

Perón and the Unions:

The Early Years

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ABBREVIATIONS

CGT: Confederación General del Trabajo

CGTCat: CGT Catamarca

CGTI: CGT Independencia

LV: La Vanguardia

PHO-FSR: Programa de Historia Oral, Fundación Simón Rodríguez

PHO-ITDT: Programa de Historia Oral, Instituto Di Tella

USA: Unión Sindical Argentina

US: Unión Sindical, periodical of the USA

Other abbreviations are used in the text immediately after the full spelling of the name of the organisation or the periodical, and thus are not listed here.

Perón and the Unions*

*Te acordás, hermana, qué tiempos aquellos ...
la vida nos daba la misma lección.
Te acordás de la Plaza de Mayo
cuando el que te dije salía al balcón ...*¹

*Vos que tenés labia, contáme una historia.
Metéle con todo, no te hagas rogar.
Mentíme al oído la fábula dulce
de un mundo querido, soñado y mejor.*²

The relationship between Perón and the working class movement in the crucial early years 1945 and 1946 has given much work to the presses and polemics to sociologists. Now that the movement is undergoing, if not a final decline, at least a deep transformation, I wish to add some more elements to the debate, taking advantage of the hindsight afforded by time, and illustrating, without necessarily intending it, Hegel's dictum that the bird of Minerva takes flight at dusk.

There is no doubt that Perón gained the support of the majority of the working class, even if its intensity and breadth can be discussed. But up to what point did he attain the involvement of the existing trade union leadership? Some initial studies, mostly by Gino Germani, which emphasised the role of internal migrants in the genesis of the movement, took for granted that the greater part of the pre-existing leadership did not join the bandwagon, and that they were short-circuited by the new idol of the masses. Other studies, which I will call 'revisionist', claimed that the role of the working class was quite autonomous in the process, on the basis of pragmatic considerations, also among its more experienced cadres, which would have decided to opt for a new alliance, over and above the ideological concerns of an earlier generation. The well-known works of Miguel Murmis, Juan Carlos Portantiero and Juan Carlos Torre have stressed this point, creating what in practice has become a new orthodoxy. Typical of the 'revisionist' literature is Murmis and Portantiero's statement that 'the new elite offering a populist project finds an already organised working class, also possessing a social project, and offers it an alliance'. Therefore, 'there would not have been ... a dissolution of workers' autonomy in favour of heteronomy in the initial stage of Peronism, but, if at all, such a thing would have happened at a later point'.³ Torre summarises his position saying, in a recent work, that 'at a crucial

* I would like to thank the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of London for the opportunity to spend a month there in the early part of 2001, taking advantage of its stimulating intellectual atmosphere to put some order in my ideas and data, and to prepare this first version of a larger study I have been preparing for quite some time.

¹ 'El cuarenta y cinco,' by María Elena Walsh (1967), in José Gobello, *Letras de tangos: selección, 1897-1981* (Buenos Aires, 1997), p. 290.

² 'Contáme una historia,' by Alfredo Mario Iaquinandí and Eladía Blázquez (1966), in Gobello, *Selección*, p. 286.

³ Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires,

moment in the Argentine working class's relationship with Perón [17 October 1945], the initiative very much lay with the trade union movement; Perón was more its creature than the labour movement his.⁴

I must say from the outset that I believe this new orthodoxy to be wrong, and that it underestimates the requirements of what may be called an autonomous working class organisation. Admittedly, it is quite complex to determine what exactly constitutes an 'autonomous organisation' of the working class, and it is necessary to explore further this concept. In these pages, part of a larger work in preparation, I try to do this, on the basis of a prosopography accumulated through several years of research.⁵ The subject, of course, is highly vulnerable to ideological distortion. Germani's approach, emphasising the scarcely autonomous character of Perón's popular support, implied a criticism, quite evident beneath the cloak of scientific objectivity. This became unfashionable during the 1960s, when intellectual circles started looking up to Peronism as the possible harbinger of a revolutionary way out from Argentina's muddle. Thus new interpretations were explored, seeking to listen to the voices 'from below'. This is paradoxical, because if there ever was a movement with a high component 'from above', it was Peronism.

Anti-status-quo elites and masses: a model to build

For an adequate comprehension of a populist phenomenon such as Peronism it is necessary to take into account two factors: namely, what happens at the level of the elites, and what goes on in the wider scenario of the popular classes. When referring to elites, I have in mind groups of a certain size, that is, something more than a couple of individuals, 'charismatic' or otherwise, plus their friends and hangers-on. Elites, in the sociological meaning of the term, *do not coincide* with a given social class or fragment of a class defined in occupational or economic terms. But often it is possible to specify the spaces in the social pyramid which, due to the tensions they are subjected to, are more likely to become preferential recruiting grounds for those elites.

An example of the alternative ways this issue can be treated is a recent book by James Brennan, who charges me with the assertion that an anti-status quo elite made

1971), pp. 112 and 123. Germani's first statement of his interpretation was published as a conference paper at the Instituto Libre de Estudios Superiores, in 1956, and reproduced in *Política y sociedad en una época de transición* (Buenos Aires, 1962). The 'revisionist' bibliography includes Hugo del Campo, *Sindicalismo y peronismo: los comienzos de un vínculo perdurable* (Buenos Aires, 1983); Joel Horowitz, *Argentine Unions, the State and the Rise of Perón, 1930–1945* (Berkeley, 1990); David Tamarin, *The Argentine Labor Movement, 1930–1945: A Study in the Origins of Peronism* (Albuquerque, 1985); Juan Carlos Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón* (Buenos Aires, 1990). There is a restatement of Germani's theories in his 'El surgimiento del peronismo: el rol de los obreros y los migrantes internos,' *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 13, no. 51 (Oct.–Dec. 1973), pp. 435–88, and a debate with articles by Peter Smith, Eldon Kenworthy, Tulio Halperín Donghi and Peter Ranis in *Desarrollo Económico*, nos. 51, 54, 56 and 57 (from Oct.–Dec. 1973 to April–June 1975).

⁴ Juan Carlos Torre, 'The Ambivalent Giant,' in James Brennan (ed.), *Peronism and Argentina* (Wilmington, DE, 1998), pp. 125–37, in p. 128.

⁵ This prosopography, with over 3,000 persons, has been prepared with the collaboration of María del Carmen Arnaiz, Patricia Chomnalez and Laura Kalmanowiecki. It is based on union periodicals and interviews from the Programa de Historia Oral of the Instituto Di Tella (PHO–ITDT) and of the Fundación Simón Rodríguez (PHO–FSR).

up of new industrialists was a central factor in the support of the 1943 coup and its aftermath. Immediately he adds that later studies or analyses by various authors show that such a support was non-existent, or very weak, or even the opposite, that is, an opposition. Anyway, Brennan continues by describing in a very interesting way the connections between the industrialists and the Peronist *government* (not the mass movement), and concludes, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, that the thesis about the role of the industrialists in the genesis of Peronism 'though it was greatly overblown, should not be dismissed as completely mistaken'.⁶

As I see it, the world of ideas and apprehensions prevalent among industrialists (and other groups) during the first years of the Second World War contributed to the formation of the Peronist elite. This does not mean that a majority of the industrialists were behind the 1943 army coup, but rather that through their attitudes they contributed to the formation of a social group or elite which came to power, and from which Perón emerged. For this to happen, of course, it was necessary that a number of those industrialists should have been involved, directly or indirectly, in the process. What proportion of them is necessary for the phenomenon to be said to have existed, is difficult to say. But it must be more than an idiosyncratic attitude of a very few people. Thus, it is unlikely that a Friedrich Engels could be understood as representing a subsector of the British industrialists of his day. By contrast, a Miguel Miranda or a Rodolfo Lagomarsino can be identified in such a manner, even if they did not have the support of the majority of their class, which was submitted to, and split by, contradictory forces.

This argument is, of course, more complex than a simple counting of heads. And it is admittedly ambiguous to speak of 'indirect' linkages, but unfortunately simplicity and rock-solid evidence are not a trait of social or historical phenomena. What is necessary is to determine in greater detail the attitudes, the contacts, the strategies, or even the silent complicities of many of these entrepreneurs, for whom, in any case, initial sympathies for what promised to be a protectionist industrialising policy were increasingly affected by the mobilising discourse of the ascending colonel, who came to be seen as stimulating industrial unrest and a contempt for the laws of a wholesome economy.

An analysis of the social conditions that make it possible for an elite to emerge is also necessary in order to understand other contexts which facilitated Perón's ascent. Another central factor was the existence of a very numerous group of middle-ranking military officers, full of nationalist ideas contrary to the status quo then reigning in Argentina. If Perón came to prominence it was not a simple effect of his personality, but rather of the existence of the GOU (Grupo de Oficiales Unidos, or Grupo Obra de Unificación), which in turn must be explained as due to certain social tensions

⁶ James Brennan, 'Industrialists and 'Bolicheros'', in his edited book *Peronism and Argentina*, pp. 79–123, in pp. 81–82 and 84; Dardo Cúneo, *Comportamiento y crisis de la clase empresarial* (Buenos Aires, 1967), pp. 174–5; Eldon Kenworthy, 'Did the New Industrialists Play a Significant Role in the Formation of Perón's Coalition, 1943–1946?', in Alberto Ciria (ed.), *New Perspectives on Modern Argentina* (Bloomington, 1972); Joel Horowitz, 'Industrialists and the Rise of Perón: Some Implications for the Conceptualization of Populism,' *Americas*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Oct. 1990), pp. 199–217; Scott Mainwaring, 'The State and the Industrial Bourgeoisie in Perón's Argentina, 1945–1955,' *Studies in Comparative International Development*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Fall 1986), pp. 3–31. For a contrasting opinion see Judith Teichman, 'Interest Conflict and Entrepreneurial Support for Perón,' *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1981), pp. 144–55.

operating at the level of their profession. In many countries of the Third World or of the periphery those tensions do exist, and have spawned such phenomena as Brazilian *tenentismo* during the 1920s, or Bolivia's so-called 'military socialism' the following decade, not to speak of 'national' socialism in Japan at about that time, or of the more recent 'Arab socialism' from Gamal Abdel Nasser to the Baath Party, and the Peruvian Revolution (1968–75).

In regions of more advanced economic and cultural development, like Western Europe or the United States, those things rarely if ever happen, nor are they found in Uruguay, or only very occasionally, and for a brief period in Chile. In the latter country the political movement led by Arturo Alessandri — head of a section of the Liberal Party — has been compared to that of Hipólito Yrigoyen, but it was far from having acquired similar mobilisational traits, and the same can be said when one compares Carlos Ibáñez with Perón. Ibáñez tried to rule in an authoritarian and populist manner from 1927 to 1931, but he failed miserably, and when returned to power democratically in 1952 it was with the participation of a Trojan horse, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) and its associated activists and trade unionists. When both allies fell out after a couple of years, the PSP went into opposition and retained its following, leaving the general isolated in the Moneda. In other words, they did what the Argentine Partido Laborista could not or did not wish to do when Perón decreed their dissolution, except for a small minority led by Cipriano Reyes. In Uruguay *batllismo*, a reformist variant of the Partido Colorado, was progressive and popular, but scarcely mobilisational, and never possessed significant trade union cadres, but negotiated with the existing ones, enrolled in factions of the Left, as in Argentina and Chile.⁷

In Argentina before the Second World War there had also been a scarcity of mobilisational experiences, except in their limited *yrigoyenista* version, which, like *batllismo*, did not have its own union structures but had to negotiate with the existing ones who kept their independence. Nor was there an equivalent of Brazilian *tenentismo* during the 1920s and '30s. If at all, something similar (but among higher officer ranks) happened during the 1940s.

Social tensions operating at the level of the men on horseback during the early 1940s were, in turn, close to those affecting the right wing nationalist intelligentsia, some sectors of the Church and industrial entrepreneurs seeking an expanded production, for civilian or military purposes. Gino Germani was not too concerned with an analysis of the class factors that could have determined the formation of the Peronist elite (as Karl Marx had also disregarded Bonapartism). His attention was centred on the forms of aggregation of the popular classes, their rural or urban origins, their degree of social mobilisation, that is, the degree of rupture with traditional forms of social deference. He took as a central explanatory variable the disparity between high social mobilisation — a concept I shall return to — and a lack of experience of autonomous organisation among the newcomers to the urban labour force. His perspective was that of the analysis of class structure, with all the necessary subdivisions, while ideologies, though significant, were mostly a dependent variable.

⁷ René Millar Carvacho, *La elección presidencial de 1920* (Santiago, 1981); Jorge Rojas Flores, *La dictadura de Ibáñez y los sindicatos, 1927–1931* (Santiago, 1993); Cristián Garay Vera, *El Partido Agrario Laborista* (Santiago, 1990).

It is strange that Marxist scholars such as Ernesto Laclau have based their criticism of Germani's model on the fact that he did not take sufficiently into account the independence of some 'superstructural' variables. According to Laclau, a populist movement is generated by a social actor (supposedly, from the higher reaches of society) who *interpellates* a popular mass, 'constituting' it through that interpellation using a given discourse.⁸ It is difficult to imagine a more passive ('heteronomous') role for the working class, conscious or not, new or old, rural or urban, *an sich* or *für sich*. If I act in a given way, it is not because someone interpellates me and therefore defines or constitutes me. Who is that person, so omnipotent as to define me, constitute me, or whatever, without my taking part in the process? Admittedly, I may be more or less easily influenced, but that will not be because someone constitutes me in such a manner, but because there is something in me that allows it to happen. In given circumstances there will be more people intent on interpellating or defining me, but their success will depend on my predisposition, my availability, so to say. And the same is true for a social group.

It may be true that the populist phenomenon is possible only when the dominant ideological discourse undergoes a crisis, as Laclau claims and Marx earlier hinted. But it is necessary to explore what factors make an elite drawn from the propertied classes adopt and use a new 'discourse', and why ample sectors of the people accept that discourse. That acceptance is not automatic, or a simple consequence of an omnipotent appellation. That is, in no way are those popular sectors 'constituted' by a 'discourse'. They have their own traditions, their own ideas and political experiences, a greater or lesser tendency to accept external leadership, and it is there that the study should be centred. If, to go on using the jargon, the interpellation is an important part of the formation of a populist coalition, it is not the cause *constituting* the popular actor.

For Germani — and in this I follow his line of reasoning — the organisationally less experienced sectors of the working class, with a lesser participation in civil society, tend to follow more easily the kind of leadership that may be called mobilisational *caudillismo*. To use the terminology of Laclau, they allow themselves more easily to be constituted by external appellations, but even in this case the emphasis should be put on them, not on the interpellation they receive. In other contexts, more seasoned working-class groups may also enter into multi-class coalitions, but of their own accord and not because anybody constitutes them. In this game of coalition-building some actors have more weight than others, more autonomy and clarity of purposes.

⁸ 'What constitutes the unifying principle of an ideological discourse is the "subject" interpellated and thus constituted through this discourse.' Further on he adds that, according to Althusser, 'ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals ... or transforms the individuals into subjects ... by the very precise operation that I have called interpellation or hailing,' and which can be imagined along the lines of the most common everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there'. Interpellations can be subdivided into either class-oriented or popular-democratic, the latter being the basis of populism. Ernesto Laclau, 'Towards a Theory of Populism,' in his *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism-Fascism-Populism* (London, 1977), pp. 100-1. Mariano Plotkin comments, in 'The Changing Perceptions of Peronism: A Review Essay,' in James Brennan (ed.), *Peronism and Argentina*, pp. 29-54: 'In his seminal essay ... Laclau moves the discussion to a new dimension: ideology. He disagrees that a class-based analysis of a movement is the key to the understanding of it ... Following Althusser, Laclau points out that "what constitutes the unifying principle of an ideological discourse is the subject interpellated, and thus constituted, through this discourse"' (p. 40).

To understand this scenario it is necessary to study the cultural differences between various social strata, their internal differentiation, and above all the way they form their own elites, that is, a leadership cadre emerging from their own ranks and remaining close to them. And it is necessary to explore the alternative strategies of the leaders of the popular classes regarding alliances with other social groups, for example, between intellectuals of the left or the right, the lower middle classes, the military, priests, business people big or small, or whatever.

Inevitably, there will be differences within the popular classes, and some of them will follow an external leadership. Which of them and why is the subject of the present analysis. Until the advent of Peronism the working class was organised on the basis of its own efforts, in alliance with lower middle class and intellectual groups, as in Europe, Australia, the United States, Chile and Uruguay. It had never benefited from direct organisational support from the state, in contrast to post-revolutionary Mexico, or the Brazil of Getúlio Vargas. Since the end of the nineteenth century, due to libertarian and syndicalist influence, it largely rejected even negotiations with government officials. The socialists themselves, though they didn't share that rejection, were limited by the criticism of their rivals. Hipólito Yrigoyen, after his election in 1916, initiated a more favourable policy, notably with his intervention in the railway conflict of 1917. This attitude stimulated a symmetrical change on the other side, even among syndicalists, whose pragmatic wing, represented by the Unión Ferroviaria's Antonio Tramonti, was strengthened. Despite later events like the *Semana Trágica*, the railwaymen's union saluted 'the first popular government of the republic', which had appointed a minister of public works (Pablo Torello) without consulting the companies.⁹

Sometimes, even the intervention of police chiefs was sought, a practice familiar since the beginning of the century. This involvement of the police may seem somewhat surprising, given its role in repressing the common, and often widespread, labour conflicts. However, maybe because of that very fact, it was important to seek their impartiality using the contacts that must have existed between the intermediate levels of both institutions, often people of the same modest social extraction.

However, despite occasionally favourable attitudes, neither the radicals nor the conservatives could boast a loyal cadre of supporters among union leaders, though many among the rank and file who could vote, having been born in the country, opted for the radicals. In some recent studies it has been claimed that many syndicalist leaders in fact acted as though they were part of the radical government machine, but this distorts and exaggerates the facts.¹⁰ Although the proximity of the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) to the ruling circles of the 'década infame' has been pointed out, a fact that may help correct some views as to the nature of those ruling circles, this far from reflects an organic connection between trade unionism and officialdom. In fact, it would have been very strange if such clearly conservative governments or political parties as those oriented by Alberto Barceló or Manuel Fresco, however 'socially oriented' they might have been, had been able to nurture their own labour cadres. The negotiations, visits and protocolic occasions,

⁹ *El Obrero Ferroviario*, 1 June 1919.

¹⁰ Félix Luna, *Conservadores y peronistas* (Buenos Aires, 1997), and his *Abwear* (Buenos Aires, 1986).

already very common in those days, are a different matter, which should not be confused with a common participation in a political movement.

But which was the working class whose organisation was going to confront the transcendental challenge from the dynamic Secretary of Labour after 1943? Obviously there must have been some heterogeneity within it, the problem is how much, and with what consequences in generating different attitudes. My hypothesis is that the degree of heterogeneity was quite high, and a cause of contrasting behaviours. Of course the limits were not sharply defined, and besides, such a complex movement as Peronism could never have been based on just one of those sectors.

The heterogeneity of the Argentine working class: myths and theories

It is quite widely accepted in the literature that dependent industrial development tends to ‘create “heterogeneous” or “fragmented” popular classes’ which demand support from the state, and this is aggravated under populism.¹¹ It is equally significant that some of the ‘revisionist’ researchers who deny the importance of working class heterogeneity in the formation of Peronism use that criterion to understand more recent phenomena, such as the leftist and confrontational unionism dominant in the Córdoba of the 1960s and ’70s. Thus, Juan Carlos Torre asserts that those attitudes were ‘especially strong in the recently industrialised centres of the Interior and among the “new working class”’. Further on he refers to the ‘ever-widening sectoral and regional disparities within the working class and the labour movement, leadership and rank and file alike’, due to the liberalisation and restructuring policies of the previous 20 years. And in a *flashback* he goes back to the end of the Second World War, when the working class:

was growing enormously as waves of migrants from the interior of the country poured into the principal cities, especially Buenos Aires. The spectacle of the conglomeration of vast numbers of workers in old and new neighbourhoods and the growing strength of more radical unions, especially the Communists, disconcerted many Argentines — but none more so than the military.

He adds that ‘among the reasons for the 1943 coup d’état was the fear permeating important sectors of the military about social catastrophe if this growing sector of the population were not controlled’.¹² Here an important issue emerges, which has stimulated opposing opinions among researchers of the period. There are some who share the perception, dominant among upper class circles, that such an influx is usually ‘dangerous’. I must admit, even though I may be in bad company, that I am also of that school of thought. Others, by contrast, believe that the recently arrived cohorts, due to their low ideological involvement, cannot form the basis of

¹¹ Joe Foweraker, *Theorizing Social Movements* (London, 1995), p.32, who refers to José Alvaro Moises et al., *Contradições urbanas e movimentos sociais* (Rio de Janeiro, 1977), and to Fernando Calderón and Elizabeth Jelin, *Clases y movimientos sociales en América Latina* (Buenos Aires, 1987).

¹² See his ‘The Ambivalent Giant,’ pp. 132, 134 and 127. I have called this ‘the Great Fear of 1942–1943’ in *Sociología de los procesos políticos* (Buenos Aires, 1985), pp. 291–8, and I have restated it, to seek convergences with Carlos Waisman’s alternative interpretation in his *Reversal of Development in Argentina: Post-war Counterrevolutionary Policies and their Structural Consequences* (Princeton, 1987), in my article, ‘The Transformations of Peronism,’ in James Brennan (ed.), *Peronism and Argentina*, pp. 204–6.

a leftist alternative, but rather follow clientelistic networks posing no challenge to the existing order.¹³

But the alternative is not between some form of radicalism and a conservative clientelism. Between those two poles there is ample place for populist outcomes, often not taken much into account by researchers fascinated (or concerned) with the revolutionary option. The 'danger' is not due to the newcomers' determination to subvert the social order: that is practically never the case. But they do come ready for anything, and *that* is the problem. Being easily integrated into mobilisational movements, they become the support for leaders who may at a certain moment adopt highly confrontational attitudes towards the establishment. Latin American history has repeatedly illustrated this possibility, due to the malleable characteristics of the social bases of populism, not despite them. Admittedly, populism does not fulfil the canonical requirements for a social revolution, but it may approach them *malgré soi*. It is, therefore, menacing, even if not always revolutionary in a strict interpretation of that term.¹⁴

Going back now to the heterogeneity of the working class, it is necessary to avoid simplistic statements of the issue, even if many were assumed by the participants, and even by some academics, or mutually hurled at each other. It is necessary then to make a brief reference to the more vulnerable ones, to get them out of the way. One of them is that Peronism was a pathological phenomenon in Argentine politics, in contrast with other saner alternatives. This language reeks too much of the barricade, or of a Barrio Norte tea party to take it seriously even if James Brennan assigns it to a whole series of theories, among them the belief that Peronism is a form of Bonapartism. I do not see why the seminal analyses of Karl Marx should be thus devalued. The fact that these analyses have been distorted by disciples and sects does not permit one to discard them, or to refrain from applying them to other scenarios. In any case, valid or not, they do not imply that the process under analysis is

¹³ Of this school of thought are works by Wayne Cornelius, 'The Cityward Movement: Some Political Implications,' in Douglas Chalmers (ed.), *Changing Latin America* (New York, 1972), pp. 27–41, and his 'Political Sociology of Cityward Migration in Latin America: Towards Empirical Theory,' in R. Rabinovitz and F. Trueblood (eds.), *Latin American Urban Research* (California, 1971), as well as his book *Politics and the Migrant Poor in Mexico City* (Stanford, 1975). This author, not finding any clear association between the structural traits of migrants and their political attitudes, concludes that 'the main determinant of the frequency of political participation is a general disposition to work collectively with others', which seems to me almost tautological, as does his other statement that the second predictor of participatory frequency is 'to be a member of a politically relevant organization' ('The Cityward Movement', p. 35 and footnote 15). See also Alejandro Portes, 'Urbanization and Politics in Latin America,' *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 52 (Dec. 1971), and his 'Political Primitivism, Differential Socialization, and Lower-Class Leftist Radicalism,' *American Sociological Review*, vol. 36 (Oct. 1971), pp. 820–35. From a different ideological perspective Samuel Huntington and Joan Nelson concur that migrants usually become involved in clientelistic networks, in *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries* (Cambridge, MA, 1976), and in Joan Nelson, *Access to Power: Politics and the Urban Poor in Developing Nations* (Princeton, 1979), even if they believe that migrants can become the basis of destabilisation, due to an excessive increase in participation. Polemically against this conclusion, see Adam Przeworski, 'Institutionalization of Voting Patterns, or Is Mobilization the Source of Decay?', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 69 (1975), pp. 49–67.

¹⁴ For other data about the political involvement of inhabitants of the *barriadas*, see Bryan Roberts, *Organizing Strangers: Poor Families in Guatemala City* (Austin, 1973), and his *Cities of Peasants: The Political Economy of Urbanization in the Third World* (Beverly Hills, 1979); Teófilo Altamirano, *Presencia andina en Lima Metropolitana: estudio sobre migrantes y clubes de provincianos* (Lima, 1984); Henry A. Dietz, 'Political Participation in the Barriadas: An Extension and Reexamination,' *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3 (October 1985), pp. 323–55.

‘pathological’.¹⁵ True enough, some of the more rabid opponents of Peronism have used this phraseology, taking it from the studies of the social or psychological pathology which generated Nazism. But even in the German experience, the word ‘pathological’ is more than anything a metaphor denoting hostility, which does not contribute to an understanding of the historical experience.

Another stream charges the supporters of Perón with irrationality, while others would follow more closely the dictates of reason. This approach, also taken from the early theories about mass society, does not withstand greater scrutiny. It is unjust to charge anybody with this defect, when a whole body of studies in the Freudian tradition put all of us in the same bag, while more recent theories believe we all act as computers calculating gains and losses. The concept of rationality of action is very elusive, despite the fact that such luminaries as Max Weber gave it pride of place in their studies.

Germani at times used the concept of irrationality to refer to the adherents to Peronism. In his first essay on the subject, published in 1956, he dealt with the issue of rationality as a guide in everyday life, extending it to a wider sphere, stating that modernisation implies that ‘a greater number of people have ceased believing in traditional norms, but, at the same time, have not become trained to accept, consciously and rationally, what they used to believe without reflection nor discussion, as a traditional and revealed truth’. Further on he introduced a subtitle *The Irrationality of the Masses in Nazism, Fascism and Peronism*, even if differentiating the attitudes and the social bases of those phenomena. Referring to the German and Italian cases he used quotation marks for the terms ‘blindness’ and ‘rational’, and he looked for other factors that may have caused the involvement of a large sector of the middle classes, who saw their social standing seriously threatened by the economic and social turmoil following the end of the First World War.

It is easy to pardon someone for considering irrational — or even pathological — the support for Hitler. But is it so obvious that those who voted for the communists, or, on the other ideological hemisphere for the conservative *volkish* parties, were exempt from such traits? In the case of Peronism, Germani stated that ‘there is no doubt that the road followed by the working class must be considered *irrational*; the rational thing would have been to accept the democratic method’. However, he then argues, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, that the support of the masses was not due to ‘a blind irrationality’, and dedicates a large part of his studies to understanding the motives of the popular sectors for supporting someone who was securing them a better place under the sun.¹⁶

¹⁵ Mariano Plotkin, ‘The Changing Perceptions of Peronism’, repeatedly rejects what he considers interpretations based on the pathological nature of the movement, bagging together Borges’ tea-party sallies and the opinions of contributors to Victoria Ocampo’s journal *Sur* with Marx’s theory of Bonapartism as interpreted by his local Trotskyite disciple Jorge Abelardo Ramos (pp. 31 and 33).

¹⁶ *Integración política de las masas y el totalitarismo* (Buenos Aires, 1956), pp. 4, 17, 20, 24 and 25. In his *Autoritarismo, fascismo e classi popolari* (Bologna, 1975), which incorporates revised versions of his earlier book, Germani adds an ‘Excursus about the degree of “rationality” of the middle class masses in fascism, and of those of the popular class in national populism’, where he states that ‘it does not seem that the hypothesis about “irrationality” is applicable to national populism’ (p. 243). Significantly, he puts the word in quotation marks.

The use of the criterion of irrationality to describe the mass support of the Fascist regimes, especially the German variety, was very common among the members of the Frankfurt School. Admittedly, to assign irrationality to a whole group of people is not the best way to establish a dialogue with them; nor did the above-mentioned intellectuals have the slightest intention of engaging in it. Something different happened in the Argentine case, especially for many understandably concerned with finding convergences with a working class that maintained its loyalty to the exiled leader. For this dialogue to have some hope of success it was necessary to avoid derogatory allusions. But unfortunately sociological as much as psychological analysis cannot be limited by the concern not to offend the objects of study.

Germani, even if much influenced by mass society theories, and particularly by Karl Mannheim and Theodor Adorno, endeavoured to differentiate the European processes from Peronism, and to determine the degree to which Argentine workers experienced a feeling of 'real freedom, completely unknown and impossible before the establishment of the national popular regime'. But at the same time he emphasised such variables as psychological authoritarianism, which had been studied by Adorno and others. Adorno, in a work co-authored by Max Horkheimer, argued that his analyses were aimed at understanding 'the psychic and unconscious characteristics explaining the support for a given policy that contradicts the rationally understood interests of a mass of people'.¹⁷

To sum up, rather than speaking about rationality or the lack thereof, it is better to refer to such more easily grasped concepts as authoritarianism, personalism, or emotivity. This is what, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the anarchist writer A. Hamon was doing, when he stated that 'in Andalusia one is an anarchist by temperament, in Catalonia by a consciously argued conviction', while in the United States 'the military discipline of the social democrats can only take shape among German immigrants, still impregnated by their cultural, national and racial traits'.¹⁸ In a more recent approach, Scott Mainwaring and Eduardo Viola comment on the tendency of new social movements towards 'affective orientations, expressive relations, and horizontal organisation', contrasting with older movements (especially trade unions) more bent on 'material preoccupations, orientations towards the state, and a vertical organisation'. This is somewhat schematic, because it lumps together many quite different 'new' movements, many of which certainly have material aims.¹⁹ But the conceptual differentiation remains valid, even if it should be applied with more care to the movements under scrutiny.

¹⁷ *La sociedad: lecciones de sociología* (Buenos Aires, 1969), p. 173.

¹⁸ A. Hamon, *El socialismo y el congreso de Londres* (Valencia, no date), pp. 60 and 70. See also his *Psicología del socialista-anarquista* (Valencia, no publisher, no date), where he maintains that 'the anarchist socialist is a passionate [believer]', who cannot 'fluctuate between two opposed ideas: once he has found his truth, he remains fixed in it', and in extreme cases 'the lack of immediate satisfaction of his wishes leads some to an indirect form of suicide ... and, to kill themselves, they kill others' (pp. 241, 238 and 243, author's emphasis). See also Temma Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia* (Princeton, 1977).

¹⁹ Foweraker also differentiates between 'instrumental' and 'expressive', or even 'emotional and heroic actions': the former would be negotiable, not the latter. See his *Theorizing Social Movements* (London, 1995), pp. 42, 51 and 63; and for an anthropological grounding to such psychological variables, the essays in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London, 1993).

Another simplistic approach, much used at the time, is the contrast between the authoritarian ‘criollos’ or ‘cabecitas negras’ and the supposedly more democratic people of recent European origin. But, as we will see presently, fascist ideas were quite widespread among immigrants. On the other hand, the concept of ‘criollo’ does not refer necessarily to a person ‘of colour’. The word is somewhat confusing, as it has changed over time, especially in Argentina, where it was used for whites born in America, while it later came to mean people with some Indian ancestry, or others without such ancestry but having lived for more than a generation in a rural or small town environment. To argue that Peronists were basically ‘cabecitas negras’, in contrast to the ‘whiter’ anti-Peronists is ridiculous, and cannot be confused with Germani’s theory about the role of internal migrants in the genesis of Peronism. Probably, favourability to Peronism was higher among people with some Amerindian ancestry than it was among others, but as they do not form a majority of the national population, no mass movement can be based only on them, even if they can help tilt the balance.

Yet another myth is that leftist political parties and trade unions were not concerned with the interior of the country, but were only based in the city of Buenos Aires and a few other urban centres. This, again, is an erroneous assumption, though it is true that organising people immersed in a traditional culture, convincing them to go to the polls, and ensuring that their votes be correctly counted was as difficult in Argentina as anywhere else.

The heterogeneity of the Argentine working class: the facts

The heterogeneity of the working class was due to a number of causes, among them the educational and skill levels, the foreign status of many of its members, their rural or urban origin, and generally the degree to which they had been affected by the process of social mobilisation. All these variables are structural, they do not depend on the individual’s will, but rather shape it and, together with more individual dispositions, they determine their organisational experience and political involvement.

Educational and skill levels are obvious factors making for a differentiation of lifestyles within the working class. The anarchist Humberto Correale, remembering his early organisational experiences contrasts his own work environment, where despite everything there were some guarantees and the presence of a civil society, with the much rougher one of the port workers, where subsistence had to be defended with fisticuffs if not the blade, not only against employers but also against comrades enrolled in rival unions, or in yellow dog (non-union worker) groups. There ‘it was just a question of brawn; it requires a particular type of person, savage, always carrying a knife, who has a heroic sense of courage, machismo. Those people are generally from inland. Thus, their concerns were very limited’.²⁰

But even among port workers there were categories. An anonymous writer in the libertarian *Solidaridad Obrera* (probably its editor, baker Laureano Riera Díaz) described in 1941 with some nostalgia their decline:

In the old times the port workers, barrack receivers and stevedores were among the better paid. On the other hand, manipulating heavy loads required a long

²⁰ Interview with Humberto Correale, PHO–FSR.

apprenticeship, particularly in the docks. All these things created a picturesque esprit de corps; the 'saqueteros' despised the green workers calling them 'tailors', 'masons', or 'buches', and they even had their own way of dressing. Maybe due to the constant exercise of this bestial work, only comparable to that of the horse-breakers in our Pampas, stevedores had an unlimited cult of courage, 'federated' and 'free', solving their differences with a dagger. But then machine operation arrived, and with it a systematic repression. And from that struggling and haughty guild ... today only a cohort of broken and ragged men survives.²¹

In almost all ports there was intense union activity. One of them was Diamante, in Entre Ríos, the last one accessible to transatlantic ships. The stevedores were organised quite early, in the 1920s, by syndicalists from the USA, who had a great deal of trouble fighting the numerous scabs. Soon organisation extended inland, and the Federación Obrera Comarcal Entrerriana was created, with its own newspaper, *Avance*, and a library, whose chairs and books — following careful scrutiny, we might suppose — ended in the parochial school after the 1943 coup. The Diamante port workers, some 700 of them, lived in an enclave near the town. In hard times they could maintain themselves by catching otters or cultivating stretches of land along the river left free of water during some months of the year.²²

Another port, Villa Constitución, which grew because of its deep waters, better than those of nearby and bigger San Nicolás, served to disgorge most of the grain wealth of the country. During the 1920s and '30s there were always four or five ships in operation, and foreign sailors created a high demand for various types of bars, cheap hotels and other establishments of lesser repute, operating in the *Barrio Chino* (not that any oriental lived there). A strong unionism existed, based not only on port workers but also on the railway repair shops.²³ Before Perón's accession to power there had been, on both sides of the provincial demarcation line (between Villa Constitución and San Nicolás), a conservative hegemony, not necessarily based on a careful counting of votes. On the Santa Fe side the caudillo was Juan Cepeda (1869–1954), inclined to a popular clientele, recruited among the more marginal elements of the town and port, where organisations like the Sociedad Protectora del Trabajo Libre were thriving, adept at securing their place in the ships' holds and celebrating with the men in well irrigated *asados* and other minor tasks of the *política criolla*. You may call this 'popular conservatism', if you will, but certainly not mobilisational.

In the city of Buenos Aires (that is, in its inner core, the Federal District) there was ample freedom for union or political activity, but once its limits were transgressed, into industrial Avellaneda or Villa Lynch, or much more in more distant places like the sugar cane fields of Tucumán, Salta and Jujuy, or among the *yerba mate* collectors, the *mensús* of Misiones, or the Patagonian estates, where many men congregated for sheep-shearing, in most of these places conditions were abysmal and repression rampant. This does not mean that organisation efforts were not conducted, or political action disparaged.

²¹ 'Los portuarios sufren actualmente un inicuo régimen de explotación,' *Solidaridad Obrera*, Feb. 1941.

²² *Bandera Proletaria*, 28 Sept. 1928, 26 Oct. 1929 and 11 Jan. 1939.

²³ Santiago Lischiatti, *Radiografía de Villa Constitución en tres placas* (Villa Constitución, 1989); Guildo B. Corres, *La brocha y la tea: historia de la FORA en Villa Constitución* (Villa Constitución, 1992). The port workers union of Villa Constitución, affiliated to the anarchist FORA, resisted Peronist influence but was closed down by the authorities by mid 1946 (*Reconstruir*, 2nd fortnight Oct. 1946).

As early as 1907 one of the first leaders of the syndicalist group, Luis Lotito, went to Tucumán to see what could be done there, and wrote a series of articles about 'the Tucumán proletariat' (some 30,000 people by his reckoning). Until recently, he stated, the people only served as support for rival factions of the oligarchy, and when 'the masters fought for whatever cause, the workers in their sugar mills hated each other and ceased to have anything to do with each other'. Under the miserable conditions they lived in, alcoholism was the only escape. This started to change with a strike in 1904, quite spontaneous though finally channelled by a local *pulpero*, who sold the movement for 200 pesos. So again, after a long series of events, activists 'were enrolled in one or the other of the bourgeois factions ... and they defended political parties all led by sugar mill owners'.²⁴

The ethnic issue could not help popping up. Confronting the patriotic agitation which tried to reach the *criollo* sectors, an imaginary character, Doricio Tacuara, wrote in the syndicalist organ about 'Race' and 'tradition', unmasking the *gauchos de levita* who excoriated foreign agitators, when the national bourgeoisie was also predominantly foreign. Another syndicalist writer, after having been in the field for a new attempt at unionising the people, lay down his arms and philosophised about 'the genesis of the idol', saying — without intent to offend — that 'the imbecility of the people creates him and the caudillo cannot but be the prototype of the imbecile'.²⁵

In the extreme south a special situation existed. The zone could be described as frontier territory, with some of the openness of such areas, but at the same time with the social tensions associated with waves of fortune-seeking newcomers, or at any rate workers trying to earn a few extra pesos, living under harsh conditions. In some areas there were large numbers of Chileans, many of them from poverty-stricken Chiloé, but a significant minority quite adept at union and political activity, which had a focus in Punta Arenas. This town thrived with leftist activism, and was the seat of the Federación Obrera de Magallanes, founded in 1911, with anarchist hegemony. That federation published *El Trabajo*, and often sent delegations to nearby Río Gallegos, in the province of Santa Cruz, to help in organisation efforts. At other moments the flux went in the opposite direction. In 1916 the Belgian consul in Río Gallegos reported that 'a group of Chilean *federados* from Punta Arenas had arrived in Punta Alta ... to get the support of the rural labourers for a strike they had declared, involving some four or five thousand workers'.²⁶ The Chilean Socialist Party (founded in 1912) was always very strong in the northern and southern extremes of the country, where it usually got more votes than in Santiago or Valparaíso, on the basis of the larger concentrations in nitrate,

²⁴ Luis Lotito, 'El proletariado tucumano,' *La Acción Socialista*, Dec. 1907 to April 1908, reproduced partly in Torcuato S. Di Tella (ed.), *Sindicatos como los de antes...* (Buenos Aires, 1993), pp. 30, 33; and his chronicle in *Revista Socialista Internacional*, 25 May 1909.

²⁵ In the syndicalist organ *La Acción Socialista*, 8 Dec. 1909 and 29 Jan. 1910. Years later the Unión Ferroviaria's newspaper also responded to the patriotic appeals of the Asociación del Trabajo and its insubstantial 'Comité Argentino de Obreros', reminding them that the majority of local capitalists were also foreign, like Christophersen, Ford, Mihanovich, Rey Basadre, Dodero, as well as many other British and North American financiers. *El Obrero Ferroviario*, 1 June 1919.

²⁶ Rosario Gúenaga de Silva, 'Los trabajadores chilenos y el nacimiento de la organización gremial en Santa Cruz,' in Carmen Norambuena Carrasco (ed.), *¿Fallan o sobran brazos? Migraciones internas y fronteras, 1850-1930* (Santiago de Chile, 1997), p. 147.

copper and coal mining and in wool *estancias* and meatpacking houses, the latter an 'Australian' pattern. Why was the same not the case in Argentina?

In the Territory of Santa Cruz foreigners made up 69.5 per cent of the population in 1895, and 53.0 per cent in 1920, and more if only males of active age were counted. About a fifth were Chileans. In the meatpacking industry of the area, of a total of 1,111 workers, there were only 98 Argentines. Among the foreigners was Kurt Wilkens, the anarchist involved in the mass revolts and bloody repression of 1921–22.²⁷ Chilean militants enjoyed great prestige among the itinerant proletariat of the Argentine South, as attested by Chief of Police Diego Ritchie in 1919, reporting on an assembly full of 'subversive speeches', where one of the most important speakers was a certain Domingo García, representing the Punta Arenas Federation, easily identifiable 'because of his aspect and the consideration he received from the workers on the day of the meeting'.²⁸

In 1920 there were strikes and violent repression in Punta Arenas, which prompted Senator Gonzalo Bulnes to denounce the existence of a 'soviet', the refuge of all the people expelled from the neighbouring country.²⁹ Combustible materials were gathering in Patagonia, with wider and deeper roots than commonly assumed. No wonder that since the beginning of the century Joaquín V. González had worried about the prospect of social revolution, 'often ignited by apparently minor causes', and fanned by the 'great sources of social unrest provided by Europe', combined with the pauperism existing in the Federal Capital.³⁰

In Neuquén there was also an influence from the left, though social conditions were not so conducive as in the extreme south. A local paper, *El Neuquén*, founded in 1908, argued later that European events would be harbingers of world revolution, when 'Christ will rise again, reproducing the scenes of the French Revolution'. When the ongoing world war seemed to involve the Americas, the editor exulted: 'War! ... a hecatomb from which we hope a new humanity will be born'.³¹ At about that time the municipality of Neuquén had a socialist majority.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 133–7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 149–50. See also Osvaldo Bayer, *Los vengadores de la Patagonia trágica* (Buenos Aires, 1972).

²⁹ Published in *El Suboficial*, organ of the Círculo de Suboficiales y clases retiradas del Ejército y de la Armada, Punta Arenas, 26 Sept. 1920, reproduced in Güenaga de Silva, 'Los trabajadores chilenos', p. 152. Already in 1919 there had been a serious strike in the Puerto Natales packinghouse, with some 20 dead, which entered popular memory as 'the Commune of Puerto Natales'. In 1920 another strike, in Punta Arenas, was violently repressed, with three dead and the anarchist Federación Obrera Magallánica closed down. By 1935 Puerto Natales had a socialist mayor. See the collection of documents by Carlos Vega Delgado, *La masacre en la Federación Obrera de Magallanes. El movimiento obrero patagónico-fueguino hasta 1920* (Punta Arenas, 1995); and Fabio Moraga Valle, 'Vanguardias políticas en Magallanes: el Partido Socialista Marxista,' *Impactos* (Punta Arenas), November 1997.

³⁰ Speeches in the Lower House of 29 July, 4 July and 20 Nov. 1901, in *Obras completas*, 25 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1935–37), vol. 5, pp. 155, 141 and 201. Regarding the poor living conditions of most of the working class in a supposedly prosperous time, see Robert Edward Shipley, 'On the Outside Looking In: A Social History of the Porteño Worker during the "Golden Age" of Argentine Development, 1914–1936,' PhD dissertation (Rutgers University, 1977). However, Shipley exaggerates the misery of the workers, and demolishes the myth that everybody could become rich, an easily vulnerable straw man. But his data about unemployment, standard of living and housing are valid.

³¹ *El Neuquén*, 5 and 13 April, 27 June, 14 July and 25 Aug. 1917; Juan Carlos Chaneton, *Zainuco: los precursores de la Patagonia Trágica* (Buenos Aires, 1993). *El Neuquén*, 15, 17 and 22 Feb. and 13 March 1917. *El Neuquén*, 9 and 16 April, 8 May and 23 Oct. 1917.

In Argentina the main equivalent of the mining areas of Chile was the sugar area of Tucumán, with extensions in Salta and Jujuy. But these concentrations had little weight contrasted with the prosperous and populated Pampean zone, and were not the source of most export earnings. Besides, the contrast in mentalities between the leaders coming from the modernised zone of the country and the *criollo* workers of the north was much greater than in Chile (which never had more than five per cent of its population foreign born, compared to almost 30 per cent for decades in Argentina, approximately from 1880 to 1930). We have already seen the reports by Luis Lotito about the sugar mill strikes of 1904. Another union organiser, the socialist Gregorio Pinto, who had travelled at about the same time, recorded his impressions of 'the sad mental backwardness of these men, due to the terrible conditions they live in, causing a colossal ignorance about their own strength and a lack of faith in their capacity for direct action'. In sum, sugar workers stuck to the belief that 'without a man to lead them' there is nothing they could do.³² Chilean socialism, because of its predominantly 'criollo' character, was more prepared to work along traditional cultural patterns, among them that of *caudillismo*, as attested by the fact that for years it had as its main leader a military chief, Marmaduke Grove, and by its support, in 1952, of the return, under democratic garb, of the erstwhile fascist-inclined dictator, Carlos Ibáñez.

Another national periphery, very different from the southern one, was the Chaco, where there was also a high presence of foreign immigrants, as in nearby Misiones, competing with an Amerindian or Paraguayan cheap labour, the latter lacking the Chileans' associationist and political experience. In 1915 the municipality of the capital, Resistencia, was controlled by the Socialist Party. National deputy Agustín Muzio, a socialist leader of the tanners, on a trip to the territory in 1924 observed this fact, contrasting it with what happened in the more backward and much more 'criollo' Corrientes.³³

In Misiones Marcos Kaner, a Communist organiser of the foodworkers, was active in, and from 1928 represented the Unión Sindical Argentina (USA) in the territory. Despite his clearly non-*criollo* origin, in an interview with the CGT periodical the editors stated that 'due to the command he [Kaner] has of the complex psychology of the mensús [they] have in him an unlimited trust'. In the same paper the Fraternidad leader Andrés Réstico described Kaner as having brought into the national federation the peculiar mentality of the men from the Argentine north.³⁴ The above mentality, surely a combination of rebellion, psychological authoritarianism and need of a leader, appeared to militants coming from the more modern part of the country as 'complex', and different from their own.

³² *La Unión Obrera* (organ of the UGT) (Feb. and March 1906), and *Revista Socialista Internacional* (25 May 1909).

³³ Pablo Lacoste, *El socialismo en Mendoza y en la Argentina*, vol. 1, p. 22; and the report by Agustín Muzio in *Acción Socialista* 1 Jan 1924 (not to be confused with the equally named syndicalist paper earlier in the century). See also articles by Francisco Racedo, brick maker, erstwhile employee of the Tabacal sugar mill, about living conditions in El Chaco (USA, 20 Sept. and 27 Oct. 1939, 15 Jan 1940, and with intermissions up to 1 April 1946).

³⁴ CGTInd 20 May 1938; CGTInd, 30 June 1938; CGT, 18 Aug. 1939; CGT, 25 Dec. 1942.

In Mendoza the Socialist Party had a majority in the Municipal Council of the capital in 1915.³⁵ In 1937 it suffered a split from the left, led by Benito Marianetti, with the result that the short-lived Partido Socialista Obrero (PSO) was formed, many of whose militants later joined the communists. The PSO retained the control of the municipality of Godoy Cruz (an industrial suburb of Mendoza) and in 1937 tripled the votes the old party had obtained in Mendoza.

In Entre Ríos there was a strong influence of the syndicalists, and in Concepción del Uruguay there was a very interesting experience of grass roots organisation, inspired by baker Juan Balsecchi.³⁶ Santa Fe had important centres of activity, from Villa Constitución to Rosario and in its extreme north, where the wood and tannin producing semi-feudal estates of La Forestal were organised despite constant violence and persecution.³⁷ Córdoba did not provide favourable conditions for unionisation, but there was an active local federation, often in the hands of the communists, who had organised a rebellious Comité Intersindical in the early 1940s.³⁸ In Buenos Aires province there were important centres of union and political activity in the capital city, La Plata, in the large services and hotel concentration of Mar del Plata,³⁹ in Tandil's stone quarries,⁴⁰ and in Bahía Blanca, which had a well-rooted Socialist Party organisation. Zárate, on the borders of the Paraná, had a huge packinghouse with intense union activity.

The foreign presence was, of course, also very dominant in the city of Buenos Aires. In 1935 40 per cent of the 36,650 textile workers of the Federal Capital were foreign born, and the proportion rose to 58 per cent if only men were considered. Among members of the Unión de Obreros Municipales only 29.5 per cent were Argentine in 1928. In 1937, in the five British-owned railway companies foreigners made up a full 45.5 per cent of the total. They reached 63 per cent in the building industry in 1938, falling to 47 per cent in 1944. In the whole country still in 1947 21.8 per cent of the economically active population was foreign born.⁴¹ Obviously

³⁵ The mayor, however, was not elected but appointed by the provincial governor. See Pablo Lacoste, *El socialismo en Mendoza*, vol. 1, pp. 22, 76.

³⁶ See Carmen Arnaiz, 'Un oasis en el desierto: la Unión Obrera Departamental de Concepción del Uruguay, 1920-1946,' in Torcuato S. Di Tella (ed.) *Sindicatos como los de antes...*

³⁷ Gastón Gori, *La Forestal* (Buenos Aires, 1974).

³⁸ César Tcach, *Sabatinismo y peronismo: partidos políticos en Córdoba, 1943-1955* (Buenos Aires, 1991).

³⁹ Elisa Pastoriza and Rodolfo Rodríguez, 'Un radicalismo perdedor: las bases sociales de la UCR en el municipio de General Pueyrredón en la década de 1920,' in Fernando J. Devoto and Marcela P. Ferrari (eds.), *La construcción de las democracias rioplatenses: proyectos institucionales y prácticas políticas, 1900-1930* (Buenos Aires, 1994), pp. 247-68; Liliana Da Orden, '¿Prácticas tradicionales en un partido moderno? Socialismo y poder local, Mar del Plata 1916-1929,' *ibid.*, pp. 229-46. See electoral data on p. 251.

⁴⁰ See *Reconstruir* (2nd fortnight June 1947); *La Unión Obrera* (set 1909); *La Confederación* (March 1911) about the 'massacre' of 1909; *La Confederación* (1 Feb. 1913). On May Day 1942 the Unión Obrera Local convened a mass meeting with political leaders of the Socialist Party, the Unión Cívica Radical and the conservative Concordancia. The anarchists termed this combination a 'contubernio' promoted by the Stalinists, bent on a common front against fascism. See Lucía Lionetti, 'La apropiación del espacio simbólico: el caso de los rituales públicos peronistas en Tandil, 1946-1955,' in Susana Bianchi and María Estela Spinelli (eds.), *Actores, ideas y proyectos políticos en la Argentina contemporánea* (Tandil, 1997), pp. 179-213.

⁴¹ Industrial Census of 1937, taken from Joel Horowitz, 'Adaptation and Change in the Argentine Labor Movement, 1930-1943: A Study of Five Unions,' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1979), pp. 116-17; 'El Obrero Ferroviario,' August 1, 1937, in Horowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 264; *El Obrero Municipal*, special issue (16 Oct. 1928); *Boletín de la Cámara de la Construcción*, reproduced in David Tamarin, *The Argentine Labor Movement, 1930-1945: A Study in the Origins of Peronism* (Albuquerque, 1985), p. 42; and Gino Germani,

electoral figures did not reflect the feelings of such a working class, in the 1930s or even in early 1946 when Perón won the presidency, which is not to say that those non-voting workers would be anti-Peronists, it simply points to the very strange character of this class. The composition of the urban labouring force was changing quickly though. From 1935 to 1943 the number of industrial establishments rose from 40,600 to 65,000, and the occupied personnel shot from 590,000 to 980,000 (rounded figures). The trickle of 8,000 net migrants from the interior to Greater Buenos Aires in the early 1930s jumped to 72,000 between 1936 and 1943, and to 11,000 from 1943 to 1947.⁴²

Social mobilisation and mobilisationism

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of two terms much used in these pages: *social mobilisation* and its related concept *mobilisationism*. Germani did set great store, as an explanatory variable, on the influx of internal migrants into urban centres during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In this he was taking into account similar events occurring in other Latin American countries, especially Brazil where they were the basis of the popular agitation known as *queremismo*.⁴³ However, for him the main variable was not that of internal migration, but rather the concept of *social mobilisation*, one of whose manifestations, but not the only one, is internal migration from rural or small town areas.

The concept of social mobilisation can be derived from the Marxist hypotheses about the social, cultural and political effects of industrial development. In other words, of the effects of modernisation, if that term may be used. As a matter of fact, Marx was, in some sense of the term, a 'theoretician of modernisation', or even of the contrast between 'civilisation and barbarism'.⁴⁴ For him, as long as industrial and technological development were not sufficiently advanced it was impossible for the working class to adopt an independent stance, except for a small minority. This was

Estructura social de la Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1955), p. 136.

⁴² Alberto Ciria, *Partidos y poder en la Argentina moderna, 1930-1946*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires, 1986), p. 85; and Gino Germani, *Estructura social de la Argentina*, p. 75.

⁴³ Angela de Castro Gomes, *A invenção do trabalhismo* (São Paulo, 1988).

⁴⁴ Marx, condemning the Russian repression of the Polish insurgency of 1863, said that 'only a civilised government ruling barbarian masses can conceive and execute such a plan', adding that Europe was menaced by 'Asiatic barbarism under Muscovite leadership'. Karl Marx, 'La misión europea de Polonia,' speech delivered in London, 22 Jan. 1867, published in a selection edited by Luis Pan, *Marx y Engels contra Rusia*, pp. 116 and 119. A few years earlier, in the *Initial Manifesto* of the International Workers Association, he pointed to the 'immense and unobstructed usurpations of that barbarous power whose head is in Saint Petersburg' (*ibid.*, p. 104). Maybe these are journalistic taunts, but in a more theoretical context Friedrich Engels, in an article for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, of 20 Aug. 1848, argued that 'the vast cultivable lands between the Baltic and the Black Sea can be saved from their feudal-patriarchal barbarism by an agrarian revolution which will change their peasants — serfs and forced workers — into free property holders' (*ibid.*, p. 100). In the matter of condemning popular movements without acceptable aims Marx did not spare epithets. Thus, for example, when describing the Taiping rebellion (which Perry Anderson considers the most important popular struggle of the nineteenth century) he claimed that 'for the popular masses it was an even greater abomination than that of the old masters ... a grotesque and repugnant reign of destruction', while its adherents had been recruited among 'lumpen elements, vagrants and low life types' (in Perry Anderson, *El estado absolutista* (Madrid, 1979, pp. 509 and 514-15)). See also Carlos Moore, 'Were Marx and Engels Racists?: The Prolet-Aryan Outlook of Marxism,' *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol.19 (1974-75), pp. 125-56.

because the power and the prestige of the upper classes would be such as to incorporate as a clientele large sectors of the popular classes, rural or urban, new or old, in the absence of a strong trade union and political experience acquired in high-technology productive units.⁴⁵ Admittedly, under extremely harsh economic conditions, or war-induced crises, or religious and cultural commotions, mass rebellions could spread among the more miserable strata of the population, giving rise to slave revolts or peasant jacqueries. But all of these, in the Marxist analysis, were destined to failure, or to an apparent success, soon capitalised by the elites that inevitably would lead them.

To the extent that wide sectors of the popular classes are still subject to the influence of local notables or their urban equivalents, they will continue to be a pliable basis for conservative or bourgeois politicians. The process of breakdown of that conservative social control structure may be called *social mobilisation*. This term has been used with somewhat different meanings in the literature. Here I use it in the sense given to it by Karl Deutsch and Germani, among others.⁴⁶ It simply implies the erosion of the links of a traditional community and the end of deference towards social superiors. It does not refer to the existence of a new activism, even if it is not incompatible with it. The earlier formulation of this idea can be traced as far back as Adam Smith, who of course did not give it that name, but described it admirably, if the overtones of the moralist are discounted:

While [the migrant] remains in a country village his conduct may be attended to, and he may be obliged to attend to it himself. In this situation, and in this situation only, he may have what is called a character to lose. But as soon as he comes into a great city, he is sunk in obscurity and darkness. His conduct is observed by nobody, and he is therefore very likely to neglect it ... and abandon himself to every sort of low profligacy and vice.⁴⁷

Some authors have used the term *mobilisation* to denote a particular activism of a social group, ready to fight for its way of life and its interests. For Charles Tilly it is the first stage in a sequence that leads to something more solid, and thus he has titled one of his books *From Mobilization to Revolution*.⁴⁸ Also in current language the term *mobilisation* is often used to denote an activity oriented to some clearly stated aims. I prefer to reserve for that the related concept of *political mobilisation*, but I am not prepared to fight for a definition. I do believe that it is necessary to have in mind a gradient, which does not have to coincide with a unidirectional historical sequence, in three phases:

⁴⁵ See, for descriptions of the 'underdeveloped' end of the typology, Eric Hobsbawm, *Los campesinos y la política* (Barcelona, 1976), and his 'Peasants and Rural Migrants in Politics,' in Claudio Véliz (ed.), *The Politics of Conformity* (London, 1967), pp. 43–65; Joel Migdal, *Peasants, Politics and Revolution* (Princeton, 1974); and Hamza Alavi, *Las clases campesinas y las lealtades primordiales* (Barcelona, 1976). An interesting study of the multiple and contradictory effects of modernisation on a primitive environment can be found in Robert Wasserstrom, *Class and Society in Central Chiapas* (Berkeley, 1983), written long before the more recent events in that area, especially p. 212 and chapter 6.

⁴⁶ Karl Deutsch, 'Social Mobilization and Political Development,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 55, no. 3 (Sept. 1961), pp. 493–514.; Gino Germani, *Sociedad y política en una época de transición*.

⁴⁷ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), quoted in Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 117.

⁴⁸ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA, 1978), especially. pp. 69–84; J.P. Nettl, *Political Mobilization: A Sociological Analysis of Methods and Concepts* (New York, 1967), pp. 107–20.

1. Rupture of traditional bonds: social mobilisation, in Germani's sense.
2. Agitation and activity towards given goals, short of a revolutionary kind: *political mobilisation*, in the sense here adopted, or simply mobilisation, as used by Tilly.
3. Involvement in a more confrontationalist and violent outcome: *revolution* for Tilly, or a particularly radical variety of political mobilisation, as I would prefer to call it. In fact, political mobilisation has many other forms apart from revolution, even class-based ones, including the social democratic and the populist varieties.

The social mobilisation of masses without much experience of autonomous organisation implies their becoming *available* for incorporation into a peculiar type of political expression, which may be called *mobilisationism*.⁴⁹ As long as a solid autonomous organisation is not acquired, the more usual experience will be the incorporation into populist movements, under a leadership I have called *mobilisational caudillismo*. Once they have acquired an organisational experience the popular classes are ready for a more autonomous political expression, whether in social democratic or in less ideological coalitions, like the United States' Democratic Party. When, as in the European experience, social mobilisation takes place more gradually, conservatism retains its strength, and the slow accumulation of organisational experience by the working class does not generate a large store of available but not yet autonomously organised recruits, thus depriving populism of its cohorts.⁵⁰

In other words, for the acquisition by the working class of its own autonomous political expression it is not enough to have a collapse of traditional ties, i.e. social mobilisation. An autonomous organisational experience is required, which generally advances at a different speed. In countries of the periphery the breakdown of traditional structures, under the pressure of international forces, occurs more quickly than in the paradigmatic British and other European cases.

The working class sector of recent rural origins is inevitably large in early stages of industrialisation, or even later on, when intense changes take place. In the periphery there is the added element of over-urbanisation, due to a combination of intense rural *push* and weak industrial *pull*, thus generating the swelling of petty commercial and service sectors, not to speak of the marginals and under- or unemployed. In some cases it is possible that ample sectors of those recently migrated people, having moved with their entire family, or more slowly, or for other motives, have not yet completely

⁴⁹ *Availability* ('disponibilidad') is a concept used by Germani, and also by Reinhard Bendix, *Nation Building and Citizenship*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, 1977), p. 428; Juan Linz, 'Cinco siglos de historia española: cuantificación y comparación,' in David Landes et al., *Las dimensiones del pasado: estudios de historia comparativa* (Madrid, 1974), pp. 165–273, especially pp. 209–10; Joel Migdal, *Peasants, Politics and Revolution* (Princeton, 1974), for whom social mobilisation is 'a process of abandonment of traditional patterns and commitments, but [which] has not necessarily led to the adoption of the ways and processes associated with modernization' (p. 13).

⁵⁰ It is possible that, fifty years after its initiation as a mass mobilisation phenomenon, Peronist trade unionism is heading towards the 'North American' pragmatic model. For that to happen there is still a need for some more shedding of the practices associated with *verticalism* and other corrupt practices, partially developed as a defensive response to persecution at the hands of both military and civilian regimes between 1955 and 1983. Regarding the Nazi or fascist experiences in Europe, they were mostly, even if not solely, grounded in the middle classes, in what Germani has called secondary mobilisation, of people who already had an urban and associationist experience, but were hit by desperate economic and cultural circumstances.

broken with some form of traditional loyalties, like in Indian panchayats reproduced in the cities, and therefore may be said not to be even socially mobilised.⁵¹

Demographic data are easier to measure, while only indirect inferences can be used to determine to what extent a given person or group is still under the influence of the traditional deferential hierarchies. Migration to the cities is very likely to produce the fissure of the cake of custom, but that fissure can also happen as a result of moving within the rural milieu itself, to plantations and the like, or without moving, through the impact of radio, television and increased communications of all types. Of course a war, with intense recruitment, inevitably generates a traumatic and massive form of social mobilisation, not necessarily accompanied by self-organisation, as in the episodes preceding the Russian Revolution.

Mass society and popular mentalities

The evolutionary perspective of liberal or social democratic roots was definitely broken with the accession of Nazism to power, and with the Second World War. In contrast to the conservative/labour bipolarity of much of the western world, the Weimar crisis was associated with the decline of the middle strata. For once, the famous proletarianisation had happened, but the results were contrary to expectations. Social scientists, many of them with a Marxist background, started revising their concepts, seeking new lines of cleavage, crises of social classes, and structural tensions, which may help in understanding the new phenomena, always within a somewhat deterministic frame, though now in greater detail. Psychology was also brought into play, based on Freudian views on the strange origins of human behaviour. Following Emile Durkheim, attention was also focused on the destruction of the primordial village community, or its small town neighbourhood equivalents, and on the impact of living in large, anonymous cities or work environments.⁵² It was also important to understand the social roots of more or less spontaneous protest movements appealing to 'disruptive' tactics, extolled by some observers from the left as a more efficient method of fighting capitalism than the more standard practices of reformist associations, from trade unions to political parties, often involved in the very system they hoped to change.

Social actors that stimulated more or less spontaneous explosions were of very different hues. As long as they were the sociologists who wrote about the subject and led the sit-ins there was not much of a problem. It is quite another matter when groups with very solid interests of their own enter the scene, like those associated from the start with Peronism, and with many similar phenomena in other parts of the world, first of all in Latin America. The study of this minority, but strategic, elite is as important, in order to understand populism, as the analysis of the popular contingents that provide its mass support.

⁵¹ Oscar Lewis, 'Urbanization Without Breakdown: A Case Study,' *The Scientific Monthly* (1975), pp. 31–41.

⁵² Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1966 [1st ed. 1942]); Arthur Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (Glencoe, 1959); Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *La sociedad: lecciones de sociología* (Buenos Aires, 1969); Alejandro Blanco, 'Gino Germani: las ciencias del hombre and el proyecto de una voluntad política ilustrada,' *Punto de Vista* (Dec. 1998), pp. 42–8.

In Marxist theory this channelling of mass popular feelings by an elite far removed from it, and with often contrasting interests, was called *Bonapartism*. This phenomenon was supposed to spread among popular sectors without much of an associationist experience of their own, at a juncture in which capitalist domination was in crisis. As a result of this crisis bourgeois parties had lost their capacity to obtain electoral majorities, and therefore the liberal constitutional regime ceased to be an instrument of control by the ruling classes. In such predicament, they would be prepared to forego their full leadership role, depositing it in a person, who for fortuitous reasons, had the confidence of the masses, stimulating, and at the same time controlling, their demands. This service, of course, was provided at a price, but without fundamentally affecting the system, even if eventually some members of the propertied classes might suffer persecution, seen as a sort of collective reinsurance.

In his analysis of this type of regime, Marx did not dwell on the factors likely to generate such a Bonapartist leader. He did not dedicate much attention, either, to the social conditions making a working class vulnerable to this kind of appeal. It is possible to take some elements from this Marxist analytical tradition, with its eschatological elements about the near-end of capitalism, and leaving aside considerations about a particular stage of attitudes describable as *class consciousness*, based on the 'correct' interpretation of historical forces, it becomes necessary, then, to study the complex of structural traits, tensions, of combinations of social psychological aspects, which make highly probable (a) the emergence of one or more elite(s) capable of integrating the masses under their leadership, and (b) the existence of a receptive mass, which has overcome its traditional deference to social superiors, without reaching the more advanced praxis of autonomously organised working people.

But which have been in Argentina the underlying currents of the popular mentality, the bases of a counterculture capable of surfacing in the most varied manner?⁵³ To simplify, I would say that these are basically two: namely, *mobilisational caudillismo*, and *rank and file associationism*. These two currents have, of course, numerous variants, ramifications and combinations. In other countries of Latin America these currents can also be identified, though in different proportions, and linked to different historical references. Let us consider them in some detail.

1. *Mobilisational caudillismo*

To avoid believing that Argentine history started on 17 October 1945, or the day Errico Malatesta stepped down from the ship bringing him from Italy, it is advisable to go back as far as possible in search of the bases of a popular counterculture. One might even reach such mass uprisings as Túpac Amaru's in Peru or the slave revolution in Haiti. But without going so far, in Argentina it is necessary to consider the involvement of much of the 'criollo' population in what I have termed mobilisational *caudillismo*, ranging from Juan Manuel de Rosas to Martín Güemes or José Gervasio de Artigas. Not that they were the same, but for the purposes of this analysis they can be grouped together into the model of paternalist *caudillismo*, at the same time mobilising and controlling a certain mass following. This dual role

⁵³ The concept of 'mentality' is much used by the French school of the *Annales*. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore, 1980).

is clear in Rosas, but it can also be found in Güemes or Artigas, even if one is more based on establishment support than the other variant.⁵⁴ *Rosismo*, despite its anchorage in the establishment, survived long among the rural population, and we may suppose also among internal migrants to the cities, of which there were many before the European tide.

In mobilisational *caudillismo* there is a strong component of paternalism, but it is no longer the classical conservative paternalism of the rural or small town notables, because it is based on the channelling of popular feelings of resentment against the upper classes, which is clearly absent in its traditional, ancien régime variety. In order for the mobilisational *caudillista* formula to gel two factors must be present, as already pointed out, at the level of the masses and at that of the elites. Among those elites certain social forces must be operating, which transform a significant minority in an elite with feelings and interests at odds with the status quo and the majority of their own class. At the popular level other factors must be present, capable of breaking down the deference they traditionally have towards their social superiors.⁵⁵

In Latin America there have been conservative phenomena which have incorporated some mass support, not only from peasants or the extremely poor, but also from run-of-the-mill working class sectors. They are often called ‘popular conservative’, to distinguish them from more upper- or middle-class conservatism. This is the case, in Argentina, of the political machine organised by Alberto Barceló in a zone of the province of Buenos Aires that included the industrial centre of Avellaneda. This machine, under the name of Partido Provincial, was long split from the main Conservative Party. Perhaps in this way it channelled popular feelings contrary to the national status quo, but it was clearly not of a mobilisational kind. In a sense it would be nearer to some more recent provincial phenomena, like the Movimiento Popular Neuquino of the Sapag family, of Peronist origin, and would be differentiated from more orthodox conservative models, like the present-day Democrats in Mendoza or Liberales and Autonomistas in Corrientes, and of course the bulk of the Partido Demócrata Nacional in the period under consideration.

The fact that Barceló could express localist sentiments in his fief helps to explain the weakness of socialist electoral support in Avellaneda, though persecution and scarcely honest counting of votes helped. In some cases the conservatives attempted to organise union groups, but with extremely limited success. Thus, the official journal of the CGT informed in 1941 that a certain Salgado, municipal employee in San Isidro (an affluent neighbourhood of Greater Buenos Aires), under the guidance of the local conservative boss Ernesto de las Carreras, had installed a masons’ union in nearby Martínez, using the headquarters of the Partido Demócrata Nacional.⁵⁶ This party, in 1931, had included in its list of candidates for the Lower House two well-

⁵⁴ Tulio Halperín Donghi has analysed this issue in his ‘El surgimiento de los caudillos en el marco de la sociedad rioplatense postrevolucionaria,’ *Estudios de Historia Social*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1965), pp. 121–49 and in *De la revolución de la independencia a la confederación rosista* (Buenos Aires, 1968).

⁵⁵ Traditional societies often have, therefore, a ‘stable’ conservative situation, though, admittedly, this can suffer occasional explosions of popular wrath, mainly the peasant jacqueries. Most of the time, though, the social order is quite solid, especially where there are no major ethnic differences between lord and peasant. In modern industrial society, those massive violent explosions are less frequent, and are replaced by a constant clash of interests between employers and labour, with its concomitant political party bipolarity.

⁵⁶ CGT, 11 July 1941.

known and genuine railway unionists, Bernardo Becerra and Alberto Cortés Arteaga, both duly elected.⁵⁷

In Valentín Alsina, a sector of Avellaneda, there was a large textile concentration, and there the Unión Obrera Textil, controlled by socialists and communists, launched during the 1930s an organisational campaign. This effort failed, as was later explained, because of lack of civic consciousness, plus the hasty tactics of some enthusiasts, with the result that the influence of 'the agents of *caudillos* who operate in that area' was consolidated. This was surely a reference to Barceló or his stalwarts, who through a combination of well-provided *asados*, occasional help in hard times, and tough police, co-opted a lot of the poorer population.⁵⁸ It is significant that Humberto Correale, the very militant anarchist from Avellaneda, has condescending words for Barceló, to the point of saying:

OK, he was paternalist. But people came from all quarters to his home (and it was a procession) to have their problems solved. Don Alberto gave them a card, and their problem was solved. But the scoundrels in his entourage never antagonised the working class movement. Some petty thieves helped us, occasionally, during a strike, giving a hand in getting out the *cameros* (yellow dogs). As for Don Alberto Barceló, never, never did he order an act of violence against strikers. He was a man of very humble origins, [who started as] a *peonacho* in the municipality, practically illiterate.⁵⁹

This is why some people consider Barceló (or his more successful disciple Manuel Fresco) as having introduced some elements of the formula which made Perón famous. But the differences are abysmal, because neither *barcelonismo* nor *fresquismo* stirred up such an alarm and hatred as Peronism did.

The classical *orilleros* (inhabitants of peripheral poor barrios) prior to the European tide, or contemporaneous with its early stages, were mostly recent rural migrants, and they brought with them the traditions of autochthonous mobilisational *caudillismo*. Ricardo Caballero, a Radical Party *criollista* leader who passed through a short anarchist experience, to move later to the right, was very strong in his condemnation of the foreign mentality of the socialists and other progressive groups, extolling instead 'the haughty native guilds [*gremios*] of stevedores, carters, coach drivers, labourers in storage houses, herdsmen, movers of livestock, and butchers', among whom it was very difficult 'to spot a Russian'.⁶⁰ Later on, when the mass of European immigrants arrived, they brought with them a mixture of local traditions. Those from the south of Italy and Spain, particularly, were of overwhelmingly rural or small town origin, never won over in their own countries by leftist propaganda. But all of them in practice formed for a time ethnic ghettos (not necessarily residentially separated), easily influenced by activists

⁵⁷ Becerra was vice-president of the Unión Ferroviaria under Antonio Tramonti (interview with José Domenech, PHO-ITDT, p. 49), labour delegate to the International Labour Organization in 1930 (CGT 1 May 1934), but he died before taking up his representative job. Cortés Arteaga was another important member of the Unión Ferroviaria, and in 1933 Luis Cerutti, General Secretary of the CGT, asked him to intervene in favour of some imprisoned activists.

⁵⁸ *El Obrero Textil* (Dec. 1938). See also Norberto Folino, *Barceló, Ruggierio y el populismo oligárquico* (Buenos Aires, 1983).

⁵⁹ Interview with Humberto Correale, PHO-FSR.

⁶⁰ Ricardo Caballero, *Hipólito Yrigoyen y la revolución radical de 1905* (Buenos Aires, 1975), pp. 140-1. In this author the *rosista* ideological element is very clear.

of their own nationality. For these activists the foreigners formed a sort of 'captive audience', much more receptive to their message than in their own countries of origin. The leftist, even revolutionary message was grafted onto a more ancestral popular authoritarianism, giving a very peculiar mixture.

What was, then, the charge of counterculture these new inhabitants of Argentina brought with them? They certainly carried a heavy component of paternalistic conservatism, which of course did not originally express itself in mobilisational or anti-status quo moulds, but could easily be transmuted into them. Immigrants, by the simple fact of having crossed the ocean, underwent a process of social mobilisation, that is, they broke their traditional moorings. They became an 'available mass', easily reached by any activist of their own nationality who inveighed against the system, which in the early stages was treating them quite badly, despite the possibilities for bettering themselves, which were not so obvious nor applicable to. They thus acquired to a large extent leftist attitudes, even if distant culturally from their tenets, in contraposition to what was the case with those who came from the more industrialised parts of Italy or Spain, or from other European origins. It is also necessary to take into account the influence of Catholicism, though the activists of this origin who came in the mass migration were probably lesser in number than those of a leftist persuasion. Even if the trauma of emigration eroded their traditional values, the roots of their ancient beliefs were still alive, and would easily sprout again given the occasion.⁶¹

The model of mobilisational *caudillismo*, on the other hand, was also present in the historical and cultural traditions of European immigrants, to begin with in Louis Napoleon himself, and then through fascism and the Hispanic authoritarianism of General Miguel Primo de Rivera and his son José Antonio. But it was not easy to integrate them into similar experiences if led by people of a more native or *criollo* origin. That convergence might come, if at all, later on, when their children acceded to citizenship, maintaining many of their ancestral values.⁶²

Fascism generated, of course, a great deal of resistance among working class activists in the trade union and political fields, but for many among the immigrant mass and their descendants it was normal to identify to some extent with the government of 'their own country'. In fact, in the Rio de la Plata, Brazil and the United States, there was a considerable support for Il Duce among the Italian community. One of the founders of the American Fascist Party was Giovanni di Silvestro, who had started his career as an extreme left socialist. Gaetano Salvemini, an intensely anti-fascist intellectual and activist, argued that the great majority of the bourgeois sectors among the immigrants were favourable to fascism.

⁶¹ See Fernando Devoto, *Estudios sobre la emigración italiana a la Argentina en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX* (Napoli, 1991), especially his chapter 8, 'Catolicismo y anticlericalismo en un barrio italiano de Buenos Aires (La Boca) en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX', pp. 199–229.

⁶² Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire: les origines françaises du fascisme, 1885–1914* (Paris, 1978), and his *Ni droite ni gauche: l'idéologie fasciste en France*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1987), as well as his joint work with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *El nacimiento de la ideología fascista*. For Spain see Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Fascism from Above: The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain* (Oxford, 1983). In Chile the Partido Nacional Socialista (explicitly Nazi) defined itself as 'on the left', and voted for the Popular Front in 1938, as a reaction to the repression it underwent under President Arturo Alessandri. See Mario Sznajder, 'A Case of Non-European Fascism: Chilean National Socialism in the 1930s,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 28 (1993), pp. 269–96.

He estimated that some 50 per cent of the total cared only for their own interests, five per cent were clearly fascists, ten per cent antagonistic but much divided, and the remaining 35 per cent could be easily influenced by official propaganda. He also pointed out that in the two clothing workers unions, with 60,000 members (mostly Jews and Italians), fascist efforts to control them 'had never succeeded, even if they had made some headway in local areas'. Which, of course, can also be interpreted *a contrario sensu*.⁶³

An interesting example of this mentality can be found in an immigrant who came very young to Argentina, rose successfully into the middle class, as an electrical technician, and later joined the Peronist movement, contributed to the creation of the Electrical Workers Union in San Nicolás (Province of Buenos Aires) and became a member of the provincial legislature. Francisco Galizia (1905–79), from a large northern Italian artisan family, arrived in Argentina when he was 17. He did not have much interest in politics, but he recalled his early experience in his home country, where he had joined Mussolini's enthusiasts. He soon became disenchanted, because he sensed that the movement was being filled with opportunists and placemen. In his memoirs, however, he still maintained very ambivalent attitudes to the whole subject:

the Axis represented strong governments, that had replaced the liberal democratic system they considered ineffectual, in bad repute and decaying. Their efficiency was demonstrated by the admirable results obtained in Germany and Italy, which, overcoming the total annihilation they had suffered, had been elevated to the first ranks among the nations. The system, however, involved the establishment, more or less openly, of a dictatorship not free from evils, maybe even greater ones

But he still believed that Mussolini was 'a real, practical, honest and sincere defender of the proletarian class, and above all a great patriot. Endowed with an extraordinary disposition [...] he proclaimed that Italians had nothing to expect from outside, and that in order to fulfil their just expectations they needed order, unity, discipline, and everybody's concerted efforts'.⁶⁴

Another episode reflecting his attitudes, which must have been shared by many in his position, occurred when, soon after his arrival, he attended a political meeting, where the speaker was 'inveighing against Mussolini, with gibes against Italy, which wounded me like a dagger. My reaction was immediate, I opened my way among the

⁶³ Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States* (Staten Island, NY, [written during the war]), pp. 11–13 and 244. There was also a fascist Longshoremen Federation of North America, whose strength is difficult to determine (pp. 124–25); in Australia several early left activists of the small Italian community also joined the fascist ranks. Gianfranco Cresciani, 'L'integrazione dell'emigrazione italiana in Australia e la politica dell' 'trade unions' dagli inizi del secolo al fascismo,' in Bruno Bezza (ed.), *Gli italiani fuori di Italia: gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d'adozione, 1880–1940* (Milan, 1983), pp. 307–44, identifies three cases among less than a dozen pioneers he refers to (pp. 330 and 334), and points out that the Australian working class movement of the 1920s and '30s feared that the Italians might become a Fifth Column (p. 336). Apparently, a large proportion of the peninsular bourgeoisie, and a non-negligible part of the working class, in fact sympathised with Il Duce. For Canada see Angelo Principe, *The Darkest Side of the Fascist Years: The Italian-Canadian Press, 1920–1942* (Toronto, 1999). In that country sympathy for fascism was also fairly widespread among the francophone community of Quebec and in the Catholic Church of that region.

⁶⁴ Francisco Galizia, *Reminiscencias de un inmigrante. El 17 de octubre de 1945 y su verdad histórica*, pp. 33–4, 94 and 32.

crowd placing myself near the podium, where I remained furious like a bull'. The young immigrant soon exploded violently, with imaginable consequences, as 'thousands of eyes converged on [him]', though he got away without greater mishap. He had the luck of being near a Marine non-commissioned officer, who 'calm and haughty in his impeccable uniform approached me and offered me a cup of coffee', explaining:

- Do you realise what you have done?
- Wouldn't you react in the same way if someone offended your own country? I asked.
- I don't blame you for that, but for your temerity. Those people are furious antifascists and you can thank God for not having been lynched

Galizia was pushed towards participation in the new unionism without any previous record in that field, as he was an administrative cadre in the company, living in San Nicolás since 1935, in charge of controlling abusive electricity connections, and not in the least all sympathetic to union activists (despite valuing Mussolini's socialist ideas). He recounts that after the 1943 coup, being 'totally foreign to politics and to the events of those days ... completely dedicated to my work and my home, I was surprised to be approached by a group of employees of the company'. Despite his 'considerable earnings' he agreed to represent the lads in discussions with the employers, and soon became the founder of a new *Sindicato de Luz y Fuerza* of the Paraná zone, later federated at national level. Predictably, the company tried to dissuade him offering a sum of money, but he rejected the offer and became a union leader, certainly pragmatic but not for that less honest.

Galizia also took part in the creation of the 'ephemeral, but glorious' *Partido Laborista*, was elected provincial legislator and then member of the 1949 Constituent Assembly. Linked to Domingo Mercante (governor of the province), he co-operated with Manuel Fossa (brother of woodworker Mateo), the Peronist dissident who contributed, with Cipriano Reyes, to the maintaining of an independent *Laborista* structure opposing Perón's decision to subdue it.⁶⁵

Other union activists, combining a certain initial leftism with Mussolinian sympathies and later support for Peronism, may be represented by Rafael Ginocchio, a foodworker (*fideero*, that is, *pasta* maker) born in Italy in 1912. His father was a middle-scale peasant, and they came over when Rafael was 12 years old. He soon became an activist among the *fideeros*, associated with the anarchist FORA, and his own sympathies hovered between socialism and anarchism. In 1937 his union abandoned its more radical ideologies and joined the CGT, within the *Federación de la Alimentación*, controlled by the communists. He believed himself as one of the main opponents of the leadership of that federation, and soon became a follower of General Perón.

Fideero workers numbered about 25,000 in 1926, but affiliation was scarce. Towards the 1930s, under anarchist leadership, they had some 140 members in the

⁶⁵ Manuel Fossa, in his interview in the Oral History Program (PHO-ITDT), mentions Galizia as a comrade in that effort. Galizia himself glosses over this episode in his book, though he reproduces an article in *Justicia Social*, a local newspaper of Coronel Suárez (22 June 1949), where after praising Galizia there is an allusion to 'those who afterwards betrayed him' (p. 121). For the references in the above texts see pp. 51–52, 79–87, 100.

capital. When in the early 1940s they joined the Federation they were 700 strong. Immediately after the 1943 coup the union was dissolved, along with the others in the field of *alimentación*, but was reconstituted on 15 June 1944. Ginocchio, now in possession of a credential from the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, thrust himself into an organisational campaign, entering freely in the workplaces and drawing people into the union in their droves. Thus, in 1946 he could claim to have 2,000 members. Afterwards, for several years, he was a member of the Comisión Administrativa of the CGT, though he later fell from favour.

For Ginocchio the identification with Perón had a highly emotional component, as he felt that the general expressed 'what I feel and that due to lack of talent I cannot express; it would seem as though he had become incarnate in me, saying what I have been feeling since I was born'. About Mussolini he had firm opinions. He believed that Il Duce 'being unable to govern with the socialists, had to change his methods', first using castor oil and the *manganello* (police baton) and then persuasion. When Ginocchio travelled to Italy ten years after Mussolini's execution, he remarked that '95 per cent of Italians mourned his death and the great works he had left in Italy. I believe that between Nazism and fascism there is a basic difference, as Mussolini did not persecute a given race ... For me fascism was one of the political movements that will have no doubt many followers in the world'. Could it be that he had this same mixture of ideas when he was a libertarian and socialist sympathiser, and an activist in a FORA-affiliated union?⁶⁶

The conservative influences which could exert themselves among the immigrant communities were clearly described in an article in a paper edited by socialist leader Nicolás Repetto. During the 1924 elections for governor of the province of Santa Fe the Church had openly backed the conservative candidate, opposing the anticlerical Lisandro de la Torre. The Catholic priests hurled biblical threats of hail, locusts and other plagues, taking advantage of the fact that 'the Santa Fe countryside, inhabited by rude European workers, was receptive' to those appeals, especially in 'far-away places, where the interchange of ideas and news is difficult'. Repetto added that 'even in Rosario, in the Arroyito neighbourhood church, a certain priest harangued his flock in a picturesque Italo-criollo language'.⁶⁷

As for fascism, the communist leaders of the Sindicato Obrero de la Industria Metalúrgica (SOIM), condemning Mussolini's jailing of several deported activists from Argentina, hoped that 'many naïve comrades, who like Mussolini, will now understand that fascism is the worst enemy of the working people'. Which can be interpreted as reflecting a perception that fascist ideology had a wide following among some sectors of the population.⁶⁸ Esteban Piacenza, founder of the fairly radical tenant farmers' Federación Agraria Argentina, also became ideologically fascist, while retaining the leadership of his organisation.⁶⁹ From this and other cases it follows that mobilisational *caudillismo* was not a *criollo* characteristic, but was also quite widespread among the immigrant communities.

⁶⁶ Interview with Rafael Ginocchio, PHO-ITDT. See especially pp. 26, 23 and 29-30.

⁶⁷ *Acción Socialista* (12 Feb. 1924), pp. 202-202.

⁶⁸ *El Obrero Metalúrgico* (Feb.-Mar. 1938).

⁶⁹ José Grunfeld, *Memorias de un anarquista* (Buenos Aires, 2000), pp. 242-3.

It would have been quite difficult to incorporate the mobilisational *caudillista* pattern into working class associations, because trade union activity was overwhelmingly expressed through associationist models, and based on a majoritarian foreign base. But as time went by, with the Argentinisation of the workforce, the mobilisational pattern imposed itself upon the others, giving birth to the 'verticalista' form of organisation, causing a violent trauma in the existing system and a confrontation with the old leadership. But let us now examine some aspects of the other countercultural tradition, rank and file associationism.

2. Rank and file associationism

Coffee houses, as celebrated famously by Enrique Santos Discépolo, were the bulwark of sociability in most cities and the basis of political party centres, cells, local unions, athenaeums, cultural groups and co-operative units, where political and union activists thrived. In those places the 'mezcla milagrosa de sabihondos y suicidas' was formed, with people like

*José, el de la quimera,
Marcial, que aún cree y espera,
y el flaco Abel, que se nos fue
pero aún me guía.*

This imagery is sufficiently strong to be used as a symbol of a deep counterculture, operating at somewhat higher stratification levels than the previously described one of popular *caudillismo*. The thick tissue of social relations in local *barrios*, with a mixture of skilled workers, white collar employees, small traders, bohemian intellectuals and students, plus other similar types, provided sustenance to a kind of political action which contrasted with the one based on *caudillista* leadership. This mixture implied a greater amount of egalitarianism, and it was more difficult to develop, because it requires a greater reliance on the resources of the working class and other lower middle class or professional groups.⁷⁰

Associational experience was clearly the basis of the early union and party experiences of the Left in Argentina, as it was in Chile. But in contrast to its neighbour, in Argentina the beginnings of popular associationism were to a large extent rooted in the foreign immigrant groups, often organised for mutual help and other purposes in nationality groups, and supported by a press in their own languages. As most foreigners did not take up citizenship, the link-up to the political system was weakened, particularly the passage to the electoral scenario. It is not that those immigrant groups lacked political or ideological interest, but that they couldn't transform it into votes. And it must also be said that being foreigners they must have felt to be in alien turf, and thus did not feel entitled to opine too much about what should be done in it.

⁷⁰ The network structure of the neighbourhood, with its mixture of dwellings and small workplaces, has been emphasised by several studies about early development of a class consciousness. Thus, Victoria E. Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organization in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914* (Berkeley, 1983), who contrasts it with what happened in larger factories; and Mary Lynn McDougall, 'Consciousness and Community: The Workers of Lyon, 1830-1850,' *Journal of Social History*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Fall 1978), pp. 129-45, for whom coffee houses were important centres of political and union activism, an experience difficult to reproduce in large-scale enterprises. The latter, however, once organised, can become fulcrums of union power, as in São Paulo, on the basis of a different type of social structure.

In fact, foreigners, with or without citizenship, who for decades made up almost 30 per cent of Argentina's total population, and much more among the urban bourgeoisie and the working class, had a salient role in trade unionism, and also in political expressions, notably anarchism (it is enough to recall Errico Malatesta and Pietro Gori) or in the Socialist Party, which was created by four pre-existing groups, only one of which was Argentine. Though the subject is open to a wide polemic, I would say it is quite obvious that the fact that during several formative decades the urban working class (and also the bourgeoisie) were foreign born and lacked citizenship had as a result the weakening of the political parties that could have represented them, that is, a social democracy with more solid bonds to the working class than the Socialist Party had, or a liberalism with deeper roots among the entrepreneurs than Bartolomé Mitre's Liberal Party and its successors, or Lisandro de la Torre's Progressive Democrats could boast.

Given the intensity of the debate, I may be allowed to restate the issue: it is not that the European immigrants lacked an interest in politics, which to the contrary, was expressed in the above-alluded creation of the Socialist Party, which is even commonplace in Argentine historiography. The many studies that document the political or ideological involvement of some immigrant groups (with or without nationality) throw light on their sympathies. But the conclusion is not that, therefore, nationality didn't matter, but on the contrary, that the political parties which might have been based on their preferences were condemned to marginality, being devoid of the vote of their natural electorate.⁷¹ Had it not been for the foreign condition of a large part of the potential voting population, the party scheme in Argentina would have been more like the Australian one, and there would have been less space for the mobilisational *caudillista* variety of *radicalismo*, headed by Hipólito Yrigoyen, which contrasts with the Chilean, French, Spanish and Italian homonymous parties.⁷²

⁷¹ For contesting opinions, see Hilda Sabato and Ema Cibotti, *Hacer política en Buenos Aires: los italianos en la escena pública porteña, 1860–1880* (Buenos Aires, 1988), and of the same, 'Inmigrantes y política: un problema pendiente,' *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1986); Carina F. de Silberstein, 'Administración y política: Los italianos en Rosario (1860–1890),' *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* nos. 6–7, pp. 381–90; and chapter 5 of my *Los partidos políticos: teoría y análisis comparativo* (Buenos Aires, 1998). On the same subject, Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli (eds.) *La inmigración italiana en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1985), and of the same, *L'Italia nella società argentina* (Roma, 1988); Oscar Cornblit, 'Inmigrantes y empresarios en la política argentina,' *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 6, no. 24 (Jan–March 1967), pp. 641–91; and Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism: Argentina and Chile, 1890–1914* (Austin: University of Texas, 1970). During a large part of the nineteenth century many Italians formed their own battalions, on a permanent or an occasional basis, or acted as mercenaries in civil or international wars. See Gaio Gradenigo, *Italianos entre Rosas y Mitre* (Buenos Aires, 1987), and the works cited in my article 'Argentina: un Australia italiana? L'impatto dell'immigrazione sul sistema politico argentino,' in Bruno Bezza (ed.), *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia: gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d'adozione, 1880–1940* (Milan, 1983), pp. 419–51. Romolo Gandolfo, 'Immigrants and Politics in Argentina: The 1890 Revolution and the Campaign for the Automatic Naturalization of Foreigners,' paper presented to the LASA XVth International Congress, Puerto Rico, 21–23 September 1989, coincides with the view that on the whole immigrants were very much in the background in Argentine politics, despite the enthusiasm of some of them during the 1890 revolution. See also Fernando Devoto and Alejandro Fernández, 'Mutualismo étnico, liderazgo y participación política,' in Diego Armus (ed.), *Mundo urbano y cultura popular: estudios de historia social argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1990), pp. 129–52, who also share this reading of the facts, though they point out that it is necessary to differentiate among the various immigrant ethnic groups.

⁷² Octavio Ruiz Manjón, *El Partido Republicano Radical, 1908–1936* (Madrid, 1976); Ernest Lemonon, *De Cavour a Mussolini: histoire des partis politiques italiens* (Paris, 1938); H.V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social*

One of the bases of working class organisation was the high number of self-taught activists. One of them, the anarchist Humberto Correale, the naval painter and man of many trades born in a 'barrio de latas', whom we have already met in these pages, remembered how he had been thrown off balance when he met the 'men of ideas':

The kitchen was very small, but look: Art, Sciences, Literature, Sociology, Trade Unionism, Theatre. Because in those days there was neither radio nor TV at the people's reach, the fact is that they hypnotised me.

Later on Correale completed his studies, and during his free time he visited museums, and when he could he organised art exhibits in union locales. He argued that wood carvers, who made the ships' figureheads, were the first sculptors, and the same with the stonemasons.⁷³

Another militant of the same ilk was Moravio Batini, who on finishing primary school entered a metallurgical factory as an apprentice, with six hours of work. This gave him the opportunity to attend a technical school, but when he turned 18 he had to complete his eight hours and could not go on studying. In the factory he had a very special encounter, with a Swiss mechanic, who had nothing to do with unionism, but had great culture:

That Swiss was a towering figure for me, he was very important in my life. He took me to museums, to the Teatro Colón, to see paintings, hear music. As I liked literature, he took me to meet Victoria Ocampo. I was 16, he 26. He was a skilled worker, I an apprentice. You can't comprehend how that man cared for me when he realised how I was. We spent whole days together. I got to learn Italian, German, and I started to study English at the British Embassy. He knew an incredible amount of literary works ... ; when we started talking there was no end to it. When I first met him I used to have lunch at home and I ran to the factory where he ate like most others. He had an extraordinary family. His father had been stationmaster in Switzerland. Can you imagine what it means to be stationmaster in Switzerland?⁷⁴

In the factory, which had some 80 employees, no more than 20 were organised, mostly those with socialist or communist ideas. The shop steward, if found out, was immediately dismissed. When Peronism arrived all that changed from top to bottom, but Moravio 'didn't like demagoguery', even if his father, who had been affiliated to the Socialist Party, did join the movement. He still remembers that when it became necessary by law to pay the *aguinaldo* (thirteenth salary) at the end of 1945, the owner, with tears in his eyes, told his workers he didn't have the money. He was told by them, who were usually so silent, that in that case they would come to work. Later on the shop steward, who was a communist and had been active for long, was isolated and once imprisoned.

Moravio Batini says that he sympathised with the socialists, especially with people like Mario Bravo, 'a poet, a *morocho*, a *negro*', or Alfredo Palacios, who 'had an

Politics, 1892-1914 (Cambridge, 1973); Kenneth Morgan, *The Age of Lloyd George: The Liberal Party and British Politics, 1890-1929* (London, 1975); Luis Palma Zúñiga, *Historia del Partido Radical* (Santiago: Andrés Bello, 1967); Peter Snow, *El radicalismo chileno* (Francisco de Aguirre, 1972).

⁷³ Humberto Correale, interview PHO-FSR.

⁷⁴ Moravio Batini, interview PHO-FSR.

extraordinary dialectic'. He remained loyal to his ideas, though critical of many anti-peronists, who complained about social laws, some of which were already on the statutes but were not applied.

Cipriano Reyes himself, not usually perceived as a man of culture but of action (maybe he was both), in fact valued literary learning, or so he wishes us to believe. In his memoirs he describes an anthological scene, when, like many others, he was roaming the roads of Buenos Aires province in search of work in the harvest. He was part of a veritable 'circuit of walkers', who also boarded freight trains as 'crotos'. Once, in 1923, when crossing a bridge together with a friend, he saw two other itinerant down-and-outs were calling him. One of them was a

a man in his fifties, with a full head of hair and a long grey beard, sipping *mate* sitting over his bundle of clothes ... After chatting for a while, the old man asked us whether we had some books to exchange. I told him I had. He impressed me as a man from another sphere despite his aspect ... I opened my knapsack and I was preparing to give him a book called 'Iras Santas', lent to me by the 'negro' Acevedo. Very good, he told me, a great Peruvian poet, the best rebel poet in Latin America, the great defender of his people and of the Indian race ... I was awe-struck looking at him. He took the book he carried with him and told me he would exchange it for mine. It had worn-out red covers, with golden letters saying 'War and Peace', by Leon Tolstoi. And he explained that he was the greatest Russian writer of all times, a precursor of Bolshevism, mystic and Christian He sat again and started writing the norms of the exchange.⁷⁵

Better-known auto-didacts, like printer Sebastián Marotta, woodworker turned journalist Jacinto Oddone, mason Rubens Iscaro, and others who wrote about the labour movement, are only the tip of an iceberg which existed in Argentina and is now quite melted. Maybe what has happened is a paradoxical result of the expansion of education, which has weakened the intellectual cadres of the working class. This fact has already been noted in the European or North American context, and the same has happened in Argentina, with the social and educational policies of Perón's presidency. In the old days, when the chances of completing a high school education were slim, many individuals with an intellectual orientation had no alternative to manual work, thus remaining within the working class, and from there tried to satisfy their curiosity in unorthodox ways. Under conditions which, despite the many crises, are more open, with ample access to secondary and even university schooling, that kind of people, even when unable to complete their training, do emerge from the ranks of manual labour and enter into those of white collar, technician, or even semi-professional status. A new 'intellectual proletariat' is thus formed, living under harsh conditions, but with a way of life removed from that of manual workers and trade unions. If at all, the modern equivalent of those self-taught militants can be found among some middle class unions, like the Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado (ATE) — which not by chance has a very radicalised leadership — or the health workers, and of course teachers. For these people, when economic conditions make it difficult for them to get an acceptable job, the alternative of manual work is not really present, among other reasons because the training they have had does not prepare

⁷⁵ Cipriano Reyes, *Yo hice el 17 de octubre: memorias* (Buenos Aires, 1973).

them for it. The result is the increasingly pragmatic orientation of most trade unions, and the prevalence of leftist phenomena at middle class levels.

None of this means that it is impossible today to have a left-leaning working-class movement. The cases of Chile, Uruguay and Brazil testify to this fact. But one of the transmission belts operating in the past has ceased to function. During the period studied in these pages this scenario was in full change. In addition, the expanded occupational prospects opened up by war-induced prosperity and full employment contributed to the depletion of the working class activist ranks, as many talented members ascended the social pyramid. In many cases harassment by employers and police forced them to seek jobs in small shops or as self-employed, or with the help of some members of the family, thus losing contact with the bulk of union members, even if they remained active in their political party.

What happened when a union militant was offered the chance to rise to a position of higher responsibility? A case in point is that of Carlos Cesana, a mason in the Buenos Aires municipality, who had started as an unskilled labourer, a football enthusiast who was also active in the sports committee of the local Unión de Obreros Municipales, and occasionally attended national congresses and of course mass meetings and assemblies, even though he never reached the Comisión Directiva level. Suddenly, one day he was promoted to the rank of supervisor ('subcapataz'), a job he gladly accepted, but which caused him no end of troubles with four youths 'full of vices and foibles', who certainly did not like heavy work, while he had no problem with four older men, who knew how to differentiate union militancy from work shirking. Given the protest of the four difficult youths, which the rival union (Federación de Obreros Municipales) took up, Cesana published a letter in the journal of his organisation, titled 'A Villainous Accusation'. He said, referring to the episode:

Tired of the justified complaints of the old fellows, and feeling it was impossible to make the others understand their obligations and the respect the old ones merited, I decided to abandon my post and asked the head foreman for a shovel, telling him I was incapable of dealing with the group under my supervision. He didn't accept my resignation, and I explained to his superior what was the matter. He proposed to me to change those four youngsters, I accepted and thus returned to my job. Is that being an informer?

Cesana then adds that among the four 'one was an active legionary, who commanded the lot, and who ... acted under the inspiration of a certain colonel of the *barrio* of Flores.⁷⁶ The legion to which he refers was of course one of the many existing at the time, of a highly right-wing nationalist hue, a fact that throws some light on the recruiting grounds of those organisations.

A more visible case was that of Juan Armendares, a high-profile socialist leader of the textile union, elected its general secretary in 1938, where he lasted for one year (he was replaced by a communist, Jorge Michellon). Armendares was offered the following year the post of foreman, in a different enterprise. He decided to accept the deal, which meant his withdrawal from the union cadres, and possibly also a diminution of his party involvement. In 1940 he signed, in representation of his new employers, an agreement with

⁷⁶ *El Obrero Municipal* (OMun) 16 Jan. and 1 April 1939; and *El Municipal*, 1 April 1939.

the union, a fact pointed out by his rivals. As for Michellon, being unable to retain a job in his trade, he had been forced to become a commission agent, until he was elected general secretary, with a salary paid by the union (and by the Communist Party).⁷⁷

3. *The transmutation of lead into gold*

Could it be possible to transform one model into the other, for example, the more primitive mobilisational *caudillismo* into associationism? Or maybe into something in between, like Leninism, or Bakunin's imagined and never-built model forcing the lumpen into a revolutionary outcome? The anarchist theoretician was one of the first to explore how a populist movement could become something else. During the Franco-Prussian war, in 1870, he took a step in that direction, considering that the majority of the French people still supported the defunct emperor. Revolutionaries, in his view, rather than opposing the war, should support the enthusiasts of Louis Bonaparte, using banners the people could understand, channelling them into a socialist mould. The *entrismo* into more mass popular movements (populist or social democratic, even communist) of some Trotskyite and other leftist groups was practised in Argentina, once Peronism had proved its capacity to lead the masses on several occasions. One of them was adopted by the Partido Socialista de la Revolución Nacional (PSRN), split from the Socialist Party (SP) in 1953, and the latest that of the Montoneros, many of whom were far from being run-of-the-mill Peronists.

The evolution of populism to the left, not only due to *entrismo* from external forces, but also through internal mutations, has been rampant in Latin America, notably in Brazil, where *varguismo* ended up posing a revolutionary threat to the system, under Joao Goulart (1963–64). The same happened with the second coming of Ibáñez in association with a majority sector of the Socialist Party, and with Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in more recent times.

Leftist *entrismo* into a popular authoritarian project had not been significant in Argentina prior to Peronism, mostly because such a thing did not exist, or had only sprung up as isolated attempts. One of them was by General Juan B. Molina in 1936, when he planned a coup against the conservative regime of President Agustín P. Justo, in combination with some members of the left-leaning radical group FORJA, especially Diego Luis Molinari. When, during the early months after the 1943 coup, it became apparent that a new anti-oligarchic force was being created from official circles, the temptation was very great for leaders of the left to join that bandwagon and push it into a more leftist track. This strategy was explicitly condemned by the socialist and communist party structures, and by most of the top cadre of syndicalists. But among more pragmatic union leaders the desire to manage their own affairs was understandably greater.

The concept of the autonomous working class organisation

Studies of the working class movement have been, from their inception, very much linked to the concept of autonomous class organisation, in trade unions, co-operatives, cultural associations and political parties. Participation by some individuals from other social origins was not ruled out, but the central concern was the organisation of

⁷⁷ Dora Genkin, interview PHO–FSR.

the popular classes without help from the State, and much less from the Church or the armed forces. The main theoretical body in this area was that of Marxism, with its social democratic and Fabian epigoni, for all of whom an autonomous organisation worthy of its name required leaders emerging from the grass roots, in principle in a democratic way, even if they often tended to remain in office for long periods, given the advantages they had over their internal rivals, who were usually more to the left.⁷⁸ One of the weapons at the disposal of the organisation is the strike, including mass protests and demonstrations, but in general there is a strong mistrust of sudden expressions of 'spontaneous' popular wrath without the presence of a seasoned leadership.

The initial moment of social democracy in Argentina is often considered to be the foundation of La Vanguardia and of the Socialist Party (1894–95), or if at all the publication of *El Obrero*, by the French Marxist Germán Avé Lallemand (1890), though there were some earlier expressions among the immigrant communities. *El Obrero* styled itself 'Defender of the interests of the proletarian class — Organ of the Federación Obrera'. The 'Federación Obrera' it intended to represent was the first of several failed attempts to organise a central organisation, following the widely attended act in celebration of the First of May 1890, where many ideological and national groups were present.

The main alternative to that approach was the anarchist belief that set much store on spontaneous struggle, stimulated by an activist elite but shunning complex stable structures. It even admitted the potentially revolutionary role of the lumpen sectors of the proletariat, like those Bakunin recommended in his famous letter to Nekaev. However, within anarchism there was also a more 'organisational' wing, which operated among trade unions, with a radical approach but not too different from the social democrat practice, except in its condemnation of party political action.

Typically, an anarchist editor of the bakers' paper, in 1902, avowed that through 'disappointments suffered' he had learned the mistake of 'the charlatans who say that the [floating] population of the taverns, the plazas, the market place, in other words the non-members, are as good or better for sustaining a struggle than the organised groups'.⁷⁹ The idea of the *espontaneístas*, of course, was that the deracinated, often jobless, floating population (not necessarily lumpen proletariat, but near it) might join a great violent explosion, and not having anything to lose might be more useful than the rest. The problem, however, was how to give them leadership, and in that field history had in store alternatives scarcely imaginable at the time.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century the more visible militants were the anarchists, some of them quite violent, but there was also a more pragmatic group of unionists, without too many ideological concerns, or, like the socialists, mostly of a reformist practice even if using quite a radical phraseology. The pragmatic group often shunned incorporation into the national federations, thus starting the long tradition of the 'autonomous' unions. Some remained autonomous, not necessarily due to lack of ideological interest, but

⁷⁸ A classic analysis is that of Seymour Martin Lipset, in chapters four and 12 in *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, NY, 1960), 'Working Class Authoritarianism' and 'The Political Process in Trade Unions'. For a more in-depth study, see S.M. Lipset et al., *Union Democracy: The Internal Politics of the International Typographical Union* (Glencoe, IL, 1956).

⁷⁹ *El Obrero Panadero* (3 July 1902).

to avoid splits among their ranks. The locomotive drivers' La Fraternidad, and the printers, were among the best-organised trades, and often independent from central organisations.

Among the anarchists there was an intense debate between the 'organisers' and the 'anti-organisers'. The organisers among them, often called anarcho-syndicalists, evolved into more moderate positions, combining with sectors of the Socialist Party to form the *revolutionary syndicalist* tradition, to a large extent inspired by Georges Sorel. Particularly strong in France, they had important offshoots in Italy and South America. In Argentina its followers ended calling themselves simply syndicalist.⁸⁰ Their idea regarding the transformation of the capitalist system passed through the general strike, and the ensuing organisation of society by the trade unions, without any intervention by political parties or intellectuals. The distrust of intellectuals was particularly marked, and it appears often in the pages of their publications.⁸¹ This revolutionary syndicalist, or anarcho-syndicalist current, then, is a second organisational model, similar in many respects to the social democratic pattern, except for its rejection of parliamentary practice and of the role of intellectuals.

A third model is that of Leninism. Under conditions quite typical of the periphery, and disillusioned about the transformative capacity of the working class 'left to itself', Lenin forged the concept of the revolutionary elite, capable of iron leadership of a well-knit party. In this it contrasts with the other two models. Its success in Russia attracted many militants tired of the slow growth of a reformist programme. In more recent historical experience, the Leninist model has evolved in a social democratic direction, given the impossibility of conducting a successful revolution. In the Argentina of the mid-twentieth century the communist-controlled unions were in practice quite similar to the social democratic ones, despite the difference in ideology.

Of these three models, the revolutionary syndicalist — which in Argentina termed itself simply *sindicalista* — was the weakest, and in most parts of the world was being overshadowed by its rivals. In their resentment, some of its leaders searched for apparently revolutionary heterodox courses, including fascism, especially in France and Italy. This fact, rather well known, has reflected on the prestige of this current of thought. In

⁸⁰ In Spanish the word lends itself to confusion, as *sindicalismo* also means trade unionism. In English the term syndicalism is clear enough, as it is not used to refer simply to trade unionism. The concept of anarcho-syndicalism is employed in different ways in the literature, due to the connections and frequent fusions between the organiser anarchists and the revolutionary syndicalists. In Argentina the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA), up to 1915 radically anarchist, was taken over during its IX Congress by an alliance of moderate anarchists and syndicalists with some socialists, who rejected the earlier declaration of the V Congress of 1905, in favour of 'anarchic communism'. Hard-line anarchists then split and formed the so-called 'FORA of the V Congress', while their moderate rival organisation was known as the FORA of the IX Congress.

⁸¹ See the article by K. Rosene, a worker of the town of Bolívar, Buenos Aires (*El Obrero Ferroviario*, Feb. 1917), and along the same lines, Silvano Prado, 'La subclase intelectual', where he accuses intellectuals of being the main exploiters of the workers' toil (*La Acción Socialista*, 12 March 1910), and Julio Arraga, an intellectual sharing those opinions, in the same journal (11 Feb. and 1 March 1905). These attitudes contrasted with those of the moderate social democratic Italian leader Filippo Turati, who debated with a certain A. Graziadei, author of a book significantly titled *Política di partito e política di classe*. Turati stated the known social democratic belief that the working class, 'left to itself', was condemned to political ineffectiveness, and needed both intellectuals and a political party so as to involve other social actors. Of course his analysis, though having some points of contact with Lenin's (and particularly Kautsky's) came to different conclusions regarding how to establish a working partnership with the middle classes. See *Crítica Sociale* (Italy) 16 Aug. 1905.

fact, one of its main representatives, Hubert Lagardelle, editor of Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, ended up as minister of labour under the Vichy regime and was jailed after the war. Another prominent leader, the Italian Edmondo Rossoni, joined Il Duce, with a few others, and throughout his regime was the head of the official union structure.⁸² However, these cases are far from representing a majority, or even an important sector of the Italian union movement. Of course socialism also gave some recruits, beginning with Mussolini himself, whose career in the Socialist Party was much more than a youthful episode.

In Argentina it has been often stated, without sufficient data, that syndicalism was an important part of the early support for Peronism. This derives in part from the fact that one of the main leaders of what remained of their central federation (the Unión Sindical Argentina), Luis Gay, joined the movement and was a founder of the Partido Laborista. If a list is made of the main leaders of this tendency, however, it can be seen that the majority opted for the opposite stance.⁸³

We can consider as forming part of the higher pre-Peronist syndicalist group the members of the Secretariat of the Unión Sindical Argentina (USA), say from 1937 to 1943, adding five leading figures who had to resign from its predecessor the CGT Catamarca because their unions remained autonomous: Andrés Cabona, Sebastián Marotta, José Negri, Alejandro Silvetti and Antonio Tramonti, plus another one who remained in the rival CGT Independencia (dominated by socialists and communists), Luis Cerutti. Table I summarises the results.

One might wonder what the grounds are for the thesis that there was a special relationship between syndicalism and Peronism, apart from the well-known figure of Luis Gay. It is true that the fact that this group was not linked to any party organisation might lead one to expect that they would be less controlled by a more ideologically sensitised structure.

In fact, towards the end of the 1930s Antonio Tramonti, the main railway syndicalist, attempted to return to the control of his union (from which he had been displaced by socialists and communists) using his contacts with President Roberto Ortiz. This does not allow us to class him as being organically linked to the Antipersonalista Radical Party, but as being part of a mutual manipulation. It is also true that the syndicalists had been repeatedly accused by their enemies of fascist leanings, and that being at the helm of the newly created Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) in 1930, they had to adopt a very cautious approach towards the military regime which came to power that year, and similarly so with the more constitutional but fraudulent one

⁸² Leo Valiani, 'Le mouvement syndical ouvrier italien entre le fascisme e l'antifascisme, 1929-1939,' International Institute for Social History, *Mouvements ouvriers et dépression économique de 1929 à 1939* (Assen, 1966), pp. 282-301, lists a dozen or so journalists and union leaders who passed through a similar evolution, among them Michele Bianchi, Agostino Lanzillo, Angelo O. Olivetti and Sergio Panunzio (p. 284). See also Claudio Schwarzenberg, *Il sindacalismo fascista: problemi di storia* (Milano, 1972); D.D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill, 1979); Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *El nacimiento de la ideología fascista* (Madrid, 1994); and Frederick F. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France: The Direct Action of its Time* (Cambridge, 1970).

⁸³ See Laura Kalmanowiecki, 'La Unión Sindical Argentina: de la revolución prometida a la incorporación al sistema político', in Torcuato S. Di Tella (ed.), *Sindicatos como los de antes...*, pp. 117-67. According to her data, of 64 first-line syndicalist leaders of the Unión Sindical Argentina, including her predecessor the CGT Catamarca of 1936, 33 (52%) were hostile to the new Partido Laborista, while 20 (31%) supported it, and there are no data for the remaining 11 (17%).

of General Agustín P. Justo. This is quite different from having an ideological involvement. Again, after the 1943 coup Tramonti attempted a comeback, and he accepted being an advisor to the intervention of the Unión Ferroviaria. But he miscalculated, and when Perón decided to replace the very reactionary military man in charge with his friend Domingo Mercante, Tramonti and his group were dumped. It is not clear what position Tramonti took afterwards, but given his prominence, if he had adhered to the new regime he would have had a high visibility. Anyway, I have put him with a question mark in the above table, to be on the sure side.

Table 1. Top ‘Syndicalist’ Leadership Prior to the 1943 Coup, from 1937⁸⁴

Name	Union	Ideology before 1943	Involvement in Peronism
Aguilar, Antonio	Maritime (FOM)	Syndicalist	No
Biondi, Atilio	Ship Repairers	Syndicalist	No
Cabona, Andrés	<i>Mimblero</i> , then State Employees	Syndicalist	No
Cazzullo, Pedro	Painters, La Plata	Syndicalist	No
Cerutti, Luis	Unión Ferroviaria	Pragmatic syndicalist	Yes (employee of Labour Ministry from 1944)
Constante, Julio	Painters, La Plata	Possibly syndicalist	?
Gay, Luis	Telephone Workers	Syndicalista	Yes, then rebel
Lanza, Octavio	Tobacco Workers	Possibly syndicalist	No?
Marinelli, Fortunato	Maritime (FOM)	Syndicalist	No
Marotta, Sebastián	Printers	Syndicalist	No
Márquez, Roberto	Tobacco Workers	?	No
Milessi, Pedro	Municipal Workers	Independent Left	No
Negri, José	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist, pro-syndicalist	No
Olivetta, Miguel	Metallurgical Workers, La Plata	Syndicalist	Probably died before 1943
Orozco, Modesto	Telephone Workers	?	Yes, then a rebel (with Gay)
Petrucelli, Pedro	Pasteboard Makers	Independent Left	No
Silveti, Alejandro	Cabinet Makers, then State Employees.	Syndicalist	No
Tramonti, Antonio	Unión Ferroviaria	Pragmatic syndicalist	?
Varela, Enrique	Tobacco Workers	Socialist, pro-syndicalist	No

Total top ‘syndicalist’ leadership (less one deceased)	18
Clearly anti-Peronist	12 (67%)
Very probably anti-Peronist	1 (6%)
Peronist	3 (17%)
No information	2 (11%)

Regarding the communist leaders, the vast majority retained their convictions. This is a result of their strong ideological commitment, that is, they were a highly self-

⁸⁴ CGTCat, 22 May 1937, US, 3 June 1937, US, 5 July 1939, US, 21 Feb. 1941, US, 25 March and 30 April 1943. For other data that help locate the attitudes of some of these people see US, 25 April 1945, 21 Jan and 1 April 1946, 15 Jan 1947; and 24 to 27 April 1947. Many other references to individuals, collected in the prosopography on which this work is based, cannot be listed here.

selected group, for whom the party was not only a control structure but also a provider of various types of support in hard times. They were a very important part of the pre-Peronist union leadership, not simply an extremist minority as they have become in later years. They did not have an important presence in the polls, mostly because they were barred from them, though probably it would not have been very high had they been free to field candidates. The areas where they were more influential (building, meat packing, textile and metallurgical workers) were very significant, and expanding. Their presence was even greater in Chile and Uruguay, where they overshadowed the social democrats.

This Leninist model is now in decline, for obvious reasons, but during the period under consideration it was very healthy. At times even the extent of their influence has been exaggerated by researchers, partly as an effect of ideological considerations. In this, as in other aspects, there is a convergence between the view from the right, which sees a communist hiding behind any shadow, and that from the left, which tends to minimise the solidity of the social democratic organisations. Perón was certainly one of the main exponents of the theory about the 'communist threat', whether he believed it or not. It is impossible to know how far communist influence would have gone in a country without Peronism. I do not believe there were conditions for its enrolling a majority of the working class, though much depended on what would happen after the end of the war, when a crisis of unemployment was foreseeable, accompanied by revolutionary agitations, as had happened after the First World War, with an impact also in Argentina with the *Semana Trágica* (1919) and the events of the Patagonia (1921–22).

The 'revisionist' interpretations regarding the supposedly autonomous convergence of the working class leadership with Peronism are mostly based on those of a socialist or pragmatic orientation in the largest union, the *Unión Ferroviaria*. In this union the theory has more evidence in its favour, though one must put the facts into context. First of all, if one is considering the railway workers, it is essential to include also the other union operating in that field, the *Fraternidad*, representing the highly qualified engine drivers and their assistants, which remained staunchly anti-Peronist, and resisted repeated attempts by the new government to control it. On the other hand, the skilled unions — printers, shoemakers, cabinet-makers, carpenters, painters, plumbers — where there was a high socialist presence, also maintained a strong resistance to the new mass movement. And the same was true of the leadership of the increasingly important *Unión Obrera Textil*, where there was an equilibrium between socialists and communists, and where the great majority of members of both currents remained in opposition.⁸⁵ A detailed analysis of each trade will be undertaken below.

But let us now examine the attitudes of what we might call, following Juan Carlos Torre, the 'Vieja Guardia' (Old Guard) of the CGT. One way of defining this is to include all members of the Secretariat between 1937 and 1943, considering for that last year the two sections into which it was split. Table 2 summarises the information.

⁸⁵ For the textile industry I have published a first provisional report in 'La Unión Obrera Textil,' *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 33, no. 129 (April–June 1993), pp. 109–36, which shows that of the pre-1943 leadership, either socialist or communist, practically nobody adhered to Peronism.

Table 2. Top Leadership of the CGT Prior to the 1943 Coup, from 1937⁸⁶

Name	Union	Ideology before 1943	Involvement in Peronism
Almarza, Camilo	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	No
Argaña, José	Commerce (CGEC)	Socialist	Yes
Cianciardo, Mariano	Fraternidad	Socialist	Died in 1942
Criado, Lázaro	Fraternidad	Socialist	No
Domenech, José	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	No
González, José María	Commerce (CGEC)	Socialist	Yes
González, Julio S.	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	?
Pérez, Isaac	Tramways	?	No?
Pérez Leirós, Francisco	Municipal Workers	Socialist	No
Pistarini, Pedro	Fraternidad	Socialist	No
Porto, Enrique	Tramways	Socialist	No
Rubio, Valentín	Tramways	Socialist	Yes
Sartorio, José	Fraternidad	Socialist	No?

Total top leadership of CGT prior to 1943 (less one deceased) 12

Clearly anti-Peronist	6 (50%)
Very probably anti-Peronist	2 (17%)
Peronist	3 (25%)
No information	1 (8%)

Of course several front-line leaders are left off this list, like Angel Borlenghi, head of the commerce employees, and the guiding force behind the CGT no. 2 (anti-Domenech) in 1943, even if he was not part of its Secretariat. Also missing are the printers Renée Stordeur and Riego Ribas; and the head of the shoemakers, Alfredo Fidanza, not to speak of the building trades' Pedro Chiarante or the meatpackers' José Peter, both communists. Borlenghi played a very prominent role in the formation of the Peronist movement, and was, for virtually all General Perón's first two periods in office, his minister of the interior. According to Hipólito Paz's *Memoirs* Perón feared him, but he had to spare him, despite his hostility to the Catholic Church.⁸⁷ Borlenghi's prominence among those of a socialist origin is equivalent to that of Luis Gay among the syndicalists, but equally unrepresentative. Of the others mentioned all retained an anti-Peronist commitment.

If we wish to throw a wider net, and incorporate into the *Vieja Guardia* of the CGT all members of its Administrative Commissions (that is, including the *vocales*), the image is somewhat more favourable to Peronism, though it does not compensate the figures in the previous table. On the other hand, given the lesser notoriety of these people, there are more cases without information. The list is as in Table 3 below.

⁸⁶ CGT of 6, 13, 20, 27 Aug., 10 Sept. and 1 Oct. 1943; *Noticias Gráficas* from 10 March to 19 March 1943; Guy Bourdè, *La classe ouvrière argentine, 1929-1969*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1987), vol. 3, pp. 1237-8.

⁸⁷ Hipólito Paz, *Memorias: vida pública y privada de un argentino del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires, 1999), p. 209.

Table 3. Intermediate Leadership of the CGT Prior to the 1943 Coup, from 1937 ⁸⁸Note: only the *vocales* are included so as not to repeat Table 2

Name	Union	Ideology before 1943	Involvement in Peronism
Andreani, Eduardo	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	No
Borello, Antonio	Fraternidad	Socialist	No
Borlenghi, Angel	Commerce (CGEC)	Socialist	Yes
Brugnerotto, Juan	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist?/Radical?	Yes
Cordes, Enrique	Unión Ferroviaria	Radical?/Socialist?	?
Chiaranti, Pedro	Building Trades (FONC)	Communist	No
D'Almeida, Domingo	Unión Ferroviaria	?	Yes
Damigella, Salvador	Building Trades (FONC)	Communist?	No?
De Cesare, Vicente	Commerce (CGEC)	Socialist	Yes
Descalzo, Luis	Fraternidad	Communist?	No?
Fiori, Luis	Building Trades (FONC)	Communist	No
Garini, Carlos	Unión Ferroviaria	?	?
González, Ricardo	Municipal Workers	Socialist?	No
Larken, Emilio	Unión Ferroviaria		?
Monzalvo, Luis	Unión Ferroviaria	?	Yes
Pérez Martínez, Carlos	Commerce (CGEC)	?	Yes
Rosendo, Ignacio	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	Yes
Royo, José	Commerce (CGEC)	Communist?	?
Santos, Antonio	?	Communist	No?
Seijas, Ramón	Tramways	Socialist	Yes? (contradictory information)
Sietti, Roque (o Sissti)	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	?
Taccone, Antonio	Unión Ferroviaria	?	Yes
Tadioli, Pedro	Building Trades (FONC)	Communist	No
Tesorieri, José	State Employees (ATE)	PSt	Yes
Testa, Roberto	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	No
Ugazio, Juan B.	Municipal Workers	Socialist	Yes
Zanetti, Argentino	Unión Ferroviaria	Socialist	?

Total intermediate leadership of CGT prior to 1943	27
Clearly anti-Peronist	7 (26%)
Very probably anti-Peronist	3 (11%)
Clearly Peronist	10 (37%)
Very probably Peronist	1 (4%)
No information	6 (22%)

⁸⁸ Same sources as for table 2.

The lack of information makes it more difficult to interpret this table, though it must be said that they are more likely to have been cast aside and sunk into anonymity than the opposite.

Anyway, if one is to examine the subject 'from the other side', that is, if we take the leadership of the CGT of 1948, clearly of a Peronist faith, it is worth seeing how many had played a role in the CGT's earlier leadership, not only in the Comisión Administrativa (CA), but also in the wider Comité Central Confederal (CCC), with 45 members. Table 4 illustrates the background of these leaders, adding, in some cases, relevant information on activity in the working class movement, even if not in the CA or the CCC.

Table 4. Leadership of the Peronist CGT of 1948, According to Previous Activity⁸⁹

Name	Position in the Comisión Administrativa (CA) or the Comité Central Confederal (CCC) between 1937 and 1943	Ideology prior to 1943
Alonso, José	no	Socialist
Antelo, Domingo	no	?
Arias, Jesús	no	?
Borlenghi, Emilio	no (brother of Angel)	?
Ciurlande, Antonio	no	?
Correa, Antonio	no	?
Diskin, David	yes (active in Commerce)	Socialist
Espejo, José	no	Socialist
Fernández, Graciano	no	?
Ferrari, Antonio	no	?
Giménez, Juan	no	?
Gosis, Víctor	no	?
Griolli, José	no	?
López, Ceferino	no (but active in local Unión Ferroviaria)	Socialist
Naveda, Romualdo	no	?
Perazzolo, Juan J	yes (and active in local Unión Ferroviaria)	UCR?
Protti, Alejandro	no	Syndicalist
Rubio, Valentín	no (but active in Tramways Union)	Socialist
Salvo, Hilario	no	?
Santín, Isaías	no	Independent Left
Serra, Rodolfo	no	?
Soto, Florencio	no (but active in local Unión Ferroviaria)	Socialist?
Tesorieri, José	yes (active in state employees union)	Socialist
Ugazio, Juan	yes (active in municipal workers)	Socialist
Valerga, Antonio	no (but active in clothing union)	Socialist

This indicates a widespread renewal of personnel, even though the list includes some previously playing a middle-level role. Admittedly, some important leaders from the pre-Peronist period had taken up positions in government, and thus could not be present in the CGT, like Angel Borlenghi, minister of the interior, or Silverio Pontieri, member of the Lower House of the National Congress. On the other hand, it is understandable that some of those who had some previous experience would

⁸⁹ *Clarín*, 3 Dec. 1947.

have been included in the new leadership, even if they were not highly representative of the pre-existing cadres.

Another type of analysis often made is that of the composition of the CCC of the CGT at the famous meeting of 16 October 1945, when it was decided to hold the general strike in support of Perón's return from detention (against the opinion of a lot of Unión Ferroviaria delegates). But that CCC did not represent adequately the existing union leadership, as the CGT had been repeatedly purged and split. We shall return later to this subject.

The organisational models of pragmatic unionism and verticalismo

To grasp the nature of the Argentine labour movement it is necessary to complement the description of the three Marxist-inspired models (social democratic, anarcho-syndicalist and Leninist) with two others of a different hue: pragmatic bread and butter unionism, North American style, and *verticalismo*, dominant where state-generated populism had an important impact, as in Brazil and Argentina, and also, in a different context, Mexico.⁹⁰

The North American model is not far removed from the social democratic one, from which, however, it differs due to the lesser ideological involvement of its leaders and most of its rank and file. Furthermore, the absence of significant socialist parties reinforces pragmatism. This does not mean that those unions shun politics, and in this they also differ from traditional European syndicalism. The connections between the great North American union federations and the Democratic Party are very close, including explicit endorsement of candidates and financial support. In some of the more industrialised states of the north, such as Michigan, the connection resembled that existing in Great Britain.⁹¹

In the United States, at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the presence of the Left in the labour front was still quite significant. Why it diminished almost to vanishing point is a complex problem, beyond the reaches of this paper. However, a couple of factors may be mentioned. One of them is the prevalence of social mobility, and the opportunities created by the so-called 'frontier'. Though there has been much myth-making about the presumed egalitarianism of those days, this does not justify throwing away the proverbial baby with the bathwater. The other factor was ethnic heterogeneity, first among the various European immigrants and then with the Afro-American and Hispanic diaspora, all of

⁹⁰ Leoncio Martins Rodrigues et al., *Nuevas tendencias en el sindicalismo: Argentina-Brasil* (Buenos Aires, 1992); Angela de Castro Gomes et al., *Estado, corporativismo y acción social en Brasil, Argentina y Uruguay* (Buenos Aires, 1992); Judit L. Kohan et al., *Experiencias sindicales recientes: Argentina, Brasil* (Buenos Aires, 1993); María del Carmen Arnaiz (ed.), *Movimientos sociales en la Argentina, Brasil y Chile, 1880-1930* (Buenos Aires, 1995).

⁹¹ Arthur Kornhauser, William Sheppard and Albert Mayer, *When Labor Votes: A Study of Auto Workers* (New York, 1956); J.D. Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (New York, 1969); D. Judd, *The Politics of American Cities: Private Power and Public Policy*, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1988). On the more recent decline in the number of members in North American trade unions, as a result mainly of de-industrialisation, Seymour M. Lipset (ed.), *Unions in Transition* (San Francisco, 1986). The proportion of affiliated workers over the total labour force (salaried or otherwise) shrank from a third to a sixth, one of the lowest in the industrialised world. See Frances Fox Piven, 'Structural Constraints and Political Development: The Case of the American Democratic Party,' in her edited book, *Labor Parties in Postindustrial Societies* (New York, 1992), p. 249.

which have stimulated xenophobia and racism of older working class groups and their consequent susceptibility to appeals from the Right.⁹²

It is significant that in Australia and New Zealand, with social structures akin to that of the United States, but without its ethnic heterogeneity (up until the Second World War), a social democratic union movement has remained dominant, with a solid connection to the Labour Party. As for Canada, ethnic homogeneity is much higher there than in the United States, except for the difference between Anglo- and Francophones, which is more regional than class-based. The result has also been the early presence of a socialist movement (the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, CCF, since 1961 the New Democratic Party), with close links to the unions, even if less electoral presence than in Australia. Quebec's regionalist movement, which adopts quite an anti-status quo stance with popular nationalist overtones, attracts votes which would otherwise go to the New Democrats, thus weakening the latter's connection to the working class.⁹³

Finally, to complete this enumeration, the *verticalista* model. To start with the more obvious, there is the classical Brazilian unionism of the *pelegos*, totally dominated by the government of the day, even if capable — through a form of local clientelism — of channelling support to Getúlio Vargas, and then to his more leftist heir, João Goulart.⁹⁴ This scheme was based on extended apathy among the working class, partly due to the recent rural origins of its vast majority, coming from very backward, almost feudal zones of the hinterland. It must also be said that during most of the period of formation of that kind of union the regime was dictatorial (1937–45), though they were later sustained under more democratic arrangements. However, the colossal industrial growth of the São Paulo region, together with the strength of Brazil's conservative parties, which rob clients to populism, has facilitated the formation of a new, autonomous and leftist unionism, the Central Unica de Trabalhadores (CUT) and Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), both clearly variants of the social democratic organisational pattern.

In the Argentine case, for decades a *caudillista*, bureaucratised leadership pattern has survived, ready to compromise with the powers that be, but at the same time capable of an effective defence of the interests of its members, and thus maintaining their support. There is a cultural compatibility between the traits of the leaders and of the majority of the rank and file, which it is necessary to explore in order to understand the solidity of the bond that unites them. It could be argued that the transition from a social democratic pattern of organisation to a more pragmatic one (of the

⁹² See Charles Leinenweber, *Immigration and the Decline of Internationalism in the American Working Class Movement, 1864–1919*, PhD dissertation (Berkeley, 1968); Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* (New York, 1991) about the breakdown of the Democratic Party in the south of the United States, where it took the black vote but lost that of the white upper classes. See J.R. Petrocik, *Party Coalitions: Realignments and the Decline of the New Deal Party System* (Chicago, 1981) and Frances Fox Piven, 'Structural Constraints'.

⁹³ Gordon Greenwood (ed.), *Australia: A Social and Political History* (Sydney, 1955); Tim Duncan and John Fogarty, *Australia and Argentina in Parallel Paths* (Carlton, 1984); Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand* (London, 1980); W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealy, *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History* (St John's, Terranova, 1985); Donald Creighton, *Canada's First Century, 1867–1967* (Toronto, 1970); Seymour M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism* (Berkeley, 1950); D. Morton, *The New Democrats, 1961–1986: The Politics of Change* (Toronto, 1986).

⁹⁴ Kenneth Erikson, *The Brazilian Corporative State and Working Class Politics* (Berkeley, 1977).

North American or Argentine variety) tends to accompany industrial development, or the rapid increase of membership, leaving behind the more archaic forms of labour militancy. In the United States the 1930s witnessed a great increase in union affiliation, which extended to areas previously beyond the reach of activists because of governmental and employer repression, such as steel or automobile production. The change was partly due to New Deal policies, and resulted in a change from the American Federation of Labour skilled-worker practices to the more industry-wide policies of the Congress of Industrial Organisations, which happened to be more to the left, but at the same time closer to government circles. This leftist orientation did not last, and thus did not result in a revival of the social democratic model, nor did it generate a populist movement, but joined a reformist popular party, which, even if allied to labour, was not capable of controlling it, as occurred with *varguismo* or Peronism.⁹⁵

In France too there was a transformation in the dominant ideology of the labour movement after the First World War, from syndicalism, or the Socialist Party, to communism, all accompanied by an increase in membership, which must be considered to a large extent cause, and not consequence, of the ideological renewal.⁹⁶ In Italy also there was a huge expansion in affiliation within the leftist Confederazione Generale del Lavoro, which grew from 250,000 members in 1918 to 2,200,000 in 1921, paralleling a great increase in the vote for the Socialist Party, even if one may wonder as to the solidity of convictions of these droves of newcomers.⁹⁷ As for Germany, after the First World War and the failed social revolution of 1918 the numerical strength of unions jumped from less than a million and a half to double that the same year, and to the unbelievable figure of seven million by 1919. This did not help at all the task of the moderate leadership of the Social Democrats, confronted with a mass — not necessarily of recent rural migrants — with little, if any previous organisational experience. In this case, as in the others mentioned above, the new entrants tended towards the left, or were incorporated by the leaders of that tendency, which easily appealed to their war-engendered resentments.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ I do not consider the North American Democratic Party as 'populist' because it does not have a charismatic and 'vertical' leadership, and is based to a large extent on autonomously organised trade unions. See Leo Troy, *Trade Union Membership, 1897–1962* (New York; National Bureau of Economic Research, 1965), and for the succession of party systems prevalent in the United States, Morton Borden (general editor), *Political Parties in American History*, 3 vols. (New York, 1974). On the concept of populism see, among others, Francisco Weffort, *O populismo na política brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro, 1978) and Michael L. Conniff, *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Albuquerque, 1982), and his more recent *Populism in Latin America* (Tuscaloosa, 1999). For a different interpretation, focused more on the situation of highly developed countries, see Frank Adler et al., *Populismo posmoderno* (Bernal, 1996).

⁹⁶ Georges Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste sous la Troisième République*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1977); Annie Kriegel (ed.), *Le Congrès de Tours (1920): naissance du Parti Communiste Français* (Paris, 1964), and her *La croissance de la CGT, 1918–21: essai statistique* (Paris, The Hague, 1966); Antoine Prost, *La CGT à l'époque du Front Populaire, 1934–1939* (Paris, 1964). Also in Great Britain the great growth of membership during the 1880s was accompanied by an ideological change, from a pragmatic unionism linked to the Liberal Party to a social democratic stance. See Tom Clarke and Laurie Clements (eds.), *Trade Unions Under Capitalism* (Glasgow, 1977).

⁹⁷ A. James Gregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* (Princeton, 1979), p. 173. The 'newcomers' were not necessarily coming from the countryside, but from passivity to some type of organisational involvement.

⁹⁸ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY, 1978), especially pp. 295 and 325.

To proceed now with the thesis about the similarities between the North American and the Argentine processes, the common cause might be sought in the similarities between the social structures of those two countries, when Argentina was a veritable South American Australia. In both countries, the passage from a social democratic to a pragmatic pattern might have been the result of modernisation, and of the incorporation of new masses of previously marginalised sectors, like those who formed the basis of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), or of *justicialismo*. The Argentine variant of populism, then, would be closer to the North American Democratic Party, contrasting with the situation in Brazil, at that time a much less developed country.

However, in many respects the social contexts in the USA and Argentina were far from being so akin at the time. First of all, Roosevelt's New Deal did not apply any special repression to the working class movement or the leftist parties, contrary to what occurred in Argentina during Perón's ascent to power from 1943 to 1945. And the end result was not a *verticalista*, but an autonomous, pragmatic unionism.

Admittedly, one might wonder how different are those two cases of pragmatism, the one that I have called 'American style', and the Argentine *verticalismo*. There are some points of contact, to begin with the fact that both were variants of pragmatism. In some cases, such as that of the North American Teamsters, the patterns seem to converge. However, Jimmy Hoffa did not owe his situation to intervention by the state, but to conditions emerging in his trade. Besides, his case is not typical.

What is found in the United States' case is a solid bureaucratisation, permanence of officials in their highly remunerated posts, and low rank and file participation. But this is part of really existing democracy, as much in trade unionism as in other spheres of activity. Some of those traits also exist in the social democratic model, and in Great Britain it is often the case that the members of the Executive Council, including the general secretary, are elected without any limit of time unless a majority demands their withdrawal. In this sense, the social democratic model, as much as the two pragmatic ones, are based to a large extent on membership apathy coupled with consensus.⁹⁹ But in the *verticalista* variety there is a much greater concentration of authority and a lack of transparency in its operations, which justify putting it in a different category.

But let us now examine in greater detail how the various sectors of the existing working class leadership reacted to the challenge coming from the military regime established in 1943, and to Perón's return to power upon a wave of popular mobilisation, in October 1945, after being ousted during a few days by his military colleagues.

The trade union leadership at the crossroads of October 1945

At the time of the 1943 military coup the trade union movement was, of course, fully accustomed to negotiating, not only with the employers, but with the government and to seeking friends in official spheres. The anarcho-syndicalist attitude, dominant

⁹⁹ See Hugh Clegg et al., *Trade Union Officers: A Study of Full Time Officers, Branch Secretaries, and Shop Stewards in British Trade Unions* (Cambridge, MA, 1961); David Edelstein and Malcolm Warner, *Comparative Union Democracy: Organization and Opposition in British and American Unions* (London, 1975).

at the beginning of the century, of refusing to deal with the authorities, and rejecting 'apparently' favourable legislation, had been long abandoned. From the other side, that is, from the ruling circles, conservative or radical, various tactics had also been explored to obtain support from the labour movement, or to cultivate some reliable allies among them. This was in the spirit of the times, independent of the ideologies. It is hardly surprising, then, that even fraudulent office holders, like Manuel Fresco in the province of Buenos Aires, tried their hand at social policies, and it is a mistake to consider them a precedent of Peronism.

The surprise some researchers have shown when documenting these facts may be due to the stereotype of the regimes of the 'década infame' as being hopelessly reactionary, which was far from being the case. A more recent historiography has revised those views, even risking going over to the other extreme. The change of perspective has occurred not only in what concerns labour policies, but also in the economic field, including the famous Roca-Runciman Agreement (1933) and the Planning Boards (*Juntas*) active in several productive spheres. And it is not by chance that those policies were implemented by people with a socialist past, like Federico Pinedo, Antonio De Tomaso and Raúl Prebisch.

Within the conservative ruling groups there was a faction inspired by fascism, which of course did not have much confidence in democracy, but in other areas was far from being 'more to the right' than the conservative-liberal mainstream. In other words, fascism is more a current of the centre than of the right, in social matters, as has been pointed out by Lipset and other authors.¹⁰⁰ For Perón and many of his early collaborators fascism was, no doubt, an important model, but the innovation Perón introduced into his way of thinking was Copernican. It is necessary also to take into account the many sources of his mental outlook — from social Christian to what we would call now Third World nationalism and anti-imperialism — but the central aspect of his radical innovation was the way that he incorporated the masses into a mobilisational scheme, in a much more profound way than had Yrigoyen a generation earlier.

On the trade union side also the strategies regarding how to tackle the initiatives coming from government — democratic, fraudulent or dictatorial — were very pragmatic. As is well known, the leaders of the recently created CGT, mostly syndicalists in 1930, had to treat the Uriburu regime installed that same year with a great deal of caution — to the extent of publishing some favourable declarations — to avoid greater evils, like the execution of anarchist activists. Years later, when the CGT had passed under socialist and communist control, a delegation was sent to meet Manuel Fresco, on the occasion of the first anniversary of his inauguration, congratulating him on his promises to implement a social policy. The delegation included the communist masons Pedro Chiarante and Guido Fioravanti, the latter soon to be deported to

¹⁰⁰ Lipset, in his *Political Man*, has a chapter (5) provocatively titled "'Fascism': Left, Right and Centre'. That title, hardly appropriate in an article originally written for a university journal addressed to a wide public, is based on a widely documented analysis of the variants of what might be better called *authoritarianism* rather than *fascism*, because in its leftist form it includes communism as well as Peronism. Nazism he locates in the centre, due to the kind of class support it got, and to its propaganda being partly aimed against some upper class groups. On the right there would be such phenomena as Francoism and Salazarismo. Calling communism 'leftist fascism' is more a play on words than anything else, and so must be considered its application to Peronism.

Italy.¹⁰¹ That same confederation did not consider this action incompatible with its support of a Popular Front, but rather the contrary.

The ideological mixture to be found in Barceló's and Fresco's entourage was really a precursor of some things to come, but it did not include a truly mobilisational formula, and that is a fundamental difference. The nationalist *Bandera Argentina* (20 February 1937), for example, praised Fresco for receiving the delegation from the CGT, saying that the governor represented 'a syndicalist nationalism, hierarchical and totalitarian', ready to establish compulsory union membership. The concept of social justice was very much in vogue, and it was used by a wide gamut of people, from the socialist Francisco Pérez Leirós to the pro-Nazi Cabildo, in an article (2 October 1941) entitled 'Hitler's Word', where the German leader was extolled because he 'signifies, in the field of social justice, an identity of the aims of national socialism and of fascism, in line with the now universally accepted doctrine of the New Order'.

The policies of the CGT and individual unions could not help from oscillating somewhat, in a more pragmatic manner than the party leaders with whom they were associated. In the case of the visit to Governor Fresco, their aim was to obtain favourable conditions for the textile conflict, mostly centred in Greater Buenos Aires, in Avellaneda, Bernal and San Martín (Villa Lynch).

The division of the CGT, started in the Congress held in December 1942 and finalised in the meeting of the Comité Central Confederal (CCC) of May 1943, brought face to face a group of labour leaders more closely linked to the political parties (socialist and communist) and those who preferred a more independent course of action, even if in alliance with those parties. Thus were born CGT nos. 1 and no. 2. The CGT no. 1 was headed by José Domenech, the leading figure of the Unión Ferroviaria, and by his close associate Camilo Almarza, with the support of a few other unions, but strong due to the large size of its main bulwark. The CGT no. 2 was headed by socialists Francisco Pérez Leirós, of the Municipal Workers, and Angel Borlenghi, of the Commerce Employees, plus the communists and most other small unions. It may be said that the Unión Ferroviaria — numerically the largest union, very centrally organised and spread all over the country — was quite advanced on its way from a social democratic to a 'North American pragmatic' model. However, most of its leaders remained affiliated to the leftist parties and currents, even if they maintained a distance from any party in particular, to avoid divisionism.

The Unión Ferroviaria is the main trade union on which the 'revisionist' theories about the autonomous role of labour's involvement with Peronism are based. In fact, data come nearer to supporting these theories than is the case with most other unions, especially in the artisan skilled and industrial or building fields. However, in considering the railway workers, the other union active among them should be considered, the highly significant (though less numerous) locomotive drivers' *Fraternidad*, whose leaders, both national and local, remained anti-Peronist almost to a man. Even in the Unión Ferroviaria, two of its main chiefs, José Domenech, the president (also secretary general of the pre-division CGT and the CGT no. 1), and his close associate Camilo Almarza (assistant secretary of the CGT) retained a clearly oppositionist attitude. This attitude was not incompatible with various strategies

¹⁰¹ See CGT 26 Feb. and 12 March 1937 with photograph; and CGT, 30 Jan., 18 Feb., 26 Feb., 19 Feb. 1937.

intended to support sectors of the military government, which seemed readier to come to an understanding with labour. The *interventor* in the Unión Ferroviaria and the Fraternidad, Capitán de Fragata Raúl Puyol, had named as his secretary a very interesting character, Benito Agulleiro ('Comrade Benito' to his friends), who after a communist youth had seen the light of reason and become labour correspondent for the nationalist periodical *Crisol*. Agulleiro was also author of a book, published during the very same period, *Técnica de la infiltración comunista*, by Editorial La Mazorca, in its Colección Anticomunista.¹⁰²

Perón, from his position in the newly created Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión, towards the end of 1943, decided to change the policy of repression, and send as a new *interventor* his friend Colonel Domingo Mercante. Mercante soon held new elections in both railway unions, in which most members of the old administrative bodies were re-elected, except the communists, barred from the polls, and Domenech himself, who preferred to remain aloof and return to his post as carpenter in a railway repair shop in Rosario, probably so as not to legitimise the process. In this episode the classic competition between the old syndicalists, led by Antonio Tramonti, and Domenech's group, was re-enacted, as we have already seen. Tramonti was dismissed from his role as an advisor and soon disappeared from the scene, but one of his main collaborators, Luis María Rodríguez, remained in opposition to the regime, and probably also Tramonti remained aloof, though in his case I have been unable to get clearer information.

Domenech, however, despite the low profile he adopted, participated in a meeting in Rosario in December 1943, to which railway workers invited Perón and thanked him for his role in the normalisation of the union. On that occasion Domenech called Perón 'el primer trabajador', a phrase that stuck, and was included in the Peronist songs, a fact some believe shows his collaboration with the regime. But this is not the case, as it is necessary to distinguish negotiation strategies, or even a word of praise, from more solid involvement. Most other socialist leaders of individual unions, when convoked to advise the newly created Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión did not shun participation, hoping among other things to score some points against their disgraced communist rivals. The idea that a member of the military dictatorship (full of high-profile fascist officials in educational and cultural areas) might become the leader of a popular movement couldn't even have crossed their minds. In fact, most retained an oppositional stance when things came to a head.¹⁰³

Regarding the rest of the Unión Ferroviaria leaders, Domenech himself complained that 'all of them became Peronist', which, however, is more an expression of resentment towards some of his friends who failed to support him than a true description of the facts. Thus, of 20 names of Unión Ferroviaria leaders mentioned by Joel Horowitz in his study of several unions (excepting the salaried administrator

¹⁰² CGT, 1 Nov. 1943.

¹⁰³ Among them Cándido Gregorio and Lucio Bonilla of the textile workers, Alfredo Fianza of the shoemakers, Jesús Fernández of the Fraternidad locomotive drivers and (in another ideological field) Fortunato Marinelli of the sailors. Even the communists, among them textile worker Jorge Michellon and José Peter of the packinghouses, toyed with similar attitudes at various points. Others, like Angel Borlenghi, who at the beginning went along 'to see what was going on', were eventually involved in the movement. See the interviews with Lucio Bonilla, José Domenech, Camilo Almarza, Luis María Rodríguez, and Jesús Fernández in the Oral History Programme of the Instituto Di Tella (PHO-ITDT).

Rafael Kogan and the deceased Bernardo Becerra), it turns out that eight were clearly anti-Peronist, eight Peronist, plus three of the Tramonti group on whom there is less information, but who most probably did not get involved in the new movement.¹⁰⁴

Another way of analysing the events is to focus on all members of the Mesa Directiva of the Unión Ferroviaria (I have data from 1934 to 1940), as shown in table 5.

Table 5. Members of the Mesa Directiva of the Unión Ferroviaria, between 1934 and 1940¹⁰⁵

Name	Ideology prior to 1943	Involvement in Peronism
Alvarez, Miguel	Syndicalist?	?
Canzobre, José	Socialist	yes?
Caruso, Paulo	Socialist	
Corvi, Rinaldo	?	?
Domenech, José	Socialist	no
Girola, Luis	Socialist	yes
González, Luis	Socialist	yes
López, Ceferino	Socialist	yes
Luna, Telmo	Socialist	yes
Rodríguez, Luis M.	Syndicalist	no
Spagnuolo, Pedro	?	?
Mirambell, Carlos	Socialist?	no
Picallo, Higinio	Socialist	?
Melani, Antonio	Socialist pro-syndicalist	no

Total members of Mesas Directivas, Unión Ferroviaria 1934–40	14
Clearly anti-Peronist	4 (29%)
Clearly Peronist	4 (29%)
Possibly Peronist	1 (7%)
No information	5 (36%)

Here too there is an equilibrium, as in Horowitz's data (which were collected with a different criterion). Now, if we throw a wider net, to include also the rest of the members of the Comisión Administrativa (the so-called *vocales*), the results are reported in Table 6, where, to avoid repetition, individuals in the previous list are not included.

¹⁰⁴ The eight anti-Peronists were Camilo Almarza, Angel Basteri, José Domenech, Julio Duró Ameghino, Marcelino Ganza, Antonio Melani, Luis M. Rodríguez and Roberto Testa; the Peronists, Juan Carugo, Luis Cerutti, Luis González, Ceferino López, Telmo Luna, Juan Olivera, Plácido Polo and Florencio Soto; the doubtful ones, of the Antonio Tramonti group, are, apart from himself, Santiago Domingo Diz and Bernardo Zugasti.

¹⁰⁵ LV 4 Sept. 1934; LV 31 Aug. 1935; LV 21 June 1936; LV 21 June 1936; CGTI 30 July 1937; CGT 14 April 1939 and 12 April 1940; CGT 16 Sept. 1944; Democracia 20 Sept. 1946. I have only data up to 1940, which will be completed in a final version of this ongoing research.

Table 6. *Vocales* in the Comisión Administrativa of the Unión Ferroviaria (1934–1940) Who Did Not Have Positions in the Mesa Directiva during that Period¹⁰⁶

Name	Ideology prior to 1943	Involvement in Peronism
Andrino, Simeón	Socialist	?
Basteri, Angel	Radical (UCR)	no
Caamaño, Manuel	Socialist	no
Campos, Antonio	?	no
Cañón Martínez, Lorenzo	Syndicalist	?
Cardoso, Pedro	Syndicalist	?
Dedionigi, José	Socialist	?
Delucci, Oscar	?	?
Díaz, Mauricio	?	no
Fiore, Mario	Socialist?	?
Maggio, Manuel	Socialist	?
Novo, Antemio or Alfredo	Not Socialist	?
Otegui, Francisco	Not Socialist	?
Papalás, Jorge	Communist	no?
Pontieri, Silvio	Socialist	yes
Posse, Francisco	?	?
Ratti, Alfredo	Socialist	yes?
Rivero, Donato	Socialist	?
Rondina, Rómulo	Syndicalist	?
Ruybal, Manuel	?	?
Sánchez, Antonio	Socialist	?
Scarano, Bartolomé	?	?
Solito, Nicolás	Socialist	?
Stefanelli, Pedro	?	?
Taccone, Antonio	?	sí

Total <i>vocales</i> , not members of Mesas Directivas, Unión Ferroviaria 1934–40	25
Clearly anti-Peronist	4 (16%)
Possibly anti-Peronist	1 (4%)
Clearly Peronist	2 (8%)
Possibly Peronist	1 (4%)
No information	17 (68%)

At this level, the information I have is not sufficient, but what little there is shows an equilibrium, even if, as argued earlier, there is more likely to be a lack of information on those who were displaced from their positions by newcomers. This fact can also be ascertained by making a complementary analysis, as for the CGT; that is, listing all members of the clearly Peronist Comisión Administrativa of the Unión Ferroviaria in 1946, including both the Mesa Directiva and the *vocales*, to identify their participation in similar roles between 1934 and 1940.

¹⁰⁶ Same sources as for table 5.

Table 7. The Comisión Administrativa (CA) of the Unión Ferroviaria in 1946: Previous Record of its Members¹⁰⁷

Name	Ideology prior to 1943	Position in CA of UF in 1946	Highest position in CAs of UF 1934–40
Arrieta, Víctor	?	<i>vocal</i>	none
Girola, Luis	Socialist	Treasurer	Assistant Treasurer
Gómez, Luis	?	<i>vocal</i>	none
González, Luis	Socialist	<i>vocal</i>	Treasurer
Granato, Angel	?	<i>vocal</i>	none
Gutiérrez, Eduardo	Socialist?	Second Vice President	none
Luna, Telmo	Socialist	President	Vice President
Pautasso, Bartolomé	?	<i>vocal</i>	none
Peixotto, Pedro	?	<i>vocal</i>	none
Pimenta, Joaquín	?	Assistant Treasurer	none
Pontieri, Félix	?	<i>vocal</i>	none
Rodríguez, Juan	Socialist	First Vice President	none
Rosendo, Ignacio	Socialist	<i>vocal</i>	none
Taccone, Antonio	?	<i>vocal</i>	<i>vocal</i>
Vázquez, Alej	?	<i>vocal</i>	none
Verde, Francisco	?	Secretario de Actas	none

As can be seen, the group is mostly new. However, there is what may be called a ‘sub-elite’ of the old leadership cadre, Luis González, Luis Girola and Telmo Luna, all of whom had been members of the Socialist Party, but obviously at odds, during the process of consolidation of Peronism, with the more senior group of the socialists Domenech and Almarza, and the syndicalist Luis María Rodríguez, who, as most members of his ideological current, had also antagonised Domenech in the past but now coincided with him in opposition to the new mass movement.

An event usually considered very important as an indicator of the labour movement’s transition to Peronism is the meeting of the Comité Central Confederal (CCC) of the CGT on 16 October 1945, where a majority decided to declare a general strike for 18 October. As is well known, the popular mobilisation in fact was already taking place, fired by other people, like Cipriano Reyes, outside that room where the supposed representatives of the CGT were considering their strategy. In that meeting the representatives of the Unión Ferroviaria were very reticent to declare the strike, which they believed might be a leap into the void, given the apparent strength of the transitory military regime led by General Eduardo Avalos and Admiral Héctor Vernengo Lima, who had overthrown and jailed Perón. The strike was finally declared, but for the 18th, while the massive gathering of the 17th was the result of a different type of mass phenomenon. It is true that trade unionism, in its pro-Perón sector, provided some intermediate structures, as has been suggested by the revisionist school. But the machine stood on different foundations.

Anyway, it is necessary to enquire what those members of the CCC represented? In fact, they reflected a dismantled CGT, of which practically the only organisation of any weight present was the Unión Ferroviaria, plus its closely associated Unión

¹⁰⁷ Same sources as for tables 5 and 6.

Tranviarios Automotor, and the rather artificial Asociación de Empleados del Estado, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Members of the CCC of the CGT in the Meeting of 16 October 1945¹⁰⁸

Name	Union	Ideology pre-1943	Presence 16/10/45	Role in Peronist movement	Previous role in working class movement
Alpuy, Anicet	State (ATE)	Syndicalist	Present	In CGT; pro-Luis Gay rebel	Active in Entre Ríos
Alvarez, Néstor	Tramways	Socialist?	Present	<i>Diputado</i>	Secr. Gral Tramway Workers
Andreotti, Antonio	Metallurgical	?	Present	Candidate to <i>diputados</i>	Contradictory reports
Arpella, Bruno	Tramways	?	Present	?	No relevant previous role
Blanco, Florencio	U. Ferrov.	?	Present	?	?
Borja Céliz, Benito	Sugar	?	Absent	?	New militant (Torre)
Bustamante, Ramón	Meat, Rosario	?	Present	?	?
Campos, Nicolás	Municipal	Socialist	Absent	?	Active, Municipal Workers
Caprara, Julio	U. Ferrov.	?	Present	Was 'agregado obrero'	No relevant previous role
Carballido, Dorindo	Tramways	?	Present	In Secretariat P. Laborista	New militant (Torre)
Céspedes, Juan	?	?	Absent	?	Trade unknown
Conditi, Cecilio	State (ATE)	?	Present	<i>Interventor</i> , Textiles, Printers	Present previous role
Cresta, Juan	Municipal	Socialist	Absent	?	Active, CSIG/ Socialist
D'Alessio, Nicolás	Glass	?	Present	Against strike	?
Ferrari, Libertario	State (ATE)	FORJA	Present	Decisive vote Oct 1945.	No relevant previous role
Figuera, Demetrio	U. Ferrov.	Socialist	Absent	Senator for Santa Fe	Active CSIG/Socialist ¹⁰⁹
Freyre, José María	Vidrio	Socialist	Present	Minister of Labour	No relevant previous role
Grillo, José	U. Ferrov.	?	Absent	<i>Interventor</i> , Construcción	?
Larrosa, Pablo	Porter	?	Present	Founder P. Laborista	No relevant previous role
Lebonatto, José	U. Ferrov.	?	Absent	?	No relevant previous role
Lombardía, Ramiro	Tramways	?	Present	<i>Interventor</i> , Construcción ¹¹⁰	?
Malvicini, Anselmo	U. Ferrov.	?	Present	<i>Interventor</i> in Telephones	Active in Liniers
Manoso, José	U. Ferrov.	?	Present	Much opposed to strike	?
Méndez, José R.	Clothing	Socialist?	Present	In CGT 1946; died that year	Secr Gral FOV 1940
Nazca, Felipe	Tramways	?	Present	To ILO in 1947-	?
Negrelli, Jorge	Beer	?	Present	?	?
Parrilli, Anuncio	U. Ferrov.	?	Present	To ILO in 1947.	Active in Junín
Pautasso, Bartolomé	U. Ferrov.	?	Present	Secr. Rosario CGT	Active Santa Fe
Perazzolo, Juan J	U. Ferrov.	?	Present	Strongly against strike ¹¹¹	Active Cruz del Eje
Pérez, Benigno	Porteros	?	Present	?	New militant
Piccolo, Mateo	Metallurgical	?	Present	Metallurgical Union, 1946	No relevant role
Platas, Antonio	?	?	Present	?	?
Pontieri, Silverio	U. Ferrov.	Socialist?	Present	National <i>Diputado</i>	Active in UF
Protti, Alejandro	Municipal	Syndicalist	Absent	?	Active ATComuna
Rodríguez, Juan	Beer	?	Absent	?	?
Seijo, Eduardo	Carpenter	?	Present	Rebel, deported to Chile 1948	Active in Mendoza
Tejada, Ramón	U. Ferrov.	Socialist	Present	In Secretariat P. Laborista	Active in San Juan
Tesorieri, José	State (ATE)	Socialist?	Absent	National <i>Diputado</i>	Active State Employees (ATE)
Ugazio, Juan B.	Municipal	Socialist	Absent	In CGT 1947	Active, anti P. Leirós
Valdez, Celestino	Sugar	Socialist?	Absent	?	Old militant

¹⁰⁸ Sources: 'Acta de la reunión del CCC de la CGT del 16 de octubre de 1945,' *Pasado y Presente*, New Series no. 2/3 (July–Dec. 1973).

¹⁰⁹ The CSIG, Comisión Socialista de Información Gremial, was a watchdog group seeking to establish discipline among labour members of the Socialist Party.

¹¹⁰ He was in the CGT before the expulsion of Luis Gay, not in the following one. Most probably he was a rebel along with Gay.

¹¹¹ He accused Andreotti, as earlier the communists, of being inexperienced and a divisionist. He was in the CGT in 1948, and was an *interventor* in the telephone union for a short time.

Let us now examine in more detail what was happening in the unions active in the various occupational fields, whether within or outside the CGT, to see the involvement of the real labour leadership of the time in the CGT and its Comité Central Confederal (CCC).

1. *The skilled artisan unions*

The more skilled unions, of an artisan type, working usually in small or medium-scale enterprises, were the printers, the shoemakers, the woodworkers (including furniture makers), the painters and the plumbers. Also within this group one might include the tailors and seamstresses, a very divided and heterogeneous union, with a large female contingent and a very ideological and activist minority.

The printers had a long tradition of autonomous organisation, with recurrent divisions along speciality or ideological lines. Often the union was not a part of the central confederations, so as to avoid divisions. Or, when these were inevitable, there usually was one group linked to the CGT and a smaller one, of syndicalist orientation, to the USA. In the former there was a socialist majority, oscillating between loyalty to the party and a more independent leftist attitude, plus some anarchist and communist minorities. Renée Stordeur, Riego Ribas and Luis Danussi were its main figures, while in the syndicalist sector Sebastián Marotta was the towering personality. None of them joined Peronism, neither did almost any of the established leaders at an intermediate level. This union was not represented in the CCC of October 1945.

The shoemakers had as their main leader the socialist Alfredo Fianza, who remained a dedicated opponent of the new regime. His union could not be controlled by the government, which was forced to create an alternative organisation, with mostly new people plus a couple of members of the old cadre, such as Juan J. Casimiro and Silvio Catalano, who had been *prosecretario* and *secretario de actas* at some point, though they had ceased to be members of the board in 1939. No representative of either the old or the new union was present at the CCC.

The woodworkers had started as a federation of many highly specialised trades (*ebanistas*, *doradores*, etc.) and later expanded to incorporate more industrially-oriented furniture making and the rougher carpenters. Some of the latter, however, had been incorporated into the Building Trades Federation, run by the communists, with whom there were often demarcation disputes. The woodworkers had a complex history of divisions and fusions, impossible to follow here. One of their main early leaders was Alejandro Silvetti, a syndicalist with a very radical past who later had to adopt a more moderate strategy. After losing in 1935 his position in the CGT Secretariat (due to the internal 'coup' of December 1935 engineered by socialists and communists), he got a job as carpenter at an official agency. It is not impossible that he may have obtained it through the connections he had established with the then governing groups, but the fact is that he returned to the shop floor, and being now a public employee, he affiliated to the Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado (ATE), where he found others in a similar situation, like Andrés Cabona, who had started as a *mimbrero* (willow furniture maker). Both of them retained a strongly oppositional attitude in their new union.

To return to the woodworkers, Silvetti's role there was taken up by the independent leftist Mateo Fossa and the communists Luis V. Sommi and Vicente Marischi, also anti-Peronists. There was, however, one sector of the old cadres who joined the new mass movement. Among them was Eduardo Seijo, a Chilean, who was the only member of the previous group who appeared in the Comisión Directiva of the new union organised from official spheres, but after a couple of years he fell from favour and was deported to his own country, because of his solidary stance towards Luis Gay. The other relevant leader to join the new authorities was Carlos Luis Salas, syndicalist of a distinguished career in the Unión Sindical Argentina (USA), almost equivalent to that of Luis Gay, but he did not accede to the governing body of the new union. Of all these, the only one who was present in the CCC of October 1945 was Eduardo Seijo.

The painters were a complicated trade, where there was a great deal of anarchist influence, headed by Antonio Cabrera, who evolved towards syndicalism. He was a great critic of the communist control of the Federación Obrera Nacional de la Construcción (FONC), which had a Painters' Branch. Towards the beginning of 1946, Cabrera joined the Federation, in a move to confront the Peronist common enemy. Among the plumbers there was even greater anarchist influence, with leaders such as Alberto Balbuena and Carlos Cristoff, also opposed to the Communist FONC, which also had a branch of that speciality, but with little impact. Neither painters nor plumbers were present at the CCC meeting, because they did not belong to the CGT, but were either autonomous or linked to the USA.

The tailors and seamstresses were very much divided between socialists and communists. Their competition could lead us to predict the collaboration of the former with the authorities. This in fact happened, with this faction including Cipriano Barreiro, of a very controversial trajectory, and others like José Ramón Méndez (who died in 1946) and Antonio Valerga, all of whom became leaders of a new organisation, the Federación Obrera Nacional de la Industria del Vestido (FONIVA), where José Alonso, a new militant, started his career. The communist sector, headed by Julio Liberman, Mauricio Ribak and Mauricio Schuster, was severely persecuted and cast aside.

2. Land transport

In the area of land transport the Unión Ferroviaria had an undisputed pre-eminence, flanked by the more skilled locomotive drivers of La Fraternidad and by the Unión Tranviarios Automotor, which had been created largely through the initiative and support of the railwaymen and was equally dominated by the socialists.

Of these unions, La Fraternidad remained practically untouched by the Peronist wave, and had disaffiliated from the CGT in protest against its political involvement. The very determined attitude of the Fraternidad has been often dismissed by researchers as reflecting a typical 'middle class' reaction. This is not really so, though it is not very useful to argue where the middle class starts or ends. The fact is that it was an occupational group with a long tradition of solid organisation, along reformist and moderate lines, but in close daily interaction with the Unión Ferroviaria members in their work environment. The role of both unions in the anti-government strikes of 1951 is well known.

As for the Unión Ferroviaria, it certainly had a big presence in the CCC meeting, with a group of delegates in which some seasoned militants were mixed with new ones, but several dominant figures had been cut out. Political pragmatism was very widespread in that union, as well as a preference for acting directly in the national arena, not through the intermediation of a political party. Domenech shared this commitment, a source of constant friction with the Socialist Party, of which he was most of the time a member.

Of the twelve railway delegates at the CCC, five had little weight, being rather new in these matters.¹¹² Three others had been active at a local level, Bartolomé Pautasso in Santa Fe, Antonio Parrilli in Junín and Anselmo Malvicini in Liniers. The latter would later acquire much prominence, as an *interventor* in various unions that had nothing to do with his own trade, like the metal and the phone workers, and in that sense he was a forerunner of a type of leader who was to become increasingly common. The other four, Ramón Tejada of San Juan, Demetrio Figueras of Santa Fe, Juan José Perazzolo of Cruz del Eje and Silverio Pontieri of La Plata, merit special consideration. Tejada was a guiding spirit in San Juan, a rather peripheral province. Figueras had been a prominent member of the Comité Socialista de Información Gremial (CSIG) and became a senator for Santa Fe. Perazzolo, an important ally of Domenech, was very much opposed in the CCC meeting to declaring the strike, deriding the attitudes of 'jóvenes inexpertos' like metalworker Antonio Andreotti, who were now assuming the divisionist and irresponsible role earlier performed by the communists. Pontieri, a man with a long career, of syndicalist origins but close to the Socialist Party, combined an opposition to the strike with a determination to join Peronism from positions of autonomy, as can be seen in his memoirs.¹¹³ In this book, published in 1972, he repeatedly quotes Juan B. Justo (not a very fashionable thing at the time), and while disagreeing with his position towards the gold standard, he points out 'the respect and admiration we workers always had for Dr J.B. Justo, due to his nobility and his extraordinary capacity'.¹¹⁴ Soon Pontieri, a member of the Lower House of Congress, clashed with officialdom, even though he persisted in his support for the regime, and spent 25 months in prison after 1955. But in his recollections he avers that the CGT had degenerated, becoming a feared oligarchy, 'so divorced from our feelings that its name, traditionally so much loved and respected, now antagonised the workers themselves; it became increasingly common, including in this city of La Plata, for members to find it difficult to select their representatives'.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, his opposition to mobilisationism shows in his opinion that 'the revolution of October 17' was due to the strike convoked by the CGT, and not to the mass concentration of that day in the Plaza de Mayo.¹¹⁶ Along the same lines, he condemns politicians, 'eternos embaucadores', and persists in claiming that the working class organisations must remain aloof from party political involvement, but favour industrialisation and the nationalisation of public services.¹¹⁷ Together with fellow *diputado*

¹¹² Florencio Blanco, Julio Caprara, José Griffo, José Lebonatto and José Manso.

¹¹³ Silverio Pontieri, *La Confederación General del Trabajo. La revolución del 17 de octubre de 1945, y otros trabajos* (Buenos Aires, 1972).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-3.

¹¹⁷ CGT, 16 May 1945.

Angel Ponce he proposed a law that would have required all state enterprises to have worker representatives on the boards.¹¹⁸ In other words, a good representative of the 'old guard', prepared to cooperate autonomously with Peronism. But there were not many like him.

The Unión Tranviarios Automotor was also strongly represented at the CCC, through its secretary general, Néstor Alvarez, new to his job (he had been there since 1944), accompanied by four newer or less influential colleagues.¹¹⁹ Most of those who had held positions as presidents, vice-presidents, or general secretaries of the union between 1936 and 1946, like Victorino Fernández ('lackey of Domenech'), Manuel Barreiro, José Guarna (communist), Valentín Rubio, Ramón Seijas and Isaac Pérez, were not to be found in the Comisión Directiva of 1946. Of them only Rubio had a clear involvement with Peronism, together with the newer and already mentioned Néstor Alvarez. The latter, however, insisted in the CCC meeting that the strike should be declared to defend the social benefits acquired, and not to obtain the liberation of Perón, as that meant hitching the movement to a person. To sum up, the UTA was a union which, like the UF, tried to negotiate with the new authorities, but a great many of its longstanding cadres remained aloof. In the Comisión Directiva of 1946 the president, Manuel Bernárdez, and the vice-president, Emilio Bagnola, were devoid of a curriculum, while the general secretary, Isaías Santín, was a Spaniard who had been in the Guardia Civil during the civil war, 'despite which he was a good person' according to the Peronist municipal worker, Pedro Otero.

3. *The riverine circuit*

Three major unions were active in what might be referred to as the riverine circuit: The Federación Obrera Marítima (FOM), the port workers (often divided) and the ship repairers (Federación Obrera de la Construcción Naval), none of them represented in the CCC of the CGT because they were autonomous or affiliated to the Unión Sindical Argentina (USA). In this area there was a strong syndicalist and anarchist influence, and there were long-running conflicts between these two tendencies, and between them and the so-called 'free' or 'yellow' groups. In the ports the entrepreneurs and the police were very worried about stoppages, particularly virulent in times of harvest (as had happened first in 1902), and thus made strenuous efforts to cultivate friendly and submissive organisations.

The Maritime Workers (FOM) were the backbone of the syndicalist current, performing for it a role similar to the Unión Ferroviaria (UF) for the socialists. Life on board ship, and the port environment, created a sort of 'occupational community' based on an intense interaction between members, and a close physical propinquity between work and home.¹²⁰ On the other hand, the easy access, via the river network, to many far-away localities, allowed them to organise stevedores and 'oficios

¹¹⁸ CGT, 1 Sept. 1946.

¹¹⁹ Bruno Arpesella, defined as a 'shopworker'; Dorindo Carballido and Felipe Nazca, new militants; and Ramiro Lombardía, with a scanty record, but who would later be, among other things, *interventor* in the new building trades union, the Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina (UOCRA), which, despite being a creation of Peronism, immediately had internal problems requiring external arbitrage.

¹²⁰ An early study of this kind of environment is T.S. Simey et al., *The Dock Worker* (Liverpool, 1954).

varios' in small trade and transport centres along the river routes, where otherwise union activity would have been unknown. There was also contact with forestry workers, especially those in the tannin-producing regions of northern Santa Fe and Chaco. The province of Entre Ríos particularly was reached in this way, and its Provincial Federation was a stronghold of syndicalism.

The activists of the FOM (affiliated to the USA) in their great majority remained aloof from the new mass movement. Their main leader during the period under consideration was Fortunato Marinelli, who did participate, like so many others, in conversations and advice when asked by the new authorities, but remained independent (he died in September 1945). Others in a similar position were Antonio Aguilar (his successor at the helm of the FOM), Pedro Rufino Velázquez, Juan Aparicio, Juan Bronzini, Humberto Cavigliani and Manuel Pardo. In this occupational area there was an originally much smaller group, inspired by the Socialist Party, which had been trying without much success to install a rival organisation, finally created in 1943, the Unión Obrera Marítima (UOM). Some of its leaders, like Cosme Givoge and Manuel Pichel, joined the Peronist bandwagon, but it proved impossible to overcome, from the inside, the resistance of the FOM. Finally, faced with unremitting official pressure, the FOM agreed, in 1947, to form a confederation with the UOM, in a process which finally produced the Sindicato de Obreros Marítimos Unidos (SOMU), within which there was an uneasy coexistence of both currents. This unitary attitude, under the banner of political non-involvement, brought the leaders of the FOM the condemnation by the more intransigent enemies of the regime, but for them it was obviously a strategy of institutional survival, and they cannot be considered as having been incorporated into the Peronist cause.¹²¹

A much smaller, and highly artisan union, was that of the ship builders (actually, repairers). They had an intensely federal structure, with branches, or autonomous affiliated unions, of painters, boilermarkers, riverside carpenters, caulkers and other similar trades, clearly anarchist in its cadres, though, to avoid divisions, it remained autonomous and did not affiliate to the libertarian Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA). Among its main representatives were Rodolfo Almeida, Angel Borda, Angel Brussoni, Juan Balbi, Atilio Biondi, Humberto Correale and Jorge Gatuzzin. They remained fiercely independent, with strong support in their neighbourhood networks, even if the pressure of circumstances forced them in 1952 to set aside some of their principles and appeal to the 'Excelentísimo Señor Presidente de la República (it was no longer a 'Región') Argentina', asking him to intervene with the police commissar who had closed their headquarters.¹²²

In the port sector, also not represented at the CCC, the situation was too chaotic to describe here in any detail. There was a fairly widespread anarchist influence, with leaders who moved in and out of this occupation (like Humberto Correale and Angel Borda). One of the few with a previous record of activity who joined Peronism was Jerónimo Schizzi, who, however, was soon replaced by a wave of newcomers.

¹²¹ In the periodical they jointly published, *Congremar*, one can find respectful references to national authorities, but no adulation as in many other publications of the time.

¹²² The letter was signed by the general secretary César Pagliarini, and the members of his board, Antonio González, Atilio Biondi and Juan Balbi (*El Obrero Calderero*, Jan. 1952), none of whom had anything to do with Peronism.

4. Manufacturing industry: textile, metallurgy, glass and paper

The textile industry was expanding very rapidly during the Second World War. In 1934 the two pre-existing unions had merged into the Unión Obrera Textil (UOT), where there was an uneasy coexistence between socialists and communists until 1941, when they split. The leadership of both groups remained almost entirely detached from Peronism, as much the socialists Cándido Gregorio, Juan Armendares, Lucio and Jorge Bonilla, Basilio and Demetrio Dimópulos, and Juan Pardo, as the communists Jorge Michellon, Gelindo Pellichero, Dora Genkin, Ida Pecheny, Flora Absatz, Meyer Kot and Heriberto Martínez. The only one of any note who apparently joined the new movement was Próspero Malvestiti, of the PC, the subject of an incident in 1943 when he was expelled for an early case of sexual harassment, or so they said. The government was forced to organise a rival union, the Asociación Obrera Textil (AOT), set up by Mariano Tedesco and some of his friends, all of whom were very young and green. Nobody from the old cadres (not even Malvestiti) joined them, even though the communists, given the mass exodus of their rank and file, decided to join the AOT to bore from within. There was no representative of the textile workers at the CCC, because the UOT had withdrawn in protest at its political involvement.

As for metallurgical workers, they had the Sindicato Obrero de la Industria Metalúrgica (SOIM), under solid communist control, though there were some socialist militants, generally keeping a low profile. One of them, the rather obscure Angel Santiago Perelman, in 1943, before the military coup, formed the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM), with help from Domenech and his CGT no. 1, intent on offering an alternative to the communist organisation (affiliated to the CGT no. 2). There were very few people with a previous record present in the UOM, one of them being Alfredo Muzzopappa (he was later an *interventor* in the Municipal Union). The later more prominent Hilario Salvo was a new man. Among the old communist cadre were Marcos Maguidovich, general secretary for several years, who later on became a small-scale entrepreneur; Muzio Girardi, his successor in 1942; A. Turiansky, deported in 1936; J. Kaminetzky; and Juan Pavignano, all of them firm in their beliefs. In the CCC meeting of October 1945 there was only one representative of the newly formed UOM, Antonio Andreotti, without much of a previous trajectory.

At the CCC meeting there was one representative from the glass workers, Nicolás D'Alessio, a new militant of that small union, where there was an important communist and anarchist presence.

The paper workers were another expanding union, with a communist leadership, also not represented at the CCC. It was very active, along with the printers, the restaurant workers, the building trades, a sector of the woodworkers and the syndicalist USA, in attempting to counteract Perón's influence in the labour movement, the Comisión de Unidad del Movimiento Obrero Argentina, set up in December 1945.

5. Building and food-workers: the bases of communist expansion

The building (mostly masons) and foodworkers (especially packers) occupational areas were typical venues for recent rural migrants. Communist influence was rapidly expanding, with charismatic figures like Guido Fioravanti (deported in 1936, and

replaced by Pedro Chiarante) and José Peter. Among the meat workers there was a high concentration in run down neighbourhoods in Avellaneda and Berisso (near La Plata), quite apart from other enclaves in Zárate and further north, from Rosario to the province of Entre Ríos. Among masons, their sporadic concentration in building sites also created a very special situation. One might wonder whether in these two areas a mobilisational and charismatic role could have been performed by the Communist Party. This might have been an alternative to Peronism, and something like that may have happened in Chile, where the Left had no difficulty in absorbing rural newcomers, though admittedly they were less numerous. In Argentina, in order to integrate the masses of recently mobilised workers, there was a need for a leadership drawn from higher up the social pyramid than the communists could afford. It should also be pointed out that in Argentina there was a greater cultural difference between the organised sector of the proletariat and the unorganised, whether rural migrants or otherwise, who were only then waking up from a long slumber, under the strong impact of an anti status quo appeal from the state.

In the building trades there was the increasingly strong *Federación Obrera Nacional de la Construcción* (FONC), dominated by the communists, competing with some syndicalists and anarchists, the latter concentrated in the more skilled sectors (painters, plumbers and carpenters). Among its leaders, apart from Fioravanti and Chiarante, there were Angel Molessini, Antonio Pettorella, Luis Fiori, Pedro Tadioli and Rubens Iscaro, none of whom became Peronist. The new rival organisation, backed from official spheres, the *Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina* (UOCRA), did not boast among its higher echelons virtually anyone with a relevant previous record. At the CCC meeting this erstwhile very important member of the CGT had no representation.

As for meat workers, apart from José Peter and his comrade Jerónimo Arnedo Alvarez, there was a significant anarchist group operating in Avellaneda, with leaders like Lucas Domínguez, of the Anglo packing house, who occasionally was allied with Cipriano Reyes, and remained in opposition to the regime, even though he was not averse to occasional negotiations. Cipriano Reyes, who had a very diverse itinerant political and artistic trajectory in Buenos Aires province (his parents were circus performers), his union experience was rather brief and not very profound. He was an uncompromising enemy of the communists, and in this endeavour he often coincided with the anarchists. He got into trouble and ended up in prison, but Perón went there to pick him up and incorporate him into his legions, together with other less courageous persons, such as the socialist state employee's José Vicente Tesorieri, a rather strange way of forging an alliance.

In Zárate there was a solid group of syndicalist activists, who did become involved in the Peronist movement, though their support was inconstant. Thus, Juan Beroch, socialist sympathiser (a fact not incompatible with syndicalist attitudes) entered the *Partido Laborista*, but he later abandoned it and ended up among the so-called *Treinta y Dos Gremios Democráticos*, the staunchly anti-Peronist post-1958 group. Another who also joined the movement, but was later a rebel, was Laureano Correa, while Clodomiro Cáffaro, also from Zárate, remained loyal to it. Anyway, none of these were present at the CCC, partly because Reyes and his people were autonomous from the

CGT, and Peter's followers had withdrawn from it. The only meat worker present was Ramón Bustamante, from Rosario, a man without much of a record.

Another strategic food production sector was sugar. It had a long history of union organisation, from the early part of the century, but with little associationist intensity and a record of failures. Before the 1943 military coup there was a Unión General de Trabajadores de la Industria Azucarera (UGTIA), which was reorganised in 1944, presided over by Juan M. Galván, flanked by his vice-president, Ernesto Luna, and secretary general, Rosario Carrizo. In November of that same year Carlos Aguilar, an official from the Catholic Right, also *interventor* in the University of Tucumán, supported by people from the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión, organised a new structure, the Federación Obrera Tucumana de la Industria Azucarera (FOTIA), recruiting local activists. Of the previous cadres of the UGTIA only vice-president Ernesto Luna survived, while the new general secretary was Celestino Valdez, a new militant. Soon afterwards the top role was taken over by Benito Borja Céliz, who was a member of the CCC of the CGT in October 1945, though he was not present at the meeting, probably because he was active in Tucumán. Another important Peronist leader was Manuel Lema, also at one time secretary general of the FOTIA and candidate for his province's governorship in 1947. Among the Left, there was a Trotskyite faction, inspired by Esteban Rey, who favoured 'boring from within' in the Socialist Party, and then joined its break-away Partido Socialista de la Revolución Nacional in 1953, to follow the same strategy in the larger popular movement.¹²³

In the sugar industry probably the same thing happened as in other areas where union activity was very difficult, because of employer and police repression, as well as worker apathy: the few militants who could survive the pressures were highly self-selected, with deep ideological or political motivations, who thus in their majority did not join the new movement, which by contrast was very attractive to those who had kept to themselves until the day before. In occupations like the railways, to give an extreme example, where persecution was not widespread if it existed at all, leaders were nearer to the pragmatic and somewhat opportunistic mentality of the average worker.

Also in the field of food, or rather drink, were the brewers, not very numerous but based in large workplaces in urban centres, which helped association. Two of their main leaders, Alcides Montiel and Jorge Negrelli, joined Peronism, the latter being present at the CCC meeting, while a newer militant, Juan C. Rodríguez, also a member, was absent. Montiel, described in an interview (by Aurelio Hernández, for *El Nacional*) as a 'trabajador criollo', with a long record, was fairly active in the organisation of the 17 October mobilisation.

Finally, in this area it is necessary to mention the ancient trade of the bakers, with a great anarchist influence, and where divisions and factional fights were endemic. Its traditional cadres, Dante Ariola, Feliciano Gascón, José Castello, Clodomiro Chavaría, Ricardo López (general secretaries at one time or another between 1936 and 1943) remained aloof from Peronism. The same could be said of Salvador Dell'Aquila (communist) and Angel González (socialist). When the Secretaría de

¹²³ Daniel Santamaría (ed.), *Las huelgas azucareras de Tucumán: 1923* (Buenos Aires, 1984); María Celia Bravo, 'Liberales, socialistas, Iglesia y patronos frente a la situación de los trabajadores en Tucumán,' in Juan Suriano (ed.), *La cuestión social en Argentina, 1870-1943* (Buenos Aires, 2000), pp. 31-61; Ernesto González (coord.), *El trotskismo obrero e internacionalista en la Argentina*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1995, 1996).

Trabajo y Previsión sponsored the formation of a new union, it had to rely on people like Pedro Conde (later labour attaché in the USSR) and José Costoya, who had never risen to prominence among the bakers. Given its tradition of autonomy, the union was not a member of the CGT and thus had no representatives there.

An interesting case among the bakers is that of Laureano Riera Díaz, a fiery anarchist who had published in 1941 a fortnightly paper, *Solidaridad*. In 1947 he too was involved in ‘entrismo’,¹²⁴ joining the new official bakers’ union as *secretario de actas*, and participated in declarations favourable to the Five Year Plan. This earned him expulsion from the Federación Anarco Comunista Argentina (FACA), of which he had obviously been a member up to that time. But this did not help, because he was branded, and he finally had to exile himself to Montevideo for the duration.¹²⁵

6. *The unions of the political world: state and commerce*

The state employees’ unions (at a national and at the municipal level, i.e. the Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado [ATE] and the Unión de Obreros Municipales [UOM] of Buenos Aires and its national Confederación) were highly dependent on the political world. So too were the commerce employees, where militancy was low but visibility in downtown areas high, and it was necessary to cultivate friends in Congress in order to get legislative support

Among national state employees (ATE) there was a confrontation between syndicalists, hegemonic in their main branch office, in Buenos Aires, and the socialists, capable of obtaining a majority in national congresses, on the basis of numerous, rather small local branches over-represented due to federalist considerations. José Vicente Tesorieri and Delfín Tato were the main cadres linked to the socialists. The former was recruited by Perón after spending five months in prison, and got a job at the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión. Another leader who played a significant role in the transition to Peronism was Aniceto Alpuy, a syndicalist from Entre Ríos and friend of Luis Gay. In 1946 he was a member of the governing board of a reconstituted ATE, but he was soon shunted aside due to his solidarity with his disgraced friend. Something similar happened to Mario Di Pancrazio. Firmer in their newly acquired convictions were Manuel Beceiro and Miguel Altrudi, and more so Cecilio Conditti, devoid of a previous record, but with a very full one later as *interventor* in the textile and the printers’ unions. Another member of the early Peronist group was Libertario Ferrari, a sympathiser of the Radical Party nationalist group FORJA, who died in 1947 in a plane accident.

The main syndicalist faction in the old ATE, in contrast to the above, remained staunchly anti-Peronist, including Andrés Cabona, Alejandro Silveti, Juan Cuomo, and the independent leftists or communists José Rodríguez Semino and Federico Duvanced. On the board of the new official ATE (renamed Asociación de Obreros y Empleados del Estado) in 1948 only new militants were present, including José De Rosa, Héctor Hugo Di Pietro and Juan Durso. At the CCC meeting of the CGT in

¹²⁴ ‘Entrismo’ is a classical term in the leftist jargon in the Spanish-speaking world, with no clear translation in English beyond ‘entryism’. It refers to the strategy, by small leftist sects, of ‘entering’ a larger reformist party, whether social democrat or populist (or even communist) in order to operate on a wider sphere, and at the very least make friends and gather some militants.

¹²⁵ *Reconstruir* (anarchist periodical directed by Luis Danussi), first fortnight, April 1947.

October 1945 Alpuj and Ferrari were present, and Tesorieri was also a member, but he was absent.

Among municipal workers (mostly manual, including garbage collectors and repair shop personnel) the main representative organisation was the Unión de Obreros Municipales (UOM) of Buenos Aires city, with the towering leadership of Francisco Pérez Leirós, a very important figure in the Socialist Party, who had long been a member of the Lower House. He and his close collaborators Juan Brennan and Pedro Pérez Villar remained opposed to Peronism, as did the main cadres of other, rival unions, like the independent leftists or syndicalists Alejandro Villanustre, Beniamino Semiza, José Ritta Luz, and José Penelón. However, within the UOM there was a rival socialist group, in opposition to Pérez Leirós, who joined the Peronist movement, formed by Juan B. Ugazio, Nicolás Campos, Juan Cresta, Pedro Contardo and José Marotta, apart from the younger Pedro Otero. This is an important faction of old leaders, but Pérez Leirós had a solid control of his union (after 1955 he returned to its helm for ten years or so), and therefore the UOM was intervened, as it could not be subverted from inside despite the presence of the above-mentioned dissident group. In the CCC of October 1945 Ugazio, Campos and Cresta were members, appointed by the union's *interventor*, and either because of this or because of their doubts they were absent from the meeting. So was Alejandro Protti, a strange cadre with a long trajectory, a member of the syndicalist union operating in the field, but who was expelled by it in 1936, and then joined 'La Porteña', a not highly appreciated organisation known for co-operating with the authorities, whoever they might have been. Due to Pérez Leirós's continued influence, the *intervención* remained in place for several years.

As for the commerce employees, their main structure was the so-called 'Federación' de Empleados de Comercio (born as a merger of several specialised unions of the city of Buenos Aires, thus its name), which had organised at national level a Confederación de Empleados de Comercio, with important groups in some cities of the rest of the country. The leadership in Buenos Aires was closely linked to the Socialist Party, with people like Angel Borlenghi, José M. Argaña and Vicente De Césare, and allies in other cities, among the most prominent David Diskin, of Bahía Blanca, and Juan Apullán, of Santa Fe, all of them incorporated into the new mass movement, though after much vacillation. Among those who remained in opposition were the communist José Royo, the socialist Luis Di Césare, and the anarchist Victorino Rodríguez, undisputed chief of the Rosario branch, where the equally libertarian José Grunfeld was present.

Clearly, in the capital the top union cadre was oriented towards collaboration with the government, even if among its mostly middle class rank and file there must have been many supporters of the Unión Democrática. At national level the Confederación retained an independent stance, and therefore did not send delegates to the CCC.

7. Newly organised services: telecommunications, health, restaurants, porters

The phone workers union, led by Luis Gay and his close associate Modesto Orozco, was under syndicalist dominance, and thus usually affiliated to the USA, or autonomous. Both Gay and Orozco had been dismissed from the phone company,

and were retained by the union as paid officers. They were at odds with another group made up of José M. Cabrera, Rodolfo Fabiano and Raúl Barros, more closely linked to the ideologically oriented syndicalists like Cabona, Silvetti or Sebastián Marotta. Socialist and communist groups added to this confusion, occasionally generating short-lived breakaway structures. Gay and Orozco, having being opposed up to mid-1944, finally joined Peronism and contributed to the formation of the Partido Laborista, but both later went into opposition, against Perón's attempt to take over the Partido Laborista, Gay's brainchild. Gay was simply expelled, while Orozco, a member of the Lower House, withdrew from the Peronist bloc. Of the rival group Fabiano and Barros adopted a clearly anti-Peronist position, while Cabrera was closer to the movement. In any case, none of these people were in the union's Comisión Directiva in 1948. Due to their autonomous orientation (they had disaffiliated from the anti-Peronist USA) they did not have representatives at the CCC.

The health sector (mostly hospital employees and nurses) had been organised by Aurelio Hernández, who had long since set aside his early communist beliefs, and was helped by Pérez Leirós to set up a union in a field where there were demarcation problems. Hernández, also a freelance journalist, joined the new movement together with his second in command Inocencio Di Giovanni, and became the head of the CGT after Luis Gay's defenestration, but he too was soon replaced by more malleable types. The union had no delegates at the CCC.

Restaurant workers were quite numerous and expanding. They claimed to have 100,000 members in 1942, or maybe they referred to the number of potentially organisable workers, though apathy was rampant. They were torn between classical syndicalists (with some anarchist elements) and the communists or other independent leftists. The main pre-1943 leaders, Máximo Suárez, Juan Véscovo and Angel Ojeda, were able to keep their union independent up to 1947, and had formed before the 1946 elections a Comisión de Unidad del Movimiento Obrero Argentino to resist the spread of Peronism. Later on, in the new union which was organised with official help, none of the above had any participation, and apparently the struggle was between Ramón Suárez (no kin to Máximo), considered a 'nazionalista' and a henchman of police chief Filomeno Velazco by La Vanguardia, and a certain Gariboto, who more pragmatically followed interior minister Angel Borlenghi. The union, not affiliated to the CGT, had no delegates at the CCC.

The porters of apartment houses or condominiums were not highly organised, but were part of the CGT. Eligio García, who had started his career in 1944, joined Peronism but was later a rebel, and towards the 1960s he was still fighting the leadership and meriting the praise of the 'Treinta y Dos Gremios Democráticos'. In the October 1945 CCC the union was represented by another new militant, Pablo Larrosa.

It is possible to interpret all this information in various ways, though it appears that the great majority of the established leadership — including all occupational sectors, and all ideologies — remained in opposition to the new regime. A new 'verticalista' model was being created, based on the appeal of a leader and his entourage, using, admittedly, some of the old cadres as an amalgam. In other words, what was happening was the replacement of an autonomous working class organisation by an authoritarian and mobilisationist one. It was a great divide, clearly marking a 'before' and an 'afterwards'. Perhaps it will not be the last.

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