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'A Strange Mixture of Guevara and Togliatti'

José María Aricó and the Pasado y Presente *Group in Argentina*

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Abstract

This article analyses the intellectual and political trajectory of the *Pasado y Presente* group in Argentina, focusing on its main representative, José María Aricó (1931–91). Although usually described as 'the Argentine Gramscians', the 'Gramscianism' of the *Pasado y Presente* group was actually little more than a theoretical cover for its erratic political behaviour, which led them from Stalinism to Guevarism, from Guevarism to Maoism, from Maoism to *Montoneros*'s branch of Peronism, and from Peronism to Alfonsín's Radicalism. Politically, their weakest point was that they distanced themselves from Stalinism empirically, because of the popularity of foquism, without undertaking a thorough critique of Stalinism. This made them vulnerable to the subsequent crisis of Stalinism, which they identified with a 'crisis of Marxism' *sans phrase*. What made them historically significant was that they articulated the radicalisation of a whole social layer in Latin America under the impact of the Cuban Revolution, as well as its subsequent deradicalisation and adaptation to bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The article closes with an analysis of Aricó's intellectual legacy, particularly his well-known book *Marx y América Latina* (1980).

Keywords

José María Aricó – *Pasado y Presente* (Argentina) – Karl Marx – Latin America – Argentina – Antonio Gramsci – Ernesto 'Che' Guevara – Palmiro Togliatti – Simón Bolívar

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> Reconociendo la potencialidad revolucionaria de los movimientos tercermundistas, castristas, fanonianos, guevaristas, etc., tratábamos de establecer un nexo con los procesos de recomposición del marxismo occidental que para nosotros tenía su centro en Italia. Éramos una rara mezcla de guevaristas togliattianos. Si alguna vez esta rara combinación fue posible, nosotros la expresamos.[1]

The *Pasado y Presente* Group's Editorial Work

The *Pasado y Presente* group, whose leading members were José María Aricó (1931–91) and Juan Carlos Protantiero (1934–2007), is widely known in Latin America and virtually unknown outside it. The reason for their popularity in the Spanish-speaking world is mainly their huge editorial effort, crystallised in the *Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente* book series (98 volumes, 65 of them published in Argentina and 33 in Mexican exile) and in the 60 or so volumes of the *Biblioteca del pensamiento socialista* [Library of Socialist Thought] book series, published in Mexico by Siglo XXI Editores. These projects resulted in new translations of *Das Kapital* and the *Grundrisse*, as well as in Spanish editions of Karl Kautsky's *Road to Power* and *The Agrarian Question*; Rosa Luxemburg's *The Industrial Development of Poland*, her introduction to political economy and a selection of her writings on the national question; Otto Bauer's *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*; Bukharin's *Politics and Economics of the Transition Period* and *Economic Theory of the Leisure Class*; Preobrazhenski's *New Economics*; I.I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*; Kuroń and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* to the Polish Communist Party; Roman Rosdolsky's *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* and *Friedrich Engels and the Problem of the 'Non-historic' Peoples*; Henryk Grossman's *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*; Samuel Baron's book on Plekhanov and Stephen Cohen's on Bukharin; Samuel Bernstein's *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection*; the *Proceedings of the Central Committee of the RSDLP* between August 1917 and February 1918; two volumes of documents on the mass-strike debate in the SPD; another two volumes on the Second International and the national and colonial problem; seven volumes of documents on the seven congresses of the Communist International; an anthology of Che Guevara's economic writings, etc.

The scope of the project was unprecedented in the Spanish-speaking world, and indeed it had no continuators. To find anything similar one has to go to

1 Aricó 1988, p. 75.

the Moscow-based *Editorial Progreso* or *Ediciones en lenguas extranjeras* (CPA-controlled publishing houses such as *Editorial Cartago* or *Editorial Anteo* had notably lower editorial standards). The *Pasado y Presente* book series and the *Biblioteca del pensamiento socialista* were a different kind of project: a broad-based church, openly iconoclastic and more sensitive to the needs of its avid local readers. The quality of the volumes differs dramatically: particularly outstanding were the canonical Spanish translations of *Das Kapital* and the *Grundrisse* by Pedro Scaron (who rendered *Mehrwert* as *plusvalor* instead of the clumsier and more usual *plusvalía*), though they were also not entirely free from error,[2] and his edition of Marx and Engels's writings on Latin America.[3] But given the absence of research libraries and of translators proficient in Russian, they had recourse to the usual Latin American expedient of translating Russian sources second-hand, from English or French versions. In such cases, the result (like the *Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente*'s edition of Isaak Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*) was predictably of very poor quality.[4]

There was one glaring omission in the series: they contained almost nothing by or about Leon Trotsky, with two exceptions. The first was a collection of articles by Nicolas Krassó, Ernest Mandel and Monty Johnstone, originally published in *New Left Review* in 1967–9, issued under the title *El marxismo de Trotsky*.[5] The second exception was two volumes of documents on the 1924–6 debate on the theory of permanent revolution, consisting of Trotsky's *Lessons of October* and five pieces by Zinoviev, Bukharin and Stalin criticising Trotsky, with a general introduction by Giuliano Procacci.[6] The *Pasado y Presente* group avoided any association with Trotskyism.

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2 Rolando Astarita has pointed out (Astarita 2012) that Scaron's translation of *Capital* Volume I, Chapter IX, entitled '*Tasa y masa del plusvalor*', reads: '*Del hecho de que la masa de la mercancía producida se determine por los dos factores, tasa de plusvalor y magnitud del capital variable adelantado, resulta una tercera ley*' (Marx 1975, p. 371). Here '*mercancía*' is an erroneous translation of what would have been more correctly rendered as '*plusvalor*'. The original reads: '*Ein drittes Gesetz ergibt sich aus der Bestimmung der Masse des produzierten Mehrwerts durch die zwei Factores, die Rate des Mehrwerts und Grösse des vorgeschossen variablen Kapitals*' (Marx and Engels 2005, p. 324; English translation in Marx 1976, p. 420). In Spanish: '*Una tercera ley resulta de la determinación de la masa del plusvalor producido a través de los dos factores, la tasa de plusvalor y la magnitud del capital variable adelantado.*'

3 Marx and Engels 1972.

4 Rubin 1974.

5 Krassó, Mandel and Johnstone 1970.

6 Procacci (ed.) 1972a and 1972b. Both the documents and the Introduction were culled from an Italian edition (Procacci (ed.) 1970), illustrating the problem we have just mentioned of retranslation of sources.

The Argentine Gramscians?

Another distinguishing trait of the *Pasado y Presente* group was the erratic character of their political behaviour, characterised by sharp zigzags from Stalinism to Guevarism, then to the Maoist *Partido Comunista Revolucionario*, then to the left-Peronist organisation *Montoneros*, which engaged in urban-guerrilla struggle, and finally, after their return to Argentina from Mexican exile, to the Radical Party president Raúl Alfonsín. Raúl Burgos's Ph.D. thesis on the itinerary of this group is entitled *The Argentine Gramscians*, taking as good coin their own justification of their political wanderings as guided by Gramsci, though they were actually first inspired by foquism, then by the Cultural Revolution, then by the return of Perón to Argentina, and finally by Italian Eurocommunism and the return of bourgeois democracy to Argentina after the military dictatorship of 1976–83.[7]

Intellectually, the outstanding figures of the group were Aricó and Portantiero, who were, respectively, the heads of its Buenos Aires and Córdoba branches, originally born of a split in the Communist Party. Portantiero was the author of two standard works on Argentine history: *Estudiantes y política en América Latina: El proceso de la reforma universitaria* (*1918–1938*), and *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*, the latter written in collaboration with Miguel Murmis. *Estudiantes y política en América Latina* is a very interesting collection of primary documents, preceded by a 130-page-long introduction by Portantiero, on the University Reform movement which started in Córdoba, Argentina, in 1918, under the impact of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, and then spread to the rest of Latin America. Though the state of Latin American research today hardly inspires imitation, the University Reform movement, born of the failure of the local bourgeoisie to carry out its historical tasks, particularly the secularisation of education, was the historical starting-point for the regime of *cogobierno* (co-governance of faculty, students and graduates) which gives to Argentine university students a degree of participation in academic affairs unheard of in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and contributes in no small degree to their political radicalisation – the kind of environment in which the *Pasado y Presente* group developed and thrived.

José María Aricó's Stalinist Origins

José María Aricó was born in the town of Villa María, in the province of Córdoba, Argentina, on 27 July 1931, and died in the city of Buenos Aires on 22

7 Burgos 2004.

August 1991. He joined the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) in 1947, and as a student activist was jailed several times during Peron's first two governments (1945–55). After high-school graduation he studied law at Córdoba National University but soon dropped out, occupying the post of organisational secretary of the *Federación Juvenil Comunista* (the Communist Party Youth organisation) in Córdoba. In the late 1950s Aricó became acquainted with Hector P. Agosti, then secretary of culture of the PCA and editor of its theoretical journal *Cuadernos de Cultura*, to which Aricó began to contribute. Typical of Aricó's production during his Stalinist period is the article '*¿Marxismo versus leninismo*?'.[8] Aricó, who was then 27 years old, quoted from Stalin's book *Foundations of Leninism* a year and a half after Khrushchev's report to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, and said nothing about the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution the year before. Agosti was then editing the works of Antonio Gramsci for the PCA publishing house *Editorial Lautaro*. Aricó translated for these series two collections of writings by Gramsci: *Literatura y vida nacional* in 1961, and *Notas sobre Maquiavelo, sobre política y sobre el Estado moderno* in 1962.

In April 1963 Aricó began to edit, together with a group of young PCA members from Córdoba (Oscar del Barco, Héctor Schmucler and Samuel Kicszkovsky, among others) the journal *Pasado y Presente*, of which nine issues appeared until September 1965. Though the aim of the journal was the theoretical and political renovation of the PCA rather than a revolutionary critique of Stalinism, it was considered unorthodox enough by the party leadership to expel the group for Maoist deviationism. Expelled at about the same time in Buenos Aires was a group of young PCA activists led by another 'Gramscian' disciple of Agosti, Juan Carlos Portantiero, who set up an ephemeral organisation called *Vanguardia Revolucionaria* (1963–4).[9] Unlike Portantiero's, Aricó's group decided not to set up a new political organisation, but they established a relationship that would last several decades and survive major political zigzags. In the city of Rosario another group was expelled, which included the historian José Carlos Chiaramonte and also developed links with the *Pasado y Presente* group.

In addition to the magazine *Pasado y Presente*, the homonymous book series began to appear in Córdoba under the title *Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente*, which would publish about a million copies in fifteen years. In addition, Aricó collaborated with the publishing house *La rosa blindada*, edited by José Luis Mangieri, which published Gramsci's books in Spanish and was later to be taken over by the guerrilla organisation PRT-ERP.

8 Aricó 1957.

9 González Canosa 2012a, pp. 121–6.

The *Pasado y Presente* Group's Guevarist Phase

After leaving the Communist Party, the *Pasado y Presente* group developed strong links with Jorge Ricardo Masetti, Che Guevara's *comandante segundo*, and his *Ejército Guerillero del Pueblo* (EGP), a guerrilla organisation which operated in the Northern province of Salta to prepare the ground for Guevara's return to Argentina. According to Jon Lee Anderson's account, Masetti sent Ciro Bustos to establish a support network in the cities for the EGP's rural guerrillas:

> In Córdoba he approached a leftist academic he had known since childhood, Oscar del Barco, a cofounder and editor of the intellectual Marxist journal *Pasado y Presente*. Bustos revealed his mission and asked for help. Within a day, del Barco had assembled a group of people, mostly intellectuals and Communist Party dissidents like himself who worked at Córdoba University's Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. Bustos outlined the EGP's plan of action to them candidly. He told them that the project had Che's backing, that the core group had trained in Cuba and Algeria, and that funds were not a problem. What they needed was recruits, safe houses, urban contacts, and suppliers – in short, a clandestine national urban infrastructure.
>
> It was what these intellectuals had been arguing for – 'revolutionary action' – a position that had earned them expulsion from the mainstream Argentine Communist Party. Within days, they had begun to organize enthusiastically, and before long a small but well-coordinated network was being set up in half a dozen cities and towns across the country, from Buenos Aires to Salta, with Córdoba as its center.[10]

Aricó went to meet Masetti personally in the jungles of Salta. According to Gabriel Rot's standard monograph on the EGP, 'Aricó himself went up the mountain to meet Masetti and establish logistical links between the two groups.' He arrived on 8 December 1963 and stayed with the guerrilla force for three days. According to the diary of Hermes Peña, one of the guerrilla-force members, Aricó 'left for Córdoba with great enthusiasm, to work and meet with representatives of the different factions of the party and of the provinces.' Rot concludes that, despite their differences over Masetti's erratic behaviour, 'the Córdoba group continued to be Masetti's most solid link with Argentina. It not only sent men, miscellaneous resources and food, but also later provided an important network of lawyers who defended the guerrillas arrested by the

10 Anderson 2010, p. 574.

gendarmerie'.[11] Indeed, according to the editorial article of *Pasado y Presente* № 4, 'the exploited masses of the North-West', the place Guevara had chosen for the EGP because of its combination of peasants, mountains and jungle, were 'the weakest link in the chain of bourgeois domination'. However, by the time that issue appeared, in March–April 1964, the EGP had already ceased to exist and Masseti was either dead or about to die.[12]

But *Pasado y Presente*'s commitment to Guevara's rural-guerrilla strategy continued after the Salta debacle. Aricó went to Cuba with Ciro Bustos for a meeting with Guevara:

> For his meeting in Havana with Che, Bustos traveled with *Pancho* Aricó, editor of *Pasado y Presente* and the ideological mentor of the Córdoba support group. Aricó was the only one of the group who had gone to see Masetti in the mountains. Since then he had become convinced – as had his colleagues, Oscar del Barco and Héctor '*Toto*' Schmucler – that Che's *foco* theory wouldn't work in Argentina. '*Pancho* went to Cuba to see Che, carrying our critical views, that we thought the rural guerrilla thing wouldn't work tactically,' Schmucler recalled. 'But when he got there, he couldn't open his mouth. Che talked for two or three hours, and Pancho didn't say anything.' Afterward, Aricó told his friends that once he was sitting in front of Che, he was overcome by the force of Che's presence and arguments and was too intimidated to contradict anything. 'It was Che,' he said.[13]

The *Pasado y Presente* group's connection with Guevara's foquist project continued for at least another year. *Pasado y Presente* № 5–6, which appeared in September 1964, carried Guevara's article on socialist planning ('*La planificación socialista: Su significado*'), while № 7–8, published in March 1965, reproduced Régis Debray's 'Castroism: The Long March in Latin America' and, in a sort of theoretical complement to Guevara's fighting in Congo, included for the first and last time a dossier on Africa.

The *Pasado y Presente* Group's Maoist Phase

In *Pasado y Presente* № 9, published in September 1965, the group closed its Guevarist detour, abandoned its infatuation with the peasantry and returned

11 Rot 2010, pp. 194–6.

12 *Pasado y Presente*, № 4, January–March 1964.

13 Anderson 2010, p. 599.

to the working class as the subject of revolution – which was just as well, since by then the automobile factories of the heavily industrial and proletarian city of Córdoba were the scene of unprecedented struggles, and less than four years later, in May 1969, the city would witness the mass working-class uprising known as *Cordobazo*.[14] This political shift was neither discussed nor acknowledged, and indeed it was not even mentioned in Aricó's later history of the group *La cola del diablo: Itinerario de Gramsci en América Latina*. We therefore have no way to assess the reasons for their break with the Guevarist project, which evidently took place before Guevara's death on 9 October 1967.

After the closure of the magazine in late 1965, Aricó's group organised, together with the *Federación Universitaria de Córdoba*, the *Editorial Universitaria de Córdoba* (*Eudecor*), which faced economic problems and the effects of political proscription during the dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966–70). After being bought up by a businessman from Córdoba, *Eudecor* was finally dissolved in 1968. In 1970, Aricó founded with Héctor Schmucler, Santiago Funes, Juan Carlos Garavaglia and Enrique Tándeter the publishing company Editorial Signos, which in 1971 would merge with the Argentine branch of the Mexican publishing house Siglo XXI.

In 1968 the *Pasado y Presente* group established political links with the Maoist *Partido Comunista Revolucionario* (PCR) through one of its main intellectuals, the historian José Ratzer, in order to integrate their leaderships – a project that was finally frustrated. The PCR was founded in December 1969 as a consequence of a split within the Communist Party of Argentina, but its roots go back to the *Comité Nacional de Recuperación Revolucionaria* (CNRR), a tendency within the PCA established in February 1968 and supported by some 4,000 members of its youth section.[15] After the founding congress, the urban guerrilla supporters split from the party to form the *Fuerzas Argentinas de Liberación* (FAL).[16] According to Horacio Crespo, a member of the *Pasado y Presente* group who later joined the PCR, in 1967–8 Aricó resolutely refused to occupy a leadership position in the nascent party, even though his participation was vehemently requested by ex-comrades and friends. Refusing to engage in the task of 'creating the party of the revolution', Aricó decided instead to launch the *Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente* book series, which began to appear

14 See James Brennan's standard work, Brennan 1994.

15 Grenat 2011, pp. 131–64.

16 There is no scholarly history of the PCR, but see the interview given by party leader Otto Vargas to Mariano Andrade (Andrade 2005).

in March 1968 with a critical edition of Karl Marx's *Einleitung zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (1857), translated by Aricó and Jorge Tula.[17]

The May 1969 *Cordobazo* itself caught the *Pasado y Presente* group completely unawares. According to one of its members, Oscar del Barco:

> We had nothing to do even with the *Cordobazo*, we who were in Córdoba! I remember Pancho (Aricó) and I were in Buenos Aires and during the return trip the *Cordobazo* surprised us in Villa María. The road was blocked, so we went to eat at the house of an aunt of Pancho.[18]

The development of an anti-bureaucratic 'classist' tendency in Córdoba's trade unions, particularly in the FIAT company unions Sitrac-Sitram, led the *Pasado y Presente* group to toy briefly with the idea of 'workerism', as shown by an unpublished dossier from 1971–2.[19]

The *Pasado y Presente* Group's Peronist Phase

By that time, Aricó was already in Buenos Aires, where he had moved in 1970. That same year, the Peronist armed organisation *Montoneros* made a spectacular entry into public life with the kidnapping and execution, on 1 June 1970, of the former *de facto* President of Argentina, General Pedro Aramburu. 'Communiqué no. 4' released on that date illustrates the ideological character of the new, Catholic and nationalist, organisation:

> To the people of the nation: The leadership of *Montoneros* communicates that today at 7.00am was executed Pedro Eugenio Arumburu. May the Lord have mercy upon his soul. Perón or Death – Long Live the Fatherland!

Montoneros would later quarrel with Perón and become the largest urban-guerrilla group in Argentina.[20]

17 Burgos 2004, p. 105.

18 Interview conducted in Córdoba, December 1996, quoted in Burgos 2004, p. 138.

19 See Schmucler, Malecki and Gordilo (eds.) 2009.

20 On *Montoneros* the standard monograph, not only in English but also in Spanish, is still Gillespie 1982, but Lanusse 2005 probes much more deeply into their origins in Catholic Church organisations.

Aricó's group developed relations with the new organisation through Roberto Quieto, a former member of the CPA and then of Portantiero's *Vanguardia Revolucionaria*. The journal *Pasado y Presente*, *segunda serie* reappeared, after a lapse of eight years, in June 1973 (i.e. after the end of the military regime and the electoral victory of Peronism), with a turgid editorial justifying their adherence to the Peronist party on the grounds that most Argentine workers supported it, and because 'the revolution can no longer be … the product of an "organised vanguard of the working class." '[21] Since power could only be seized after a 'long march', the task of the hour was 'to start to elaborate a socialist strategy from the factory', to strengthen 'workers' autonomy' through 'a network of committees and councils' which, 'as organs of direct democracy, can be controlled by the masses', unlike the bureaucratic trade unions.[22] To support this case, the same issue of the journal included a long article by Gramsci entitled 'Democracia obrera y socialismo'.[23]

Pasado y Presente's new political line was developed in the second (and last) number of the second series, published in December 1973. There we read that 'the Peronist revolutionary groups today have a heavy political responsibility, because they constitute the nucleus for the creation of a leadership for the revolutionary process in Argentina'.[24] Again: 'Today the Peronist movement is shot through with the possibility of socialism, and on the backs of the Peronist revolutionaries lays the responsibility for this possibility not being frustrated'.[25] And again: 'the struggle for working-class hegemony in the national movement, the struggle for socialism, is taking place in politics centrally within Peronism'.[26] The reason for these flabbergasting statements lies in the unification of the two main Peronist guerrilla groups, *Montoneros* and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR) in October 1973.[27] In the group's own words:

> The recent unification of FAR and *Montoneros*, the two most important political-military organisations, developed and hardened in parallel with the deepening of the consciousness of the working class and more particularly of the youth, is a fact destined to have a profound significance for the future history of the class struggle in Argentina. Its significance lies in

21 *Pasado y Presente* 1973a, p. 7.

22 *Pasado y Presente* 1973a, pp. 14, 16 and 17.

23 *Pasado y Presente* 1973a, pp. 103–40.

24 *Pasado y Presente* 1973b, p. 188.

25 *Pasado y Presente* 1973b, p. 192.

26 *Pasado y Presente* 1973b, p. 202.

27 On the FAR see the Ph.D. dissertation of Mora González Canosa (González Canosa 2012b).

> the fact that there now appears, for the first time, a revolutionary organisational pole based on a correct strategic proposal and exerting a weighty gravitational pull on the masses.[28]

Since it was impossible to build anything on those shaky grounds, the second series of the journal lasted only two numbers, from July to December 1973.

To sum up, the *Pasado y Presente* group shifted, in the space of a decade, from Stalinism to Guevarism, from Guevarism to Maoism, and from there to Peronism, all in the name of 'Gramscianism'. But this third turnabout was not destined to be the last one: there was yet to be a fourth one, inspired by a new military coup and the subsequent return of democracy.

The *Pasado y Presente* Group's Radical Phase

After the military coup of March 1976, the dictatorship closed the Editorial Siglo XXI, imprisoning some of its members. In May 1976 Aricó went into exile in Mexico. There he took up again his most important role: translator and editor of classic Marxist texts. He worked until 1984 for the Mexican publishing house Siglo XXI, where he launched the already-mentioned *Biblioteca de Pensamiento Socialista*. In addition, he collaborated with Ricardo Nudelman in the creation of the publishing house Editorial Folios, which issued works by authors such as Max Weber, Carl Schmitt and Karl Korsch, and worked as a lecturer at the University of Puebla and at the Mexican headquarters of the Latin American Social Sciences Institute (FLACSO).

Politically, the period of Mexican exile was characterised by a sharp turn to the right, mediated by the influence of Eurocommunism and particularly of the Italian Communist Party, whose leader Enrico Berlinguer had adopted a policy of support for bourgeois governments known as the 'historic compromise', which lasted from October 1973 to November 1979. In October 1979 Aricó launched, with Jorge Tula and Portantiero, the left-Peronist magazine *Controversia para el examen de la realidad argentina*, characterised by a wholesale embrace of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. This right-wing turn of the *Pasado y Presente* group was also marked by the publication in 1981 of Arthur Rosenberg's *Democracy and Socialism: A Contribution to the Political History of the Past 150 Years* (1938), which subsumes the history of Marxism into the history of supra-class 'democracy'.[29] In 1980, the year after the launch

28 *Pasado y Presente* 1973b, p. 192.

29 Rosenberg 1981.

of *Controversia*, Aricó published his main book, *Marx y América Latina*, where he tried to substantiate theoretically the *Pasado y Presente* group's new political line.

Back in Argentina after the return of democracy in 1983, the *Pasado y Presente* group provided advisors and ideologists for the first post-dictatorship government led by Raúl Alfonsín. In July 1984 Aricó, Portantiero and Jorge Tula created the *Club de Cultura Socialista*, closely linked to Beatriz Sarlo, Carlos Altamirano and the group around the magazine *Punto de vista*, and in August 1986 launched the magazine *La ciudad futura*, named after Gramsci's one-issue periodical of February 1917 *La città futura*. The new magazine advocated 'the construction of an advanced social democracy'.[30] It published documents of the Socialist International and the European Social-Democratic parties, and by 1989 openly stated: 'In fact we consider ourselves reformists and assume that role'.[31]

The influence of European Social Democracy in this final, right-wing phase of the *Pasado y Presente* group is evident, for instance, in the symposium *Caminos de la Democracia en América Latina* organised in 1983 by the Spanish *Fundación Pablo Iglesias*, and in the Congress on 'Karl Marx in Africa, Asia and Latin America', organised by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in March 1983. Perhaps because of this influence, the political position adopted by the group is usually described as 'Social Democratic', though strictly speaking that is not true. Raúl Alfonsín was elected president in 1983 on the ticket of the *Unión Cívica Radical*, one of Argentina's two main bourgeois parties. While Peronism remained firmly in control of the organised labour movement through its links with the union bureaucracy, and thus could perhaps be seen as the local version of European Social Democracy, Alfonsín's Radicalism had the support of the petty bourgeoisie, and its economic programme in 1983–9 was purely liberal: there were no nationalisations, no universal health insurance, no unemployment benefits, and indeed no welfare state of any kind, unless the free distribution of food packages to a starving population counts as such. Even on the 'human rights' front Alfonsín's government had a wretched record, with the adoption, after the revolt of some military units, of the laws known as *Leyes de Punto Final* (officially *Ley de extinción de causas*, 1986) and *Obediencia Debida* (1987), which granted immunity to those responsible for the torture and killing of 30,000 political activists during the military dictatorship. After some initial grumblings, the *Pasado y Presente* group ended up endorsing Alfonsín's move in the name of the 'preservation of democracy'.

30 *La ciudad futura*, Issue 1, August 1986, p. 3.

31 *La ciudad future*, Issue 17–18, 1989, p. 4.

The Misappropriation of Gramsci and the Discovery of 'Democracy'

All this was done in the name of, and indeed gave a bad name to, 'Gramscianism'.[32] According to James Petras, for instance, 'in Argentina, the revisionists provided Gramscian intellectual support for Alfonsín's regime, which reduced the workers' income by 50 per cent, applied the IMF's austerity and free-market policies, and exonerated hundreds of police and military officers involved in gross violations of human rights'.[33] And according to Daniel Campione, who vindicates Gramsci against his local exegetes:

> The name of Antonio Gramsci was predominantly associated, in that period, with what was pejoratively called at that time 'possibilism'. In that current, Gramsci's thought largely played the role of an exit visa from the revolutionary tradition to positions less and less identified with Marxism, and indeed with any anti-capitalist standpoint. It strongly supported what was called the 'democratic transition', understanding the bloody defeat of the '70s as a demonstration of the need to accept the survival of the capitalist system, revaluing parliamentary democracy as the political form best suited to promote reforms in a 'progressive' sense, reforms which were seen as the only viable mode of social transformation in a positive sense. It expected, with a quite un-Gramscian naïveté, that the establishment of democratic 'rules' would make it possible to counteract the power of big capital, which the devastation brought about by the military dictatorship had increased not only in economic, but also in political and cultural terms.[34]

The discovery of 'democracy' was accompanied by a criticism of the *Iskra* group's model of party-building, as laid down in Lenin's book *What Is to Be Done?*. The *Pasado y Presente* group's polemics with Lenin reached back to the publication of *Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente* № 7 and № 12, both in 1969.[35] Another important stepping-stone was the translation of the essay 'The Conception of the Revolutionary Party in Lenin' by the Italian Antonio Carlo, in № 2–3 of the journal *Pasado y Presente*, published in December 1973.[36]

32 From this period dates Aricó's Spanish edition of Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere*, in six volumes (Gramsci 1986–90).

33 Petras 1990.

34 Campione 2004.

35 Cerroni, Magri and Johnstone 1969; Bensaïd, Nair, Luxemburg, Lenin and Lukács 1969.

36 Carlo 1973a; English version: Carlo 1973b.

Finally, Portantiero published in 1977 his essay 'The Uses of Gramsci', which argued that Gramsci's organisational model makes possible 'a strategy for the conquest of power that is neither reformist nor insurrectionalist'. This was necessary because power is 'a relation of social forces to be modified, not an institution to be "taken" '.[37] If, in Peter Thomas's words, 'the conversion of an unrepentant Communist militant who died in a Fascist prison cell into a harmless gadfly is surely among the most bizarre and distasteful episodes of recent intellectual fashion',[38] the 'Argentine Gramscians', under the inspiration of the Italian Stalinists, made their own contribution to this conversion.

Aricó's *Nine Lessons on Economics and Politics in Marxism* (1977)

Aricó's main writings are, in chronological order, his 1977 lectures on 'Economics and politics in the analysis of social formations [*Economía y política en el análisis de las formaciones sociales*]', posthumously published as *Nueve lecciones sobre economía y política en el marxismo*,[39] *Marx y América Latina* (1980), *La hipótesis de Justo: Escritos sobre el socialismo en América Latina* (1981) and *La cola del diablo: Itinerario de Gramsci en América Latina* (1988), to which should be added a collection of interviews[40] and the numerous introductions and articles written for the book series and journals he edited.

The rejection of Marx's definition of his theory as *Wissenschaft* is the leitmotiv of Aricó's 1977 *Nueve lecciones sobre economía y política en el marxismo*.[41] He counterposes Marxism as '*critical theory*' to 'what could be called science', arguing that 'it makes no sense to speak of a Marxist anthropology, of a Marxist sociology, a proletarian biology, a Marxist physics, etc.'[42] – thus conflating the social and natural sciences. This rejection of social science turned into a rejection of rationalism in general. For instance, Aricó argues that Marx had 'a general perspective born of a fundamental rejection of the whole *rationalist* tradition',[43] though Plekhanov's *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Materialismus*

37 Portantiero 1977, pp. 20, 22.
38 Thomas 2009, p. 57, n. 46.
39 Aricó 2012.
40 Aricó 1999b.
41 Aricó 2012.
42 Aricó 2012, p. 11.
43 Aricó 2012, p. 24.

clearly shows that Marx's theory was a development of the insights of the consciously materialist thinkers of the Enlightenment, such as Helvétius and d'Holbach.

Aricó then proceeds to set Engels against Marx, arguing that 'in the field of the critique of political economy, for instance, it is evident that Engels had a different conception of the theory of value from that of Marx'[44] – a distinction that seemingly went unnoticed by scholars of Marx's economic writings such as Hilferding and Rubin. Later on, Aricó argues that, unlike Marx, who tended to emphasise the word 'criticism', Engels tended to stress the term 'origins', which reveals his 'positivist or evolutionist conception',[45] an unsubstantiated generalisation based on a reference to a single work of Engels (*Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats*).

Having set Engels against Marx, Aricó proceeds to dismiss Marx's disciples: 'I would dare to say that, due to their limited knowledge of Marx's *oeuvre*, the Second and Third Internationals were ignorant of the real nature of Marx's project'.[46] He singles out for praise, however, one of Marx's Second-International disciples: the revisionist Eduard Bernstein. According to Aricó, 'Bernstein was more Marxist that many others who considered themselves "orthodox" '.[47] 'Since Bernstein had a premonitory vision of the new phase of development of capitalism in Europe, he remains much more topical than Kautsky, Plekhanov and the rest of the socialist thinkers'.[48] Three years later, Aricó published the standard Spanish edition of Bernstein's *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, preceded by the article series in *Die neue Zeit* that gave rise to the revisionist controversy, called 'Probleme des Sozialismus'.[49] It is from a bad Spanish translation of Lucio Colletti's Introduction to Bernstein's book that Aricó got the derogatory term *cientificidad* to refer to 'Second-International Marxism'.[50] Colletti quoted a letter from Bernstein to August Bebel, dated 20 October 1898, reading in the original *Wissenschaftlichkeit*, which should actually be rendered

44 Aricó 2012, p. 50.
45 Aricó 2012, p. 59.
46 Aricó 2012, p. 58.
47 Aricó 2012, p. 68.
48 Aricó 2012, p. 86.
49 Bernstein 1982.
50 Aricó 2012, p. 62.

as 'scientific nature'.[51] Aricó dismisses the work of Marx's disciples as 'positivist *scientificism* strongly influenced by Darwinian conceptions'.[52]

This dismissal of 'Second-International Marxism' in general, and of Kautsky in particular (an over-generalisation from Kautsky's polemics against Rosa Luxemburg after 1910 and later against the Bolsheviks) was taken over from the ultra-left writer Karl Korsch, whom Aricó praised as 'one of the most lucid minds' of his time.[53] Korsch's criticism of Kautsky's *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung* (1927) became established in academic circles after the publication of Erich Matthias's *Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus. Die Funktion der Ideologie in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie vor dem ersten Weltkrieg* (1957). Kautsky's main biographer, Marek Waldenberg, provides abundant material to refute this thesis, which was shared by neither Lenin nor Trotsky, both of whom always recommended the writings of Kautsky's revolutionary period to communist workers.[54]

Aricó then proceeds to draw an artificial contrast between a Lenin allegedly focused on the second volume of *Capital* and a Kautsky stuck with the first volume of *Capital* and with Engels's *Anti-Dühring*: 'When Volume II appeared, all the periodicals of Social Democracy at best dedicated five or six lines to review it; the second volume of *Capital* was neither analysed nor understood'.[55] In the following page we learn that 'for Kautsky this work of Marx barely deserved five lines, while Lenin based on it all his so-called *Economic Writings*'.[56] Actually, when *Capital* Volume II appeared Kautsky dedicated 10,213 words to review it in *Die neue Zeit*, alongside the recent German edition of *Misère de la philosophie*.[57]

According to Aricó, the second volume of *Capital* enabled Lenin to 'place himself outside the then-prevailing conception of historical materialism'

51 The letter reads: '*Vergiß nicht, daß das „Kapital" bei aller Wissenschaftlichkeit doch in letzter Instanz Tendenzschrift war und unvollendet geblieben ist, nach meiner Ansicht deshalb unvollendet, weil der Conflikt zwischen Wissenschaftlichkeit und Tendenz Marx die Aufgabe immer schwerer machte*' (Adler (ed.) 1954, p. 261). Rendered in Spanish this reads: '*No debe olvidarse que El Capital, con toda su cientificidad, en último término era un escrito tendencioso y que quedó inacabado, e inacabado, a mi modo de ver, precisamente porque el conflicto entre cientificidad y tendenciosidad ha hecho cada vez más difícil la tarea de Marx*' (Colletti 1975, pp. 77–8).

52 Aricó 2012, p. 93.

53 Aricó 2012, p. 236.

54 Waldenberg 1980.

55 Aricó 2012, p. 69.

56 Aricó 2012, p. 70, a reference to Claudín's edition of Lenin 1974.

57 Kautsky 1886, the review of the second volume of *Capital* appears on pp. 117–29, 157–65.

as a philosophy of history[58] and to exhume the concept of *ökonomischen Gesellschaftsformation* (allegedly forgotten by the Second-International theoreticians) as an analytical tool suited for the study of concrete and historically determined societies, which Aricó sets against the supposedly abstract model implied by the concept of *Produktionswesen*.[59] All this despite the fact that the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* clearly shows that for Marx the two concepts were synonymous: 'In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.'[60]

In lesson number six Parvus's real name is spelled 'Elfam',[61] while lesson seven is a discussion of the 'theory of collapse' not free from anachronisms (Heinrich Cunow is identified as a 'right-wing reformist' back in 1898). Interestingly, Aricó endorses Henryk Grossmann's *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems*, which the *Pasado y Presente* group edited two years later for the *Biblioteca del pensamiento socialista*.[62]

Lesson eight on 'Gramsci and political theory' is significant in two respects. First, because Aricó endorses Gramsci's contraposition between the 'war of position' and the theory of permanent revolution. Aricó argues that 'the polarity between war of position and war of movement' corresponded to 'a new stage of capitalist society, in which the concept of permanent revolution, spelled out by Marx in his circular to the League of Communists of 1848' (actually it was first advanced in the Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League of March 1850) 'had been overtaken by circumstances'.[63] Secondly, Aricó describes Gramsci's concept of hegemony as 'the exercise

58 Aricó 2012, p. 146.

59 Aricó 2012, p. 175.

60 On this subject see further Bosch Alessio and Catena 2013.

61 Aricó 2012, p. 190.

62 Grossmann 1979. The *Pasado y Presente* group issued a Spanish version of Lucio Colletti and Claudio Napoleoni's *Il futuro del capitalismo: Crollo o sviluppo?* in two volumes (Colletti 1978 and Napoleoni 1978). Aricó edited, and indeed added texts to, the first part of the anthology, called *El marxismo y el 'derrumbe' del capitalismo* and containing texts by Marx, Bernstein, Cunow, Schmidt, Kautsky, Tugan-Baranovsky, Lenin, Hilferding, Bauer, Luxemburg, Bukharin and Grossmann (Colletti 1978).

63 Aricó 2012, p. 268. Cf. Gramsci's original statement in the *Quaderni del carcere*: '*la formula quarantottesca della «rivoluzione permanente» viene elaborata e superata nella scienza politica nella formula di «egemonia civile». Avviene nell'arte politica ciò che avviene nell'arte militare: la guerra di movimento diventa sempre piú guerra di posizione*' (Q13, §28; Gramsci 1975, p. 1566).

of democracy', which 'breaks with the separation between democracy and socialism'.[64] These lines foreshadow his later adaptation to Alfonsínism in the name of 'Gramscianism'. In the same vein, Aricó describes the stranglehold of the Stalinist bureaucracy over Soviet society as a 'passive revolution' carried out from above.[65] He attributes to Gramsci a nationalist 'conception of the working class as a national class, i.e. a class representing the whole population, which for that very reason is the continuation of the process of historical formation of a people'.[66]

In the final lesson, Aricó rejects Marx's 'false theory of structure and superstructure',[67] because this 'economicism' allegedly turns political and cultural processes into 'simple epiphenomena' of the economy,[68] whereas Aricó wants to establish 'the primacy of politics through the overcoming of economicism'.[69]

It is against this background that *Marx y América Latina* should be read, as a settling of accounts with Aricó's old Marxist background, which was increasingly becoming a burden for the *Pasado y Presente* group's next political move: 'the long march through the institutions, whose functioning must be challenged from within'.[70]

Aricó's *Marx y América Latina* (1980)

In *Marx y América Latina* Aricó sets out to explain the alleged 'oblivion, circumvention, or, if you will, disregard for the reality of Latin America in Marx's work'.[71] He focuses in particular on Marx's highly critical article on Simón Bolívar for the *New American Cyclopaedia*. Aricó dismisses as inaccurate older arguments that sought to explain away Marx's alleged misreading of Latin America as the product of either lack of information or 'Eurocentrism'. On the contrary, Aricó argues, Marx paid much attention to the periphery of capitalism, as shown by his change of mind on the Irish question (cf. Marx's letter to Engels, 11 December 1869) and by his letter to Vera Zasulich stating that the

64 Aricó 2012, p. 273.
65 Aricó 2012, p. 274.
66 Aricó 2012, p. 290.
67 Aricó 2012, p. 253.
68 Aricó 2012, p. 279.
69 Aricó 2012, p. 329.
70 Aricó 2012, p. 338.
71 Aricó 2010, p. 272.

rural commune could enable Russia to avoid the capitalist expropriation of the peasantry (cf. Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich, March 1881). Aricó then proceeds to argue that Marx's analysis of the 'Irish case' resulted in a 'strategic turnaround' which implied 'an extension to all the proletarianised strata of the world of the restrictive concept of "industrial proletariat" as the only basis for social transformations in a socialist sense.' This alleged turn to the peasantry was 'largely motivated' by Marx's 'growing mistrust in the revolutionary capabilities of the British and, by extension, of the European proletariat'.[72] For the same reason, Marx's 'initial derogatory statements about the "idiocy of rural life" gave way to a revaluation of the role of the peasantry'.[73] In the same spirit, Aricó praises Bukharin for allegedly having 'a deeper understanding of the peasant question' than that of the other Soviet leaders and elaborating 'the strategic concept of the siege of the "citadels" of capitalism by the world "countryside" of the dependent and colonised countries, a concept that, as we tried to show, was in the process of maturation in the late Marx'.[74]

If the above-quoted paragraphs were leftovers from Aricó's former links with Guevara's peasant guerrillas, other passages in the book show the influence of Peronist nationalism. For instance, Marx's famous passage on the general law of capitalist accumulation, 'Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product as capital',[75] is turned by Aricó from a *class* into a *national* antagonism.[76]

Aricó then proceeds to castigate Marx for failing to 'completely abandon the Hegelian philosophical heritage',[77] in particular the concept of 'peoples without history',[78] which allegedly resulted in the 'Marxian occlusion of Latin

72 Aricó 2010, p. 114.

73 Aricó 2010, p. 135.

74 Aricó 2010, p. 114.

75 Marx 1976, p. 799.

76 '*La acumulación de riqueza en un pueblo* [!] *significa contemporáneamente acumulación de miseria, torturas laborales, ignorancia, embrutecimiento y degradación moral en el pueblo* [!] *opuesto*' (Aricó 2010, p. 104).

77 Aricó 2010, p. 118.

78 Aricó 2010, pp. 165–8. The *Pasado y Presente* group issued a Spanish translation of Roman Rosdolsky's *Friedrich Engels und das Problem der 'Geschichtslosen' Völker* in the same year that Aricó's *Marx y América Latina* appeared (Rosdolsky 1980). Engels's writings on the South Slavic peoples, which Rosdolsky arbitrarily attributes to a survival from Hegelian philosophy (the concept of 'peoples without history' in the *Philosophy of Mind*), were motivated by the reactionary role played in the revolutions of 1848–9 by the Croats

American reality'.[79] This is reflected above all in Marx's article on Bolívar: 'It is in Marx's exacerbated anti-Bonapartism that we can find the political reasons that led to the resurrection of the concept [of 'peoples without history'] and to that sort of scotoma suffered by Marxian thought'.[80] Aricó vindicates the figure of *Napoléon le petit* against Marx, who stands accused of 'xenophilia':[81] 'In Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, Napoleon III was the ruler most committed to the process of awakening and access to the European cultural and political world by the Latin American nations'.[82] It is true that Bonapartist hacks peddled the concept of '*l'Amérique latine*' as part of Louis Bonaparte's 'Pan-Latinist' propaganda, but to describe the organiser of the second French intervention in Mexico as a political leader committed to Latin American awakening is going a little bit too far.[83] According to Aricó, Marx's anti-Bonapartism turned into an 'entrenched political bias'[84] which clouded

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under the leadership of their *ban* Josip Jelačić, who supported the Habsburg monarchy against Kossuth's revolutionary government in Hungary and against the October 1848 insurrection in Vienna, crushed by Windischgrätz immediately after the repression of the revolution in Slavic Prague. Engels suspected (not at all incorrectly as shown by Bakunin's later 'confession' to Tsar Nicholas I) that the Pan-Slavists were being used as tools of tsarist foreign policy. Russia was then, before the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the bastion of reaction in Europe: it fielded the 200,000 troops that enabled the Austrian emperor to crush Kossuth's army.

79 Aricó 2010, p. 117.

80 Aricó 2010, p. 150.

81 Aricó 2010, p. 167.

82 Aricó 2010, p. 150.

83 On this issue see the seminal essay of John Phelan (Phelan 1968), and the most recent treatment by Leslie Bethell (Bethell 2010). Proponents of the idea of 'Latin America', Bethell points out, 'felt that the United States was their enemy. The annexation of Texas in 1845, the Mexican War (1846–8), the Californian gold rush, US interest in an interoceanic route across the Isthmus of Panama, the constant threats to occupy and annex Cuba and, especially, William Walker's invasion of Nicaragua in 1855 all confirmed their belief that the United States could only fulfil its Manifest Destiny at the expense of "*América Latina*" '. But, he also remarks, 'Latin' propaganda was no more than a cover for French and Spanish intervention in what they regarded as their own colonial backyards in America: 'In the 1860s, as a result of France's intervention in Mexico in 1861, Spain's annexation of Santo Domingo in 1861–5, and the latter's wars with Peru (1864–6) and Chile (1865–6), France and Spain joined the United States as the enemy. It was for this reason that some Spanish Americans preferred to see themselves as part of "*América Española*", "*Hispanoamérica*" or simply "*América del Sur*" rather than "*América Latina*". For them, *latinidad* represented conservatism, antiliberalism, anti-republicanism, Catholicism and, not least, ties to Latin Europe – that is to say, to France and Spain' (Bethell 2010, pp. 459–60).

84 Aricó 2010, p. 161.

his view of Bolívar – referred to as *el Libertador* with a capital letter[85] – and of Latin America in general, leading Marx 'to belittle the national dynamics of our countries'.[86] Given the seriousness of the accusation, a full treatment of this issue would require a separate essay, but we will confine ourselves to a few indications in the following section.

Aricó closes his book with an artificial contraposition between a Hegelian and a libertarian side in Marx's thought, and with a call to scrap the former – which is not surprising since, three years earlier, he had stated that 'the so-called laws of dialectics, as explanatory principles of facts, are empty and sterile'.[87]

The 'Epilogue to the Second Edition' is a long disquisition on the 'crisis of Marxism' – i.e. of Stalinism, which Aricó, due to his 'occlusion' of Trotsky's critique of Stalinism, identified with Marxism *sans phrase*. But perhaps most striking is the degree to which Aricó's language had acquired postmodern overtones. He talks about the appearance of 'a new form of modernity',[88] arguing that 'the crisis of the state is linked to a more general crisis of rationality'.[89] Marxism he now regards as, 'above all, a criticism of the concept of theory as the foundation of encyclopedic projects, as a metalanguage of the specialised sciences'.[90] Aricó therefore advocates a 'secular Marxism', because 'what is democracy but the secularisation of power?'.[91] All reference to the actual class content of parliamentary democracy as one of the variants of bourgeois rule had by then been abandoned.

Marx's Article on Bolívar for the *New American Cyclopaedia* (1858)

In Aricó's book much ado is made about Marx's article on Bolívar for the *New American Cyclopaedia* (1858): the last chapter of *Marx y América Latina* is called '*El Bolívar de Marx*' and a Spanish edition of Marx's entry, originally written

85 Aricó 2010, p. 162.

86 Aricó 2010, p. 155. A contributing factor was Marx's 'theoretical blindness' to the fact that 'the state has the capacity to "produce" civil society and, by extension, the nation itself' (p. 168), because, due to 'his theoretical opposition to Hegel's concept of the state' (p. 174), Marx refused to 'recognise the political moment in its autonomy' (p. 173). Thus Marx stands accused of both retaining certain Hegelian categories such as the *geschichtslosen Völker* and of rejecting others.

87 Aricó 2010, p. 112.

88 Aricó 2010, p. 258.

89 Ibid.

90 Aricó 2010, p. 260.

91 Aricó 2010, p. 279, n. 16.

in English, is added as an appendix. Marx regarded Bolívar as a hypocrite, a coward, and a poseur, the epitome of the social class that would lead the Latin American countries into two hundred years of backwardness. The subsequent tiresome discussion on whether Bolívar was the fraud that Marx believed him to be has obscured the more substantial issue of whether the Latin American independence wars, of which he became the most prominent figure, were also bourgeois revolutions paving the way for capitalist development – insofar as that was at all possible in societies born of a settler-colonialist process conducted under an absolutist political regime and resulting in a latifundist regime of landed property.[92]

The recent biography of Bolívar by John Lynch, the *doyen* of the British Latin Americanists, is revealing because it combines a positive, at times even uncritical, depiction of the man[93] with a sombre assessment of the social legacy of the Latin American independence wars.

According to Lynch, the bourgeoisie or, as he puts it,

92 The very narrow distance between the 'progressive' and the more reactionary wings of the Latin American dominant classes is clear from the land-reform plans of the most progressive *caudillo* produced by the dismemberment of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, José Gervasio Artigas, the founding father of Uruguay. Artigas's land regulations of 1815 distributed 17,000 acres (4 *suertes de estancia*) to each family engaged in cattle-ranching regardless of its race, but of course even those units were latifundia (Barrán and Nahum 1977, p. 282). By comparison, the US Homestead Act of 1862, adopted during the Civil War, allotted 65 acres to each family of settlers, which were meant to sustain a family unit devoted to agriculture, while the Stock-Raising Homestead Act of 1916, meant for areas unsuitable to agriculture, granted them 260 acres (by 1934 more than 270 million acres had been granted under those acts). This reveals that the economy of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies was not only not capitalist, as asserted by Sergio Bagú (and, after him, by Milcíades Peña), but was largely not even feudal – it was a pre-feudal, pastoral economy. Of course, if each family occupied an area of 17,000 acres, it was impossible to develop a home market suitable for industrial development.

93 For instance, describing the execution of Manuel Piar, a *pardo* (mulatto) *caudillo* who rose to the rank of general-in-chief of the independence army by decree of Bolívar himself, Lynch writes: 'Bolívar confirmed the sentence and had him publicly executed by a firing squad in the main square of Angostura "for proclaiming the odious principles of race war . . . for inciting civil war, and for encouraging anarchy" [Bolívar, *Manifesto to the Peoples of Venezuela*, 5 August 1817]. The sentence may have been defective in terms of law, but Bolívar calculated carefully in executing Piar. Piar represented regionalism, personalism and Black revolution. Bolívar stood for centralism, constitutionalism and race harmony [?]' (Lynch 2007, p. 107).

> the urban elite was not a strong force in the new nations. The withdrawal of the Spaniards, the commercial dominance of foreign entrepreneurs and the political importance of the new power base – the *hacienda* – all combined to reduce the power and wealth of the urban elite and to diminish the role of the cities. Political power would now be exercised by those who had economic power, and this was based on land, an asset that remained firmly in the hands of a relatively small group of creoles who began to mobilize labour even more effectively than their colonial predecessors. In effect, Bolívar presided over a ruralization of power in which his immediate collaborators played a leading role.[94]

Lynch recognises that 'the Bolivarian model of government, designed around the life presidency, appealed to the military but otherwise made few friends',[95] and as a crypto-monarchy was not meant to mobilise the masses around democratic institutions but to secure social stability. Crucially in racial caste societies with high levels of *mestizaje* like the Latin American ones, Bolívar 'wanted to recruit coloureds, to free the slaves and incorporate the *pardos*, in order to tilt the balance of military forces toward the republic, but he did not propose to mobilize them politically'.[96] Indeed 'the Spanish American revolution was ambiguous on slavery, prepared to abolish the slave trade but reluctant to release slaves into a free society'.[97] Although Bolívar freed his own slaves, slavery was not abolished until 1854 in Venezuela and until 1855 in Peru, when it became economically convenient to the upper classes to turn the manumitted slaves into 'into "free" peons tied to estates by laws against vagrancy or by a coercive agrarian regime'.[98]

The situation as regards the Native Americans was even worse: 'Basically the Indians were losers from independence'.[99] Their formal emancipation, which released them from payment of tribute and the obligation of forced labour, was not necessarily welcome, because Indians in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia 'saw tribute as a legal proof of their landholdings from the surplus of which they paid their dues'.[100] The laws enacted by the new republics were meant to divide their 'communal lands among individual owners, theoretically among

94 Lynch 2007, p. 147.
95 Lynch 2007, p. 287.
96 Lynch 2007, p. 105.
97 Lynch 2007, p. 288.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.

the Indians themselves, but in practice among their more powerful neighbours'.[101] In actual practice, 'their community lands were left without protection and eventually became one of the victims of land concentration and the export economy'.[102]

Nor was the mulattoes' situation any better: 'The revolution failed to reach out to Indians and slaves, even as it also stopped short of the mixed races'.[103] The white creole elite had resisted the Spanish policy that first introduced some social mobility for the *pardos* in the middle of the eighteenth century. 'Now the creoles were in power, it was the same families who had denounced the opening of doors to the *pardos* in the university, the Church, and civil and military office. For the mass of the *pardos* independence was, if anything, a regression'.[104]

Lynch reaches the grim conclusion that 'the popular sectors in general were the outcasts of the revolution'.[105] While peasants and rural labourers suffered from 'land concentration, liberal legislation in favour of private property, and the renewed attack on vagrancy', in the towns 'local industry declined', unable to withstand British competition.[106] Artisans and the rural poor 'were regarded as outside the political nation'.[107]

According to the Venezuelan historian Germán Carrera Damas, Bolívar's policy was in effect a variation on that of the creole elite.[108] As summarised by Lynch, this interpretation holds that

> the creole elite were driven by an overriding objective: to preserve the internal power structure in Venezuela, namely the predominant power of the white propertied classes, formed in the colony and now threatened by the social convulsions unleashed by the war. To preserve their power amidst these tensions, and to confront the demand of the slaves for freedom and the *pardos* for social equality, the creoles were prepared to make minimum concessions, to abolish the slave trade and to declare legal equality of all citizens. But this controlled and peaceful change was brutally broken by the rising of the slaves in 1812 and 1814, the rebellion of the

101 Ibid.
102 Lynch 2007, p. 289.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Carrera Damas 2006; originally published as Carrera Damas 1984.

> *pardos* in 1811, 1812 and 1814, the war to the death [against the Spaniards], and the near destruction of the white dominant class.[109]

Bolívar shared the objectives of the dominant class of white latifundia-owners to which he belonged, but he did not concur with them about the policies required to reach those goals:

> Fearing the risk of social war turning into racial war, he became permanently committed to absolute abolition of slavery. Abolition would remove the threat posed by the struggle of the slaves for freedom and enable him to reconstruct and preserve the internal power structure. But there remained another danger, the unsatisfied demands of the *pardos*. He confronted this through the centralist and aristocratic character of his constitutional projects, those of Angostura and the Bolivian Constitution, and in his partiality towards monarchy at the end of his life, all designed to restore the structure of internal power. As for republican forms, they threatened to become vehicles of *pardocracia*; from 1821 he criticized the effectiveness of republican institutions and democratic liberalism, and saw them as obstacles to the restoration of order in Venezuela.[110]

According to Aricó's *Marx y América Latina*, 'Bolívar was trying to repeat in Spanish America what the Portuguese monarchy had managed to do in Brazil',[111] i.e. 'the formation of a geographically broad nationality' and 'the establishment of political and social order'.[112] Bolívar played a progressive historical role because the only possibility of achieving national organisation 'resided in the imposition of a strongly centralised power'.[113] Marx 'underestimated the Bolivarian struggle to prevent the Balkanisation of Latin America because he only took into account Bolívar's imperial whims',[114] and he could not see that the Latin American states were 'the product of a process that we could call, in Gramscian terms, a "passive" revolution'.[115] However in Brazil 'the formation of a geographically broad nationality' under a monarchy did not mean greater political or economic independence from Great Britain, or any progres-

109 Lynch 2007, p. 290.
110 Lynch 2007, p. 291.
111 Aricó 2010, p. 176.
112 Ibid.
113 Aricó 2010, p. 177.
114 Aricó 2010, pp. 176–7, n. 21.
115 Aricó 2010, p. 180.

sive development in the bourgeois sense, since the latifundia regime remained untouched and slavery was abolished as late as 1888.

To this fundamental accusation against Marx, Aricó adds an additional one: in Marx's article series *Revolutionary Spain*, originally published in the *New-York Daily Tribune* in 1854, the Latin American independence movements were allegedly seen 'from the perspective of their supposed or actual function as a brake on the Spanish Revolution'.[116] Hal Draper's essay on Bolívar, which not unlike Aricó's uses Marx's article for contemporary political purposes (namely to criticise Castro's regime), at least shows that Marx did not at all regard the Latin American wars of independence as reactionary movements, or question the progressiveness and legitimacy of that struggle.[117] Marx criticised Bolívar's Bonapartism and authoritarianism because, by depriving the masses of democratic rights, they undermined mass-political mobilisation and therefore the independence struggle, as well as the subsequent transformation of social relations in a bourgeois sense and therefore the development of the productive forces. Following this line of reasoning, the pioneering Marxist analyses of Latin American history, by Germán Avé-Lallemant and Milcíades Peña in Argentina and José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru, were theorisations of backwardness which attempted to uncover its historical roots in the local ruling classes' inability to carry out real bourgeois-democratic revolutions, as reflected in the preservation of the latifundist regime of landed property, the caste-like oppression of natives, the feudal-Catholic lid on women, the rickety industrial development and the consequent crowding of unemployed urban masses into shanty towns, and the economic and political subjection to imperialism.[118]

Aricó's Later Writings

Aricó's book *La cola del diablo: Itinerario de Gramsci en América Latina* (1988) traces the history of the *Pasado y Presente* group, presenting its political zigzags as a straight political line guided by a coherent 'Gramscian' ideology. *La cola del diablo* is revealing above all for the passage quoted at the beginning of this article, which reads:

116 Aricó 2010, p. 292.

117 Draper 1968.

118 Avé-Lallemant 1890; Mariátegui 1988; Peña 2012.

> Recognising the revolutionary potential of the Third World Castroist, Fanonian, Guevarist, etc. movements, we tried to establish a link with the processes of recomposition of Western Marxism, which for us was centred in Italy. We were a strange mixture of Guevara and Togliatti. If that rare combination was ever possible, we expressed it.[119]

Indeed the *Pasado y Presente* group's 'Mexican turn' to bourgeois democracy was eerily reminiscent of Togliatti's revival of the popular-front policy known as the *svolta di Salerno*. According to Paul Ginsborg, 'Togliatti was able to make use of the theoretical writings of Antonio Gramsci, who had died in 1937 after many years of imprisonment. In 1944 Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* were still unpublished, but Togliatti had had access to them in Moscow.' Not unlike Togliatti, Aricó and Portantiero also 'postponed any possible connection between "war of position" and "war of manoeuvre," until the latter was eventually to disappear'.[120] But there the analogy ends, because although Togliatti was, in Tobias Abse's words, a 'loyal servant of Stalin',[121] he still wanted to preserve the organisation of the working class as a separate political party – if only because he controlled it. The *Pasado y Presente* group's invocation of Gramsci was meant, not to organise the workers into a separate political party, but to subsume them to a block of 'popular classes' for the purpose of 'national realisation' – including, of course, the 'national' bourgeoisie.

According to an interview granted by Aricó in November 1984, 'Eurocommunism, or rather the new theoretical elaborations and policies developed by the Italian Communist Party after recognising the ebb of the social movement and the lessons that could be learned from Allende's defeat, was the only attempt, however insufficient, at giving a theoretical answer rising to the challenge of the crisis'.[122]

Since not all readers might be acquainted with the vagaries of late Stalinism (known as Eurocommunism after the 1977 book of the PCE leader Santiago Carrillo, *Eurocomunismo y estado*), we might be allowed a short digression on the PCI's 'historic compromise' line. In October 1973, in a series of articles in *Rinascita*, the Italian Communist Party Secretary-General, Enrico Berlinguer, launched the concept of a 'historic compromise' between the three major political parties of the time, the PCI, Christian Democracy and the *Partito Socialista*. His starting-point was the need to prevent a repetition in Italy of

119 Aricó 1988, p. 75.

120 Ginsborg 2003, pp. 44–5.

121 Abse 2003.

122 Aricó 1999, p. 35.

the recent events in Chile, where Salvador Allende's government had been overthrow by an army coup. Ever since 1969, Berlinguer argued, this tendency had been apparent in Italy. Student and worker militancy had been countered by the 'strategy of tension', the mobilisation of the extreme right and a deteriorating economic situation. In order to oppose these tendencies, Berlinguer proposed a new grand alliance like the one which the anti-Fascist forces had created in the period 1943–7 – i.e. a new popular front. The Christian Democrats never accepted the PCI into the government, preferring the Socialists as more pliable partners, and Berlinguer dropped the project in November 1979. But the intervening years witnessed the so-called 'Governments of National Solidarity' or '*non sfiducia*' ('not no-confidence') of Giulio Andreotti, based on the abstention of the opposition parties. In these governments the Communists and Socialists were not part of the government, but they agreed not to cause their downfall.

According to the main historian of postwar Italy, Paul Ginsborg: 'The "profound change in economic and social structures" which Enrico Berlinguer had seen as a consequence of the "historic compromise" was nowhere to be found in the record of reform for the years 1976–8'.[123] Indeed, he concluded: 'The Andreotti/Berlinguer cooperation had disconcerting parallels with that between De Gasperi and Togliatti (not for nothing had Andreotti been De Gasperi's under-secretary). On both occasions the Communists had the difficult task of trying to force through reform from a subordinate position; but on both occasions they allowed themselves to be lulled and deflected by the superior statecraft of their opponents'.[124] The same conclusion was drawn by Perry Anderson on the basis of the electoral results: 'When elections came in 1979, the PCI lost a million and a half votes, and was out in the cold again. The Historic Compromise had yielded it nothing, other than the disillusionment of its voters and a weakening of its base'.[125] Thus the Italian 'historic compromise' has nothing to show in terms of actual historical accomplishments, and indeed it just represented a stage in the transformation of the Western-European Stalinist parties into bourgeois-reformist parties.

This revival of the popular-front policy coincided with the *Pasado y Presente* group's Mexican exile, and furthered their adaptation to bourgeois democracy in the name of Gramsci. Burgos argues that a major role in this process was played by a workshop held in 1980 in Morelia, Michoacán, dedicated to the discussion of the methodological and political usefulness of the concept of hegemony, whose contents were published in the book *Hegemonía y alterna-*

123 Ginsborg 2003, p. 394.

124 Ginsborg 2003, p. 400.

125 Anderson 2009, p. 337.

tivas políticas en América Latina.[126] According to Burgos, this 'new vision of revolutionary thought in Latin America' was 'already "at play" in the Sandinista revolution', while 'the influence of discussions that originated in Europe around the Eurocommunist political currents and the theoretical currents called post-structuralist is also evident in the discussions of the workshop'.[127]

Aricó's last book, *La hipótesis de Justo* (1999), is a criticism of Juan B. Justo, the historic leader of Argentina's Socialist Party – not, however, of Justo's reformism, but of his strong side, namely the organisation of the working class as a separate political party. Aricó criticises 'Justo's rejection of any proposed class collaboration that involved the subordination of the proletariat to other political and social forces'.[128] As a consequence of those class politics, 'the possible block of subaltern classes was actually broken into two antagonistic sectors in competitive relationship with each other, according to an abstract standard of modernity'.[129] Again, Gramscian terminology is used to call into question the political independence of the working class.

Conclusion

José María Aricó and the *Pasado y Presente* group had all the virtues and defects of the local intelligentsia, only exacerbated by the depth of the revolutionary process that Argentina and indeed Latin America underwent during the sixties and early seventies, and by the extent of the subsequent backlash. It was precisely this typical character which constitutes their historical significance, because they articulated the radicalisation of a whole social layer in Latin America under the impact of the Cuban revolution as well as its subsequent deradicalisation, not unlike the New York intellectuals of Trotskyist fame had done in a previous generation.[130] Their 'Gramscianism' was little more than a theoretical cover for their erratic political behaviour, which led them from Stalinism to Guevarism, from Guevarism to Maoism, from Maoism to Peronism, and from Peronism to Radicalism. Politically, their weakest point was that they distanced themselves from Stalinism empirically, because of the popularity of foquism, but without undertaking a thorough critique of Stalinism. This made them vulnerable to the subsequent crisis of Stalinism, which they identified with a 'crisis of Marxism' *sans phrase*, leading to their

126 Labastida and del Campo (eds.) 1985.
127 Burgos 2007.
128 Aricó 1999a, p. 88.
129 Aricó 1999a, p. 117.
130 Wald 1987.

adaptation to bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Still, they left behind a positive legacy in the book series they edited; indeed the *Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente* and the *Biblioteca del pensamiento socialista* editorial enterprises are still waiting for a continuator.

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