Populism in Latin America

Essays by Adolfo Gilly, Helena Hirata, Carlos M. Vilas and the Argentine PRT, selected and introduced by Michael Löwy

Guillermo Bonilla, The trade-union leadership and the miners' strike, 1959

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Notes:

Populism, nationalism and class independence in Latin America

Michael Löwy

In most countries of the continent (Central America and Chile are exceptions) the workers and peasants have not achieved class independence.* They are not politically organized by forces—even reformist ones—issuing from the labor movement, but by bourgeois forces of a particular type: movements known as populist. Understanding these movements and defining a correct strategy towards them is thus a precondition for moving forward to class independence.

Revolutionaries have buried populism a thousand times; we have declared that Peronism was going through its final crisis, that Aprism had collapsed, etc. We have explained that with the current political and economic conditions, it was no longer possible to maintain a populist political line on the redistribution of wealth, and that the cycle of populist governments had come to an end.

The problem

What is actually happening? APRA has recently won a spectacular victory in Peru. In Brazil, Brizola, the successor of Vargas and Goulart, seems the most likely victor in the coming direct presidential elections. Parties known as "populist" are in power in half the continent: in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Peru.

It is true that certain developments—particularly the formation of the PT (Workers Party) and CUT (United Workers Confederation) in Brazil—show that it is possible under the existing historical conditions to make important breakthroughs beyond populism, in the direction of working-class political and trade-union independence.

The term "populism" is rather vague and imprecise. While its origins go back to Russian populism—the terrorists of Narodnaya Volya (Will of the People) and later the SR (Socialist-Revolutionary) Party—it is used in rather vague fashion, and it is clear that the Latin-American movements dubbed "populist" have little in common with the Russian version of the turn of the century.

A vast quantity of literature exists, both academic and Marxist, on populism in general and its Latin-American variant in particular. We shall restrict ourselves to the latter.

Bourgeois sociologists are far from agreed amongst themselves on how to characterize populism: for example, according to Gino Germani, it represents the political manifestation of the traditional and authoritarian masses, out of step with modernization; on the other hand, in Torcuato di Tella's (another Argentinian's) view, it is the product of a "revolution of expectations" of sections of the urban population due to the radio, press, etc., which create new needs in terms of consumption, standard of living, etc. These analyses are rather superficial and of limited interest.

More interesting are the Marxist-influenced studies of the dependentist school, particularly from Brazil (Françisco Weffort, Octavio Ianni, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Ruy Mauro Marini). For these authors, populism was the expression of a distinct economic cycle: the period of industrialization through import substitution, which has led to a certain redistribution of wealth. This hypothesis is more interesting but overly economic: it does not provide any explanation for the current resurgence of populism, well after the end of the political project of "national" industrialization through import substitution.

Another attempt at interpretation claiming to be Marxist is that of the Argentinian Ernesto Laclau: according to him, populism is a manifestation of popular-democratic ideology appearing in combination with several forms of class expressions (fascism, nationalism, socialism). This analysis ends up by presenting Hitler, Perón and Mao all as variants of populism... It is an ideological, abstract method, which takes no account of the specificities of the phenomenon.

Attempt at a definition

Finally, we have the revolutionary Marxist viewpoint, which has perceived populism as a multi-class movement, under bourgeois hegemony and with a nationalism ideology. In this context, a provisional definition can be advanced: populism is a political movement—expressed in diverse organizational forms (party, trade unions, various associations, etc)—under a bourgeois/petty-bourgeois leadership and the charismatic leadership of a caudillo.

Once in power, this movement, which claims to represent "the people" in its entirety, follows a Bonapartist political line, supposedly above class divisions, but which in the final analysis represents the interests of capital (though this does not mean that any friction with sections of the bourgeoisie is excluded). It can also—particularly if there is pressure from below—make social and economic concessions to the exploited classes and/or take certain measures of an anti-imperialist type.

For example, one could mention: Peronism
"Populism and class independence"

Let's take a closer look at the different aspects of this definition:

- The petty-bourgeois/bourgeois leadership. Generally the leading personnel of populist movements is of petty-bourgeois extraction, but its politics serves the interests of the bourgeoisie. Having said that, conflicts between the two are possible, as a result of the Bonapartist nature of the populist regime. In addition, we should note the existence, in a subordinate but important position, of a bureaucracy of working-class origin at the head of the populist trade unions.

- The charismatic leadership. The caudillo, the popular leader, plays an essential role in the formation and staying power of the movement. Complementing the diverse organizational forms which populism takes, he gives the movement unity, visibility and mass influence. Perón and Vargas are two paradigmatic examples, but one could mention also Haya de la Torre, Paz Estenssoro, Bettancourt, Cárdenas, Pepe Figueres, Brizola, etc. This stems on the one hand from a certain cultural tradition (caudillismo) which goes back to the 19th century, and on the other from the "vertical" and authoritarian structure of the populist movement.

- The social base. It is generally predominantly urban: workers, petty-bourgeois layers, certain sectors of the bourgeoisie known as "national" (Argentina, Brazil, Peru), but in other countries it also includes broad peasant layers (Mexico, Bolivia). The mass political influence of populism is mainly electoral, but in certain cases it can also be militant, active and organized (Peronism, Aprism). It also has influence in workers and peasants trade unions, which are led by a "yellow," corrupt trade-union bureaucracy (the pelegos in Brazil, the charros in Mexico, etc), more or less tied to the state.

- The ideology: petty-bourgeois nationalism at once anti-imperialist and anti-communist. Depending on the period, one aspect or the other predominates, including in the history of the same movement. For example, APRA was first mainly anti-imperialist (1920s and 1930s), but became ferociously anti-communist and pro-US in the 1950s and 1960s (a new turn may be underway now). To the contrary, Varguism was ferociously anti-communist from 1935 to 1942, and then moved to tactical agreements with the Brazilian CP between 1945 and 1955... Populist ideology addresses "the people" as a whole, or "the nation" as a whole, but can also establish a privileged relationship with the workers (Perón, Vargas, Cárdenas). Despite the "homogenizing" role of the caudillo, populist movements are politically and ideologically very heterogeneous: one finds a crypto-fascist right wing (anti-communist, right-wing nationalist and sometimes antisemitic), a hegemonic nationalist/romalist center, and a crypto-socialist left wing (influenced by Marxism). This heterogeneity sometimes provokes splits — particularly through the departure of the left.

- Populism in power. These regimes are of a Bonapartist nature, posing as arbiters above the classes, relying sometimes on the employers and army, sometimes on the trade unions and popular mobilization. Its program aims at industrial development, particularly through import substitution and the expansion of the domestic market. This can lead to frictions and conflicts with the landed oligarchy when partial land reforms are implemented (as in Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, etc). Conflicts and rivalries with imperialism are also possible, for instance when sources of raw materials (oil, mines, etc) are expropriated. To win the support of the workers, important concessions can be made in the form of wage raises, minimum wage levels, stability of employment, social security, etc, sometimes leading to a real improvement in the standard of living of the working masses. At the same time, any independent workers mobilization is suppressed, and the trade unions are linked, sometimes organically (as in Brazil) to the state. The trade-union bureaucracy tends to become an appendix of the state apparatus and serves to neutralize any autonomous struggle.

The golden age of populism in power (1944-1964)

With the exception of Mexico, which constitutes a specific case (the Cárdenas government in the 1930s), it is the postwar era which constitutes the period of the main populist governments in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica and Guatemala. In 1952 in Bolivia, a genuine interrupted revolution took place (to use the term coined by Adolfo Gilly to describe the Mexican revolution of 1910-1917) and this explains why the first reforms conceded by the MNR were so radical: expropriation of the tin mines, land reform, dissolution of the old armed forces of the oligarchy, etc. In Guatemala, there was a rather particular case of "left Bonapartism" (Jacobo Arbenz) as a result of the influence of the CP in the mass movements and in certain parts of the administrative machinery of the state. In Brazil and Argentina, the reforms were conceded from above and the popular and workers mobilizations were controlled by the populist trade unions and political apparatus.

During this period, the governments applied a nationalist political line, known as desarollista ("developmentalist"), based on industrialization through import substitution, and engineered the so-called "populist pact" between the industrial bourgeoisie and the trade unions: "social peace" in exchange for wage raises, social legislation, etc.

Stalinism was to play a very important role in the rise and political triumph of populism in 1944-46: in...
Argentina and Bolivia, through an alliance with the oligarchic right and imperialism against populism — characterized as "fascist"— and thus leaving Perón and the MNR a monopoly on national demands; and in Brazil, in contrary fashion, through totally uncritical support for Vargas and its political maneuvers. The logic behind this apparently contradictory behavior: the neutrality of Perón in the Second World War as against the pro-US position of Vargas (who thereby became an ally of the USSR)... The only criterion was the foreign policy of the USSR!

Not one of these Bonapartist regimes has succeeded in fulfilling the tasks of a genuine bourgeois democratic revolution: they have not resolved the agrarian question — either because there was no land reform whatsoever (Brazil, Argentina), or because the reform only worsened the situation of the peasantry (Bolivia); nor have they broken with imperialism and obtained genuine national independence: their plans for independent industrialization have failed and the "national" bourgeoisie has chosen the path of association and joint ventures with foreign capital; finally, in none of these countries has a stable democracy been established.

This historical experience therefore confirms the hypotheses put forward by Trotsky in The Permanent Revolution: under a bourgeois leadership, democratic gains (land reform, national independence, etc) are limited and ephemeral.

The crisis of populism (1960-1976)

The aspiration of the dynamic sectors of the bourgeoisie towards a political line of development associated with imperialist capital, the fear of the ruling classes when faced with a popular workers movement threatening to get out of control, and the tendency of imperialism to favor authoritarian regimes, led to the military coups which overthrew the populist governments of Perón, Vargas and Arbenz in 1954, and ten years later of Goulart and Paz Estenssoro (1964): populism was entering its crisis.

This crisis intensified after the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1958. The Cuban July 26 Movement itself came out a populist type current: the Orthodox Youth. The Cuban events were to have a considerable impact on Marxism and revolutionary politics. This was the case in Peru with the MIR (which came out of APRA) of Luis de la Puente and Ricardo Napuri, in Venezuela, with the creation there too of a MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) from a split in Democratic Action led by Domingo Alberto Rangel, Americo Martin and Moises Moleiro. More confused or incomplete breaks took place in Bolivia, with the formation of Juan Lechin's PRIN; in Argentina, with the founding of the Montoneros; and in Brazil, with the involvement of officers close to Brizola in left-wing armed groups (for example the VAR-Palmares).

In general the political scene during the 1960s and early 1970s tended to polarize between revolution and military dictatorship, between Cuba and imperialism. The space for national/reformist populism receded. Vargas disappeared, Peronism weakened, Democratic Action (Venezuela) and APRA became openly pro-imperialist, the MNR split into a thousand pieces, etc. It was the time when the populist cycle appeared to be a chapter in Latin-American history which had come to a close.

The social-democratic renaissance of populism (1976 to the present)

Historically, the Socialist International (SI) — that is, social democracy as an international current— has never had much influence in Latin America, with the exceptions of Argentina and Uruguay. Its resolute anti-communism and its links with American imperialism (via the US Democratic Party), made it a less than attractive option. With the impact of the Cuban revolution throughout the continent, the social-democratic forces of Argentina and Uruguay went into crisis, their youth espoused Castroism and the SI lost its last supporters in South America. (The Chilean Socialist Party had never expressed the desire to join).

However, from 1976 onwards, the SI started a political offensive towards Latin America which was to meet with success. The starting point was the SI congress in Geneva in 1976, which witnessed the election of Willy Brandt to the presidency of the organization and the meeting, the same year, of leaders of European social-democracy and Latin-American populism (Haya de la Torre, Mufioz Ledo, etc) in Caracas.

The reasons for this SI offensive are many: they were in the first place economic — the 1974 oil crunch and the rivalry between US and European capital; but they were also ideological: a certain thawing of the Cold War and the trauma of the US-backed military coup against the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in 1973.

The first big success of this new orientation was the gathering of an SI conference in Vancouver in 1978, which 29 Latin-American organizations attended. At the suggestion of the Swedish social-democrats, an SI "working group" on Latin America was set up, mainly organized by Manley (of the Jamaican PNP) and Peña Gomez (of the Dominican PRD); this represented a victory for the Swedes and their allies against the more right-wing orientation of the German SPD and its Latin-American allies: Odubar (of the Costa Rican PLN) and Gonzales Barrios (of the Venezuelan AD). The same year marked an important turning point for the SI in Latin America, as a result of their diplomatic intervention (against the US) in defense of free elections in the Dominican Republic, which were won by the PRD's Antonio Guzman.

In 1980, the "First Regional Conference of the Socialist International for Latin America and the Caribbean" met in Santo Domingo, with dozens of Latin-American political organizations in attendance forming a political spectrum ranging from the Colombian Liberal Party (a reactionary formation of the big bourgeoisie)
to... the Nicaraguan FSLN. The predominant element was, however, the populist parties of the continent (APRA, AD, PRD, PLN, PNP). The decisions taken signified an important diplomatic turn-around: support for the FSLN and the Salvadoran FDR, in opposition to US policy in Central America. Nevertheless, certain populists rejected this orientation and retained their traditional anti-communist positions: the Costa Rican PLN and the Venezuelan AD (supported by Mario Soares and other right-wing social-democrats) who led a campaign against Sandinism. They were soon joined by others, and the whole SI and its Latin-American allies were to cease to support the FSLN and FDR, shifting instead to a political line of arbitration through the Contadora group.

Attraction and limits of social-democratization

It remains to be explained why the majority of populist forces on the continent tried, from the late 1970s, to "social-democratize" themselves. One can point to a number of explanatory elements to understand this change:

- the favorable political stance of the US administration towards dictatorships (Nixon and then Reagan), which compelled those forces opposed to the military regimes to look for support in Europe. In addition, many populist leaders (Brazilian, Bolivian, Chilean) had gone into exile in Europe during the worst years of the military dictatorships and thus came into contact with social-democratic parties in Portugal, Spain, France, Sweden and Germany.

- the economic interests of certain sectors of the indigenous bourgeoisie in diversifying their dependence and thus escaping from the exclusive control of US capital.

- the loss of the nationalist/anti-imperialist identity of populism and the need for ideological renewal. Besides, the development of the industrial proletariat and workers movement forced them to look for a new legitimacy, more "modern" and less trite than the old paternalist populism.

The process of social-democratization of these parties has been very uneven: in certain cases, it has been more thoroughgoing, creating "social-populist" hybrid formations, which play a dual role — both populist and social-democratic — in the national political system (the Jamaican PNP); in others, the link with social democracy has been more "diplomatic," superficial and rhetorical (the AD of Venezuela).

One can nonetheless state that in the great majority of cases, these parties have not become social-democratic parties — in other words, reformist workers parties — but remain populist formations — in other words, petty-bourgeois/bourgeois in essence. This is a result of the persistence of their populist tradition, of the type of links they have with the working classes and trade unions (from above, through the state, or through the control of a pro-employer bureaucracy), of their ideology, which is essentially bourgeois reformist (without any reference to socialism), and finally of their patronage-based and caudillist method of functioning, grounded in a legitimacy derived from charisma, a very different regime from that of the modern bureaucratic structure of social democracy. However, we cannot exclude a partial or total social-democratization of certain populist movements in the future, including possibly the use of references to socialism (this may occur with Brizola’s PDT in Brazil).

Presentation of the essays in this collection

The texts which make up this anthology represent different Marxist approaches to the phenomenon of populism in Latin America.

Adolfo Gilly, a well-known Latin-American revolutionary Marxist, has written the best history of the Mexican revolution to date. Drafted in prison during the 1970s, when the author was serving a sentence imposed by the Mexican authorities for his activity in support of the guerrillas of Yon Sosa in Guatemala, this book has rapidly become a best-seller (published in more than 20 editions) and has been unanimously acclaimed by Mexican historians as a major work. It consists of an analysis of the Mexican "interrupted revolution," from the viewpoint of the theory of permanent revolution. We have selected from this work a few pages describing Mexican Bonapartist populism, in its "classical phase," from Obregón to Cárdenas.

Helena Hirata is a Brazilian sociologist of revolutionary Marxist persuasion and a militant in the Workers Party. A researcher at the CNRS, she has lived in France for many years and is the author of several important works on the Brazilian working class, on the sexual division of labor in industry, and on the evolution of the state in Brazil. The text which we are publishing here is a chapter from her doctoral thesis which examines populism in Brazil in the 1950s (under the Kubitschek government).

The passages on Peronism are extracts from a pamphlet (anonymous) produced by the Argentine PRT around 1972-73; it seems to us a useful text, which avoids the pitfalls of sectarianism and acritical support towards Peronism common in the Argentine left.

Finally, the more general text on populism and its economic and social foundations is part of an essay by the Argentine Marxist Carlos M. Vilas, who is currently working in Nicaragua, and is a member of the governing body of the Nicaraguan Social Sciences Association. Carlos M. Vilas is the author of numerous works on Nicaragua, of which one, Perfiles de la revolución sandinista (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1984), received the Casa de las Américas prize in 1984.

Many of the documents cited here were published in the special edition of the review Críticas de la Economía Política on populism (nos. 20-21, "Los populismos," July-December 1981), produced by a team of economists and social scientists linked to the Mexican PRT. ■

[See selected revolutionary Marxist writings on populism p. 35.]
Obregonism and Cardenismo
in Mexico 1920-1940
Adolfo Gilly

The Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) which rules Mexico today, still claims to embody the consolidation of the gains of the Mexican revolution, some sixty years after the event. To understand why it identifies with that tradition, it is necessary to remember that from 1910 to 1917, the country was the scene of one of the most profound revolutions of the 20th century, which was only contained by the establishment of a Bonapartism proclaiming its attachment to the revolution.

By May 1911, barely six months after the beginning of the insurrection, the oligarchical regime of Porfirio Díaz had been overthrown by a convergence of uprisings of peasant bands, liberal politicians, military garrisons and workers movements. But the solutions put forward by the early moderate leaders of the revolution, first Villa's surrender of arms symbolized not the defeat or the final conclusion of the revolution, but its interruption until the development of a more favorable stage.*

Obregón's Bonapartism

Obregón came forward to establish bourgeois power on a new political basis. Consistent with his whole trajectory during the revolution, he understood that the development of a new bourgeoisie required certain concessions to the masses within a tightly controlled framework. At the same time, it would be necessary to lean on the masses in order to confront both imperialism and the forces of restoration, as well as the inevitable alliance between the two.

Although the old landowners did not forfeit most of their property, remaining—at least until the Cárdenas period—the economically strongest sector of the bourgeoisie, they were definitively excluded from power. For its part, the industrial bourgeoisie was then a weak force, torn between the mass of imperialist investment and state-controlled holdings. At the political level, it seemed completely tied to the old, pre-revolutionary regime.

This accounts for the peculiar character of Obregón's Bonapartism, which rested politically on the instrument of the Mexican Army, and socially on mass union organizations under the control of a bureaucracy tied to the state apparatus. It combined features of both classical post-revolutionary Bonapartism and the sui generis Bonapartism of the bourgeoisie in backward countries. (See Trotsky's discussion of Bonapartism on pages 8-9.)

In August 1919, at the start of his election campaign, Obregón signed an agreement with the Mexican Regional Workers Federation (CROM). Its leader, Luis N. Morones, would later be one of the strongest pillars of the Obregón regime and make his fortune as a government minister. He was the prototype of those careerist bureaucrats who, while enriching themselves and providing personnel for the bourgeoisie, eventually came to rely upon armed gangsters to crush any attempt at rank-and-file opposition. In December, CROM and Morones founded the Labour Party and declared their support for Obregón's candidacy. At the beginning of 1920, Obregón reached a further pact with Magaña and Soto y Gama, the petty-bourgeois Zapatist leaders. Soto y Gama subsequently formed the Agrarian party as another of the political foundations of the Obregón regime.

Balancing act

These two pacts, together with the support of the army, gave Obregón all the prerequisites for his coup d'état. By suppressing the most odious features of Carranzism and granting certain concessions to the masses, he used the trade-union and Zapatist leaderships to channel the nation-wide resistance of the workers and peasants; and by associating these leaderships to the state apparatuses, he ensured that he would keep a hold over the masses. This very structure further allowed him to control the military factions, and to exploit the army as a political force. The anti-imperialist sentiments of the army, as of the masses themselves, could also be used in

the process of confrontation and negotiation with imperialism.

This complex balancing game was the only political and social basis which could have permitted the economic development of a bourgeoisie, without provoking a direct clash with the masses or political abdication to the alliance of the old oligarchy and imperialism. However, the fact that the bourgeoisie developed through scandalous state-organized plunder is yet one more source of the social weakness of the whole Mexican capitalist system.

The new bourgeoisie which emerged from the revolution encouraged the involvement of the old bourgeoisie in a subordinate position. But neither Obregón nor his successors would allow the existence of a traditional oligarchic or bourgeois political party to challenge the legitimacy of the revolution or the regime that issued from it. They were able to prevent this not merely through repression, but because the masses on whom they sought to base themselves were equally unwilling to tolerate such a party. When the Church, by force of circumstance, was impelled to fill this vacuum and to operate as a de facto political party of reaction, Obregón and then Calles mobilized against it the whole accumulated weight of the liberal, anti-clerical tradition of the Mexican revolutions. Similarly, Obregón and Calles mercilessly crushed attempts to organize an opposition within the army. Between 1920 and 1928 (the year of Obregón's assassination), dozens of officers who had served in the Constitutionalist Army, including Obregón's closest collaborators in the campaigns against Huerta and Villa, were brought before a firing-squad or otherwise liquidated.

Nevertheless, the regime would remain a prisoner of the revolution and its working-class and peasant base: its weakness from birth prevented it from developing an independent class base, which could only have been attained through an alliance with representatives of the old regime. The play of bourgeois parliamentary parties, characteristic of capitalist democracy, died in Mexico; and although a parliament continued to exist in name, it did not play any role in national politics. The extreme concentration of presidential power is not a sign of strength, but an indication that the socially weak regime cannot sustain legal, parliamentary struggles between rival bourgeois sectors and parties. It has to place itself completely in the hands of a supreme presidential arbiter: that is the essence of the Bonapartist form of government.

US imperialism continued to put pressure on Obregón in order to keep the 1917 Constitution, and particularly article 27, as far as possible from its own holdings in the country. However moderate were Obregón's declarations, Washington could see that the alien and historically inimical class base of the new regime would not allow the consolidation of a firm bourgeois power; that it would not be possible to avoid a nationalist policy, opposed to imperialism, on the part of the Mexican government; and that, ultimately, nothing could guard against a new revolutionary explosion under the impact of fresh national and international stimuli. Initially therefore it withheld from de la Huerta and Obregón the official recognition it had given Carranza in 1915. Diplomatic links were only restored in July 1923 — after the murder of Pancho Villa, and after the Mexican government had undertaken, through the Bucareli Accords, to respect the property rights of North Americans in the country. The next year, however, in typically Bonapartist style, Obregón made Mexico the first country on the American continent, and one of the first in the world, to recognize the Soviet Union.

The officers of Carranza's army had enriched themselves by buying up the best lands of the old Porfirián

In 1932, Trotsky defined post-revolutionary Bonapartism thus:

"The Bonapartist regime can attain a comparatively stable and durable character only in the event that it brings a revolutionary epoch to a close; when the relationship of forces has already been tested in battles; when the revolutionary classes are already spent but the possessing classes have not yet freed themselves from the fear: will not tomorrow bring new convulsions? Without this basic condition, that is, without a preceding exhaustion of the mass energies in battles, the Bonapartist regime is in no position to develop."

("The Only Road," in The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, New York: Pathfinder, 1971, p. 256)

In 1939, basing himself on the Mexican experience, he defined the sui generis Bonapartism of backward countries as follows:

"In the industrially backward countries, foreign capitalism plays a decisive role. Hence the relative weakness of the national bourgeoisie in relation to the national proletariat. This creates special conditions of state power. The government veers between foreign and domestic capital, between the weak national bourgeoisie and the relatively powerful proletariat. This gives the government a Bonapartist character of distinctive character. It raises itself, so to speak, above classes. Actually, it can govern itself either by making itself the instrument of foreign capitalism and holding the proletariat in the chains of a police dictatorship, or by maneuvering with the proletariat and even going so far as to make concessions to it, thus gaining the possibility of a certain free-

(1) [Científicos were the positivist entrepreneurs who were the base of Porfirio Díaz's rule.—Ed.] Carranza had put a complete stop to the redistribution of land to the peasantry, leaving article 27 of the Constitution and his own law of January 1915 a dead letter. Figure show that Obregón's concessions in this field remained very limited. During Carranza's rule between 1915 and 1919, only 148 villages received communal land, 66 of them in the first year. A further 95 were endowed with such land in the transitional year, 1920. The figure for 1921, the first year of the Obregón regime, al...
revolutionary Bonapartism

dom toward the foreign capitalists. The present policy of the Mexican government is in the second stage; its greatest conquests are the expropriations of the railway and oil industries. These measures are entirely within the domain of state capitalism. However, in a semi-colonial country state capitalism finds itself under the heavy pressure of foreign private capital and of its governments, and cannot maintain itself without the active support of the workers. That is why it tries, without letting the real power escape from its hands, to place on the workers' organizations a considerable part of the responsibility for the march of production in the nationalized branches of industry. ("Nationalized Industries and Workers' Management", Writings 1938-1939 p. 326.)

In 1940 he added:
"The governments of backward, i.e., colonial and semi-colonial countries, by and large assume a Bonapartist or semi-Bonapartist character; and differ from one another in this, that some try to orient in a democratic direction, seeking support among workers and peasants, while others install a form close to military-police dictatorship. This likewise determines the fate of the trade unions. They either stand under the special patronage of the state or they are subjected to cruel persecution. Patronage on the part of the state is dictated by two tasks which confront it: first, to draw the working class closer thus gaining a support for resistance against excessive pretensions on the part of imperialism; and, at the same time, to discipline the workers them under the control of a bureaucracy." ("Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay", Marxism and the Trade Unions, London 1968, p. 11)

oligarchy at a knock-down price, while the agrarian redistribution for which the masses had fought the revolution barely went further than the parchment of the constitution. Under Obregón, this system of bourgeois class formation reached quite scandalous proportions, and the state-organized plunder became a veritable national institution through such forms as economic concessions, hand-outs, public contracts, and even more brazen diversion of public funds. The post-revolutionary bourgeoisie developed through this peculiar system of "primitive accumulation" (already tested in Europe centuries before), then invested its gain in banking industrial and commercial concerns and went on enriching itself by the normal mechanisms of capital accumulation. Forces newly attached to the state political apparatus then took their turn to become capitalists through the plunder of state funds. Many years before, when he was still fighting Huerta, Obregón had anticipated such a future in a conversation with Lucio Blanco. Pouring scorn on those who concern themselves with land redistribution, he said with a cynical smile: "We'll be the cieníficos of tomorrow." (1)

This system played an indispensable role by making the trade-union bureaucracy a partner in the use of the state apparatus for private gain. Together with the firing squad and the assassin's pistol, it also served to maintain control over the military factions which, given the preponderant role of the army in establishing and maintaining the regime, were constantly incited to fresh Bonapartist conspiracies. Obregón again summed it up well: "No general can withstand a 50,000-peso shot". Although Obregonism greatly differed from the regime of Napoleon III in its social bases and reasons for existence, its ideology and methods of enrichment were not a whit less developed.

International context

In order to sink roots and flourish, the regime of the new Mexican bourgeoisie required a long period of social peace and world possibilities of capitalist development similar to those enjoyed by the Porfirian dictatorship. But in fact, it emerged during the post-October decline of world capitalism, when imperialist domination prevented every industrially backward capitalist country from rising to the level of an advanced capitalist country. Moreover, its alien social base and system of plunder hindered the stabilization of an authoritative forward-looking state apparatus.

Obregón created the model to which all subsequent Mexican governments have clung. They have not been able to crush or disorganize the masses, but have had to lean upon them in order to control them. No government has been able to free itself of the revolution, of the need to speak in its name. The persistence of the revolution not only scotched every neo-Carranzist attempt to sweep the masses aside — for example in the later-Calles, the Aleman and the early Díaz Ordaz regimes — but vigorously asserted itself in the revolutionary resurgence of the Cárdenas era.

If the world war had not for ever closed the period of capitalist ascent, the new Mexican bourgeoisie may have been in a position to develop by bringing the revolution to an end. If the Russian Revolution had not triumphed character of the land distribution is even more apparent if we take regional disparities into account. In Morelos, the old Zapatist stronghold, twenty-five per cent of the population had received an area of land amounting to thirty-three per cent of the state total. In Yucatan twenty-two per cent of the rural population had received some land, in Campeche fourteen per cent. In Puebla and San Luis Potosí, nine to ten per cent of the land area had passed into the hands of the villages. In the rest of the country the figures were minute. (Tannenbaum, The Mexican Agrarian Revolution, New York 1939).
in 1917, the Mexican Revolution would not have found a respite to prevent the conversion of defeat into full-scale rout, and the Carranzistas would have succeeded in crushing the Mexican masses and robbing them of all organization. It was above all the young Mexican proletariat, secondary in the revolution itself, which received a direct stimulus from the Russian Revolution. It revived and extended its struggles, stemming the reactionary offensive, encouraging peasant resistance, and inspiring the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie that had also been attracted by the Russian Revolution. Together, these three forces hemmed in the restorationist wing and brought about its downfall.

The presidential elections of September 5, 1920 formally confirmed what had already been resolved by non-electoral means. On December 1, Álvaro Obregón legally assumed office as president of the Republic.

The victory of the Russian Revolution did not occur in time to propel forward the anti-capitalist dynamic of the peasant war and nationalist revolution, but it was the historical event which enabled the invincible tenacity of the Mexican masses to keep alive the continuity of the Mexican revolution. [...] 

The second phase: Cárdenas

The turn in the Mexican situation was not determined solely by national factors. These combined with decisive factors of the world situation. Fascism was on the rise in Germany and Italy. But where they found any support, the masses throughout the world continued the anti-capitalist struggle. In Cuba, the dictatorship of Gustavo Machado was overthrown in 1933 by a general strike of 12 days, which opened the road to the petty-bourgeois anti-imperialist government of Grau San Martín. In El Salvador, a peasant uprising with a socialist programme was led by the communist leader Agustín Farabundo Martí in 1932. Prepared in the form of a putsch, it was stopped and defeated in a bloody fashion — 20,000 deaths — by the dictator Martinez. Martí was shot. Also in 1932, the military coup of Marmaduke Grove established the "Socialist Republic" for 12 days in Chile. In the United States, the turn towards the reformist concession of Roosevelt was starting, and there was the rising strike wave which was to culminate in the organization of the CIO. The world crisis of the capitalist economy which was centered on the United States, although it could not by itself create a revolutionary situation, prevented imperialism from acting in a coordinated and centralized way against the Soviet Union and the revolutionary movements in other countries.

Cardenismo emerged from all this combination of national and international factors as the political expression of the second ascending phase of the Mexican Revolution and, once in power, it imposed itself and developed as a revolutionary nationalistic anti-imperialist government faced with the particular form of the capitalist state that emerged from the agrarian revolution of 1910-1920. Although the formula is complicated, it is because reality was and it resists classification. "Grey, dear friend, is all theory / but green is the gilded tree of life," said Goethe.

When Calles, in 1936, faced with the growing strike wave of workers throughout the country, tried to use his position in the political apparatus for a new internal coup d'état against the right, this time against Cárdenas, the relationship of forces had already changed. On April 10 of that year, the president put Calles and Morones in an aeroplane to the United States, liquidated the coup and radicalized his policy, seeking support from the workers' and peasants' movement.

The fundamental aspects of the Cardenist period were: the nationalization of the oil and railways; the agrarian redistribution; the organization of the workers' movement; socialist education; foreign policy. This chapter is centered on these elements.

Nationalization of oil industry

The basic conquest of the Cárdenas period was the nationalization of oil and railways. But of these two nationalizations, the decisive one was that of the British and North American oil companies. This was the culmination of a broad struggle of the nationalist and revolutionary nationalistic current, with the support of the whole Mexican people, since the Revolution and the 1917 constitution. Each time that imperialism saw its oil holdings threatened, including in the Obregón and Calles periods, it brandished the threat of an armed invasion of Mexico. In fact, its internal agents and allies were too weak to resist the truly national demand for the expropriation of oil reserves. And this was a real threat from imperialism. Mexico knew this from a wide experience, although the Bonapartist government of the Mexican bourgeoisie saw it increased because of their own insecurity and lack of confidence from the masses.

Cárdenas based himself on the workers' movement, and in particular on the trade-union organizations and the strike movement of the oil workers, in order to move forward the nationalization. It was the initiative and the pressure of the strike and the mobilization of the oil-workers which gave the government the assurance to take the decision. British and North American imperialism answered with blackmail, national and international slander campaigns, the complete withdrawal of their technicians, an organized boycott on the world market of Mexican oil, but its threats of invasion came down to the isolated uprising of General Cedillo, which more or less disintegrated by itself, from lack of support. Imperialism had not gone through the experience of the punitive expedition of 1916 in vain. Its leading states understood — and understand — that to enter Mexico is to put a foot into the fatal trap which would provoke the explosion of an anti-imperialist war in Latin America, and a severe crisis within the United States itself. Since then this threat of invasion — which is real — has been used increasingly. However, it is above all used by the most reactionary sectors of the Mexican bourgeoisie in order to justify before the masses its concessions to imperialism and its resistance to all progressive measures.
On the other hand, the nationalist revolution could then go further—further than it had been able to do in its first stage—because the Soviet Union, although encircled by capitalism, existed, and despite the policies of its leadership was an objective point of support for revolutionary progress for the masses throughout the world. The Mexican masses, in their turn, had succeeded in putting at their head an anti-imperialist leadership which was sufficiently audacious to understand the existence of this point of support and did not hesitate to use it, although it could not really understand its scope. To expropriate the oil in 1938, with imperialism on the other side of the border, required much greater audacity than had all the subsequent revolutionary nationalist leaderships. Cádernas drew this courage from the depths of the revolutionary conviction and assuredness of the Mexican masses. His merit was to be able to feel and dare to represent it.

The axis of the whole mobilization of the national masses which supported and made possible the expropriation of the oil against all the international and national threats was the oil workers themselves and their union. The oil workers worked miracles to keep going the installations that the companies had sabotaged and dismantled. They replaced from one day to the next the British and North American technicians who left hoping to come back within a few weeks given the alleged "inability" of the Mexican workers to run the installations by themselves. They invented technical processes, worked extra hours and days without wages. They carried the industry on their shoulders, and increased oil production, therefore saving the nationalized industry from disaster in the critical moment in which the imperialists and their agents were forecasting disaster. Nobody could erase from the consciousness of the oil workers the confidence one from such an achievement. This became one of the deep-rooted pillars of the struggle for power and building socialism in Mexico.

Neither the nationalization of oil nor of the railways were socialist measures. They did not go any further than State capitalism. They were, however, a serious blow to imperialism's economic domination over Mexico (2) and its authority in all Latin America, a stimulus to all the Latin American nationalist and revolutionary forces who immediately saluted this new progress as an achievement of their own the new progress in the Mexican Revolution.

**State capitalism**

Cádernas did not propose to defeat capitalism, he proposed to open it up for "more just" development, eliminating the worst forms of imperialist exploitation, broadening the domestic market and the basis for the development of a national capitalism which, in his conception, would prepare the conditions for reaching socialism in a far distant future. This was not a socialist but a bourgeois idea. But in nationalizing the principal industry in the country, he not only hit at imperialism but, without hitting directly at capitalism, he removed from private property one of its main sources for accumulating wealth. The state was not taking responsibility for a debt-ridden industry whose existence was necessary for the national economy, but taking over the most dynamic and productive sector of national

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(2) "In 1940, the last year of General Lazaro Cardenas's government, direct foreign investments had been brought down to 2,262 million pesos, the equivalent of US$419 million, from a figure of 3,900 million pesos in 1935. That amounts to a reduction of 42%. On the other hand, the foreign debt had increased, not as a result of new loans, of which there were none, in the absolute, but as a result of the expropriations of the oil industry and large estates, of the nationalism of the railroads and the claims for damage cause by the armed struggle..." "Direct foreign investments reached a total of $2,700 million by 1969 (value in pounds sterling), as compared to only 419 million in 1940. "The foreign debt reached the sum of $2,832 million the same year, 1969, a figure ten times higher than the corresponding one for 1940." (Jesús Luis Cecilia, México en la órbita imperial.)
Argentina and Peronism 1943-1976

1930 a military coup overthrows the regime of the Radical leader Yrigoyen
1942-43 The Communist Party seeks an agreement with the military junta
1943 / June The United Officers Group overthrows the junta and appoints General Ramirez president and Colonel Perón Secretary for Labor
1943 / March General Farrell appointed president; Perón appointed Defense Minister; social reforms are promulgated including the Status of the Rural Peon
1944 / December Perón appointed vice-president
1945 / February Argentina declares war on Germany
1945 / October a decree/law legalizes trade unions
1945 / October 17 Perón is sacked and imprisoned, but mass demonstrations and strikes restore him to his position
1945 / December a decree establishes a minimum legal wage and a thirteenth month of wages
1946 / February Perón receives 55% of the vote in the presidential elections and defeats Tamborini, the Unión Democrática's candidate supported by US ambassador Braden
1947 Argentina joins Inter-American Mutual Assistance Pact at Rio de Janeiro conference; railroads are nationalized; the Peronist party formalizes its statutes; women win the right to vote; a five-year industrialization plan is launched
1948 strike of Tucumán sugar workers
1949 strikes and normalizations in the CGT trade unions
1951 strike of railroad workers
1951 Perón obtains 65% of the vote in the presidential elections against Balbín
1952 / July death of Eva Perón
1955 / June 16 The Casa Rosada is strafed by rebel Air Force planes
1955 / September 16 Admiral Rojas and General Lonardi lead a military coup that overthrows Perón
1955 / November General Aramburu bans the Peronist party and decapitates the CGT
1958 The Radical Frondizi is elected with the support of the Peronists, banned from running in the elections
1962 a military coup deposes Frondizi
1963 creation of the Peronist Revolutionary Movement, out of which the Montoneros, a left current later arose, in the hope of acting as a counterweight within the Peronist movement to Vandor's collaborationist labor bureaucracy
1966-73 a military coup establishes a succession of military juntas under generals Ongania, Levingston and Lanusse
1968 Ongaro and the Peronist left create the CGT of the Argentinians
1969 the Montoneros, an armed movement of the Peronist left, goes into action
1973 / March Campora, a left Peronist candidate, is elected president
1973 / September Perón is elected president with 60% of the vote, and disowns the Peronist left
1974 / July Death of Perón; Isabel Martínez Perón succeeds him
1976 A military coup d'Etat overthrows Isabel Perón and unleashes a fierce repression
Our formula

In our view, Peronism was a historical movement that tried to bring about an independent capitalist development through a Bonapartist government which would control the working class in order to use it as a base.

The definition may appear somewhat complex. It calls, in fact, for an explanation of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, one of Karl Marx's key works.

In it, Marx analyzes with great clarity and accuracy the growth and conflicts of various social forces and class segments struggling in capitalist society, focusing on particularly illuminating moments. These are the junctures when an economic or social event suddenly throws the old structures of capitalist society into crisis and pits the various social strata against each other. When such a crisis breaks out after the revolutionary class has fully matured, a stage evidenced by the existence of a strong proletarian party and fighting workers and people's forces, a revolution takes place.

When this crisis takes the proletariat by surprise and erupts before it has succeeded to build its own party and army, the crisis ends with a mere readjustment of bourgeoisie society.

This is precisely the sort of event analyzed by Marx in his work: Louis Bonaparte's coup which led to his being crowned emperor Napoleon III a few years later.

Basing himself on the state apparatus, particularly the army, Louis Bonaparte took power and, though he did not represent any particular section of the bourgeoisie, ruled on behalf of the bourgeoisie as a whole.

Normally this sort of maneuver does not work. The very reason for bourgeois parties to exist is precisely that each represents a different section of the bourgeoisie and prepares to succeed the other at the head of the government through the electoral game.

But when capitalist society is shaken by these major crises, no bourgeois section fighting for its own particular interests can govern effectively on behalf of the entire bourgeoisie, carry out a readjustment and save the system.

A leader then emerges tied to no particular section, but pledged to defend them all, drawing his strength from an organ of the system such as the army or the whole state apparatus.

This was what Louis Bonaparte did, hence the label of Bonapartism which Marxists use to describe this sort of government. Incidentally, this was also what his uncle, the first Bonaparte, Napoleon the Great, did some fifty years earlier.

The international conjuncture

It is also what General Perón did in Argentina in 1945. Argentina's old structure based on dependence on British imperialism and an almost exclusive focus on cereals and cattle could no longer contain the development of productive forces. The 1929 economic crisis and then the war had reduced the amount of foreign manufactured goods imported into the country and stimulated local industry. Argentina's old set-up was incapable of containing this new phenomenon of industrialization which took off in the 1930s.

The old British Empire was badly shaken by the second imperialist war and could not stop this development with a renewed influx of manufactured goods. Nor could it join the feast by investing since, at that time, it was concentrating its efforts on rebuilding its own territory razed by German bombs.

The mighty Yankee Empire, the new world-class superpower, was for the time being not interested in these distant latitudes. It focused primarily on the reconstruction of Europe as a means to thwart the advance of its former ally, the Soviet Union. It also was busy trying to stop the advance of the People's Liberation Army in China and, more generally, any further extension of people's struggles in Asia. Its hands were too full to get more involved in Latin America, where it already controlled many countries.

So the international conjuncture made a certain independent capitalist development of our country both necessary and possible. The same conjuncture provided the economic basis for such a development: exchanges on favorable terms with European countries suffering from destruction and hunger and prepared to purchase our wheat and meat at any price.

There was a snag, though, which had to be resolved before the favorable conjuncture could be turned to advantage: the Argentine industrial bourgeoisie, the class
which this perspective should have aroused most forcefully, was very weak, close to non-existent. National capital was almost entirely in the hands of the old farming and ranching oligarchy, a notably parasitic class, with little or no interest in investing in industry.

The most enlightened sections of the armed forces therefore began to wonder whether they might not be able to assume the role of this weak bourgeoisie and formulate a perspective for independent capitalist development. The narrowness of the bourgeois layers which they could hope to involve in this project suggested that they ought to look elsewhere for support.

The only class that could provide such support was the working class, insofar as the development of industry would entail its own development as a class.

The group of officers led by Perón therefore set out to win the support of the workers by offering them certain advantages while building a new type of labor movement through which it could control the working class and prevent it from struggling for its own historic interests, that is for socialism.

This is why we say that Perón's government was a Bonapartist government which tried to implement an independent capitalist development project by controlling and basing itself on the working class.

The Bonapartist project

"People say, gentlemen, that I am an enemy of the capitalists, but if you carefully noted what I just said, you will not find a defender more, let us say, determined than myself, because I know that the defense of businessmen, industrialists and traders is the defense of the state itself." (...) "I have been steeped in discipline. I have been abiding by discipline or enforcing discipline for thirty-five years now, and during that time I have learnt that discipline had one fundamental basis: justice." (...) "This is why I believe that if I was the owner of a factory, it would not cost me to earn the affection of my workers by some intelligently conceived social work. Quite often, you can achieve that simply by sending the doctor to the house of a worker whose son is sick; by offering a little gift on a special day; by the boss going by and tapping the shoulder of his men in a friendly way, and speaking to them every now and then, as we do with our soldiers." (...)"

"The result of the 1914-1918 war was that one European country disappeared from capitalism: Russia. (...) In that war, that country ranked among those with the greatest debt in the world (...) and I therefore wonder what the situation of the Argentine Republic will be when the war ends, when paralysis and probably unusually high unemployment will grip our land, and money men and ideologies will infiltrate our state organism and labor organization from the outside (...) there will be an awakening of communism which though dormant still festers among the masses and will reemerge, like all endemic diseases, in the postwar period when the natural factors are present."

"With us, the General Labor Confederation (CGT) will operate as it should and we will not have the slightest objection, when we want firms X or Z to run well, to dispense our advice to them and transmit such advice to them through their natural commanders; we will tell the General Confederation: something has to be done for this firm, and they will take it upon themselves to get it done. I can guarantee that they are disciplined and will do such things with the utmost good will."

"This will be the safety catch, this organization of the masses. However, the state will organize a second insurance, namely the authority required for no one, once at his post, to be able to leave that post, because the state organism has the means, if necessary by force, to lock things into place and not allow them to go off track."

These statements are extracts of the speech delivered by Juan Domingo Perón, at the time a colonel and the Secretary for Labor and Welfare, on August 25, 1944, to the Buenos Aires Chamber of Commerce. The same message was read before delegates from all trade unions on August 31, because, as Perón explained: "I do not want my words to be misused, neither in our country or abroad, and if they must be published for that, there is no objection to that taking place." (1)

These statements of the leader of Peronism, uttered at a key juncture of his political career (the struggle for total power), shed a revealing light on the nature of Perón's Bonapartist government and his approach to achieving an independent capitalist development. This perspective of independent capitalist development, leaving aside the limitations corresponding to its bourgeois character, was quite limited: it did not stem from a genuine impulse emanating from a rising bourgeoisie, as in Cromwell's England or the French Revolution. The situation was quite the opposite in fact: the Argentine bourgeoisie, mean, dull-witted and pledged to imperialism since the day of its birth, never even understood that Peronism reflected its interests.

Preempting the revolution

This development project was therefore not elaborated by the group of Bonapartist officers led by Perón as a response to appeals from the class to whom it would profit, but to forestall with the utmost lucidity the danger that a revolutionary process might be unleashed in the concrete conditions of Argentina and the world. Its aim was to put a brake on this process. This comes through quite clearly in Perón's speech quoted above, but one can add further evidence.

The paragraphs reproduced below are taken from a speech delivered August 7, 1945, to the Military College. The date as well as the audience to which it was given make this a speech of capital importance. One can only assume that, within the bounds of his chameleon-like ability to tell each and everyone whatever they wished to hear, Perón spoke most sincerely to his own comrades-in-arms. "The Russian revolution is an accom-
The limits of Bonapartist nationalism

Can we say that Perón was purely and simply an agent of British imperialism and its old allies, against the new bourgeois alignment around the United States? That would be falling to the level of the lowest form of left-wing "gorillazism".

Perón relied in part on the declining imperialist power with whom he could negotiate more easily and enlarge his room for maneuver in dealing with the rising imperialist power, the United States.

In the following limited sense, Perón was nationalist: he aspired to the independent capitalist development of our country. But the limits of such nationalism in circumstances where imperialism exists and controls the world market stem precisely from its bourgeois character.

We can see one of the limitations of his approach in the policy he followed towards British capital. It is not necessary here to recall all the reasons why the nationalization of the British-owned railroads was a very bad bargain for the country. We need only quote the statements of the spokespeople of those who "suffered" from the nationalization: "According to Don Miguel Miranda — the Financial Times stated — the purchase of the British-owned railroads will never be submitted to Parliament because the latter would not approve the generosity with which the British shareholders have been treated." (3)

"The lines have shown no profit over the last fifteen years. During the same period, the operation costs increased 250% and Argentina's new social legislation has now become effective in railroad management. It was high time for us to disengage." (Statement to La Prensa, February 12, 1947)

By contrast, the meatpacking and freezing firms, which British capital preferred to keep, were not nationalized. On the contrary, they received subsidies which enabled the English monopolies to absorb the wage increases won by meatpackers, and to continue to export their products at a profit, without reinvesting a single peso in their installations, with consequences that are clear today. It continued even after the freezing installations were sold to the US monopoly Packers Ltd of Chicago, now fused with other monopolies of the industry in the supermonopoly DELTEC International, whose activities are equally well known in our country.

Another limitation appeared in relation to the agrarian policy, the basis of any genuine independent development. In his August 7, 1945 speech to the Military College, Perón promised: "The theme of the Land Reform is that the land is not to be used for profit but for labor, and that each Argentinian has the right to work land and own the land that he works." What was left of this Land Reform ten years later, at the time of the fall of the Peronist government? Very little, almost nothing. The Peronist government restricted itself to promulgating the Statute of the Rural Peon and the Law on Rural Rents and Farming Contracts, which granted the rural proletariat and poor peasant a few gains. But the land remained the property of the old landowners who were therefore able, after the "16th of September" [1955], to erase with one stroke of the pen, at no cost to themselves, all the "conquests" of Peronism. In addition, the farming and cattle-raising output has remained blocked at its 1930 level and the productive methods have barely changed in the countryside. Large-scale use of labor compensates for the lack of tractors in sufficient numbers, of chemical fertilizers, of appropriate seed, in a word, of rational methods of operation.

Something similar happened in urban industry. Industrial growth under Peronism was based on the massive use of manpower rather than on a genuine renovation and extension of the country's industrial equipment.

What is the cause of this anomaly so contrary to the laws of industrial development? Again, the Bonapartist nature of the Peronist government. Under a bourgeois regime, the only way to adequately increase capital in industry is to overexploit the workers and extract from their labor the capital needed for the purchase of industrial equipment.

Another path to industrialization does exist: it involves socializing industry and letting the working class itself develop through a workers state. But socialism was far from Perón's intentions. (...) At the same time, by allowing the workers to be overexploited by the capitalists, he would have lost the massive support of the working class and eliminated his own margin for maneuver with the bourgeoisie and imperialism.

Trapped by the contradictions of his own tepidly reformist bourgeois policy, Perón's government preferred to continue to pretend to be on the best terms with both God and the Devil.
Bonapartism and the class struggle

For Bonapartism hoped to profit from the times of prosperity to eliminate the class struggle and "balance" the forces of the bourgeoisie, imperialism and the working class, by transforming itself into the supreme arbiter of all decisions.

But the class struggle is the motor of history and cannot be swept aside by a simple system of political and economic checks and balances.

The working class, even when it has not reached a high level of class consciousness, even when it does not clearly understand its historic mission as a class, cannot and never will be a mere title in the hands of some ruling group, whoever they may be. On October 17, 1945, Bonapartism gave the signal for a mass mobilization to support its leader against the right wing of the military government which was bending to the pressures of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. But the working class, by taking to the streets of Buenos Aires and all cities of the hinterland, threw its own class weight into the political arena.

Therein lies one of the most explosive contradictions of Peronism: the class origin of this base. Even without struggling for its own historic goals, the working class deeply suffused Peronist ranks and left its imprint on many measures of the Bonapartist government.

The process of mass unionization of the working class was promoted and controlled from above, but it was also taken over and given a new impulse by the rank-and-file as a weapon in the struggle against the employers. Between 1945 and 1949, the class struggle passed through the economic struggle over the distribution of profits. Employers hoped to turn all the huge postwar profits into capital investments. The workers claimed they deserved an increasing share of this wealth which they had created by their labor. The Bonapartist government tried to balance these struggles in favor of the capitalist regime as a whole and constantly bolstered the state apparatus and state control of the CGT to that effect.

Prosperity began to wane in 1949 but the Korean War (1950-1953) gave Bonapartism a reprieve. By 1954, the crisis of the system had begun to burst out in the open. The huge profits that made possible big wage increases for the working class and fat profits for the ruling class already were no longer coming in. The time to choose had come.

What did Perón's Bonapartist government choose? In 1953, it created the Economic General Confederation to organize Argentine employers and counterbalance the CGT's influence in the Peronist political machine. This produced good results so fast that Guillermo Kraft, who represented the organization at the Seventh Plenary Meeting of the Inter-American Trade Council in Mexico, in 1954, boasted that: "A profound transformation is under way in our country. People are grateful for private enterprise and trust entrepreneurs. The goods that were nationalized are now being turned over one after another to private firms. We are invited to participate in the management of the state institutions."

Those of us who are above a certain age remember the most immediate day-to-day evidence of the crisis of Bonapartism at that time: the congress for productivity, the tours for productivity among the workers, the famous speeches in which Perón said that he saw too many things wasted in the garbage cans at five in the morning, the poor dark bread one ate at meals for the first time in a long time.

The most active sections of the working class also noticed this phenomenon and strikes that were not organized from the top down, appeared again. On the other hand, the official CGT acted as a strikebreaker in the work stoppages—which lasted over two months—in the engineering industry and in the other movements of a variety of trades.

Bonapartism and the new empire

A thorough analysis of Peronism's economic policy would take us beyond the limits of this article. We will merely indicate the basic skeleton of this policy: an independent capitalist development project, designed to put a brake on the revolutionary process, but thwarted by its own class limitations. In the epoch of imperialism, only a workers government, an authentic workers and people's government, can successfully carry out the gigantic task of transforming a backward and dependent country into a prosperous, industrialized and independent country.

To remove any doubt about this assertion, one need only ask the following: Would the "gorilla" reaction have succeeded in turning the country over to the Yankees and smash the working class so easily if the relations of property had not been exactly the same on September 16, 1955, as they were on October 17, 1945? Would Abaruam, Rojas and company have succeeded in taking power so easily if the workers and peasants had been organized in armed militias when they faced the professional bourgeois army? Would Yankee imperialism have penetrated our country so rapidly if it had not begun to do so before September 16? And could the Cuban oligarchy recapture the power in its own country, today, after ten years of Castroist revolution, as our own gorillas recaptured it after ten years of Peronist "revolution"? Of course not.

Why did Perón not carry out the land reform, nationalize industry and arm the proletariat? Certainly not for lack of popular support. Never had a government of our country enjoyed such widespread support. In 1946 Perón was elected to the Casa Rosada in the first truly clean elections of our history, with 1.4 million votes that is 260,000 more than the opposition united under the banner of Unión Democrática. When he asked for an other term as president in 1951, his lead had jumped to 2.3 million as against the Unión Cívica Radical ticket headed by the Balbín-Frondizi tandem.

The reason Perón did not carry out a genuine revolution is simply that he did not want to. Because that was not part of his plan which was conceived within the
strictly bourgeois boundaries of his Bonapartist project.

When the "brave" Navy airmen massacred the unarmed people assembled in the Plaza de Mayo on June 16, 1955, Perón answered the workers who asked for weapons: "From home to work and from work to home." Three months later he fell without pain or glory. "It was to avoid bloodshed," he said. The Peronist workers massacred at Avellaneda and Rosario between September 23 and 29, those shot on June 9, Valleses, the dozens of anonymous Peronist militants, the children who continue to die of hunger and curable diseases could tell General Perón how much more blood has been shed, though in a different way.

Some people try to justify these twenty-five years by emphasizing the alleged anti-imperialism of the Peronist "National Movement." "During his government," they tell us, "Perón stopped US imperialism, liquidated English imperialism, and gave us genuine economic independence, social justice and political sovereignty. He could go no further because the conditions did not exist. Today, however, the National Movement has been through that experience and knows that it must fight for socialism."

Every word a lie. As far as British imperialism is concerned, we already explained above the real content of Peronist policy: nationalize those British goods which the British wanted to abandon as part of their worldwide retrenchment. We made their orderly retreat easier and offered them a financial bonanza. Those resources the British wanted to keep—like the meatpacking installations and La Forestal—remained British as long as the British still wanted them.

What about his attitude towards the United States? In 1946, Peronism built its election campaign around the slogan of "Perón or Braden". But in 1947, the Peronist government signed the Treaty of Rio de Janeiro, the first link in a long chain that binds us to the North American imperial system. This Treaty pledged us—and continues to pledge us—to "defend any country of the hemisphere that might be the object of extra-continental aggression." In other words, to embark on any military adventure which the United States might decide to undertake. Later on, the Peronist government sent its representatives to the OAS conferences in Caracas and Bogota.

In 1950, when the postwar reserves began to run out, we undertook the first loan issue of the Washington-based Import-Export Bank, to the tune of $125 million. The same year, the sending of a contingent of our troops to fight in Korea was prevented by the famous Pérez to Rosario march and other spontaneous demonstrations of the Argentine people against the war. The fate that would have befallen our soldiers if the Yankees had been allowed to turn them into cannon fodder can be gauged by the following figures: of the 5000 men sent to Korea in the Brazilian battalion, only 325 came home.

On July 30, 1953, Perón wrote in the official daily "Democracia": "A few day ago, an illusory or American, Doctor Milton Eisenhower, visited our country on behalf of his brother, the president of the United States. (...) A new era is opening in the friendship between our governments, our countries and our peoples."

The oil contracts with Standard Oil were supposed to be signed some time in 1954 or 1955; but the "gorillas" coup d'état postponed the actual signing and the deal was consummated under Frondizi's government. (...)  

**Peronism as a social phenomenon**

One could say that for the "new" working class [created by the vast internal migration from the Argentine countryside in the 1930s and 1940s which diluted the labor movement of European origins—Ed.], Peronism represented a first stage towards class consciousness. It embodied the moment when the working class, though not yet conscious of its historical objectives, began to identify as a class, as a set of people united by common interests and opposed to another set of people, another class, by virtue of these very same interests.

The mass unionization and economic struggle over the sharing of the national income were to be the instruments through which the working class began to gain this consciousness in the first years of the Peronist government. A decree of the military government established June 4, 1943, promulgated on November 29 of the same year, instituted a Secretariat for Labor and Welfare directly under the Presidency of the Nation. It brought together the old bureaucracies of the National Labor Board and Provincial Boards, formerly under the Ministry of the Interior.

On December 1, the leadership of this Secretariat was handed to Colonel Perón. The same evening, Perón delivered a long speech broadcast over the radio explaining the goals he set for himself. Perón explained the need for organizing the workers more from the standpoint of the needs of the state than of the workers themselves. He flattered the workers and announced that his Secretariat would defend their interests against abuses by the employers (this was indeed put into practice). The central theme of that evening's broadcast was the famous "Third Position." According to this argument, Capital and Labor are two indispensable elements of production; they must not fight each other but work together to increase the wealth and greatness of the Fatherland. The state was located above them, as a protective father; its role was to harmonize the conflicting interests and smooth over differences when they arose; "to put things back on track," as Perón would say in a later speech. The full text of this broadcast was published on pages 1 and 4 of *La Nación*, of December 2, 1943.

Decree 23 852 of 1945 and, subsequently, the Law on Professional Associations, regulated and defined the activity of trade unions as complementary to the state measures implemented by the Secretariat for Labor and Welfare.

Under the prodding of the Secretariat and the protection of this legislation, dozens of trade unions were created between 1943 and 1945. Some appeared in industries where none had ever existed; others side by side
with already existing unions or socialist unions, which they ended up absorbing.

The trade-union cadres needed to implement this campaign came from various origins: some came from the ranks of those joining unions, some came from the new political organs created at the same time as the unionization was going on: from the Labor Party (Partido Laborista) of Cipriano Reyes, the caudillo of Berisso; from the Agrarian Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Agrario) whose leaders collaborated with Peronism through their daily, Democracia, until 1947, believing that Peron would carry out a profound land reform; others from movements leaving the traditional parties (such as a section of the Radical Intransigents and of Sabattinismo); from the nationalist groups then appearing such as FORA, in which Jauretche, Scalabrini Ortiz and others were active, from trade-union leaderships that had been communist, socialist or in the old Trotskyist groups: Borlenghi, a long-time socialist leader, who was to become a minister of Peron, the Perelman brothers who disappeared from the scene without pain or glory in the first years of Peronism, and many others, some still known today, others whose trace has been lost in time.

Besides these trade-union cadres, a very active role was played in the process by the inspectors of the Labor Secretariat themselves. They criss-crossed the country, convinced that they were performing a sacred mission. They came from the same origins as the others mentioned above, but connected themselves to the Secretariat through different channels.

Interesting data on this issue can be found in the works of Alberto Belloni, *Del anarquismo al peronismo*, and the Perelman brothers, *Como hicimos el 17 de octubre* — which can be verified in the press of the time.

The results obtained by these activists in their campaign of mass unionization can be gauged from the figures published in Luis Cerruti Costa's book *El sindicalismo, las masas y el poder*. The Metalworkers Association, an affiliate of the Communist CGT, had 2000 members in 1941. The Metals Workers Union (UOM) founded in 1943 by an initiative of the Secretariat for Labor reached 100,000 members in 1945. The pro-Communist Textile Workers Union had 2000 members in 1943. That same year, the Textile Workers Association was established; it had 85,000 members by 1946. The FOTIA (sugar industry) founded in 1944, had 100,000 members by 1947. The Bakers' Staff, founded in 1943, had 20,000 members by 1946. The Wood Federation, founded in 1944; had 35,000 members by 1947.

How should this explosive pace of unionization be explained? Why did the working-class masses who had joined unions in very small numbers a few years earlier, then do so in huge numbers?

Betrayal of the Communist Party

The answer must be sought in the earlier history of the workers movement and in the new social conditions created by the war, the process of industrialization and the emergence of a military government on June 4. As European markets were closed by World War Two, the process of industrialization initiated in the 1930s as a result of the 1929 crisis, accelerated. Tens of thousands of people migrated from the country to the city and joined the new factories and workshops. Industry offered the hope of a better life to these people who had just barely left the countryside and its ruthless exploitation made even harsher by the world crisis during the "infamous decade" [1930-40—Ed.]. But the avaricious and dull-witted "national bourgeoisie" whose only ambition was to accumulate capital as fast as it could, and the huge imperialist octopuses battening on our industry were not prepared to share the enormous profits gained from the new prosperity with their workers.

The workers needed to find instruments with which to contend with the bourgeoisie and imperialism on the economic field for a better share of the national wealth which they, and they alone, had created by their labor. The old communist and socialist trade unions did not offer such an instrument. Those who arrived from the country looked upon them with suspicion and distrust. First, because the Communist trade-union leaders spoke a language that corresponded neither to their level of consciousness nor to their immediate interests. Instead of posing the problems of the working class as they arose in the concrete reality of our country, the Communists invoked some vague internationalism that was, in fact, nothing more than their tail-ending of the twists and turns of Soviet foreign policy.

Taking the Soviet Union's alliance with the Western imperialist powers against Germany and world fascism as their point of departure, the Communist Party proposed to the workers the notorious tactic of the Popular Front which, in practice, meant that one had to hitch the movement onto the coat-tails of the local bourgeoisie and even imperialism.

Thus, by 1942 and 1943, the reformism of the Communist Party was turning into open treachery, as when it liquidated the great strikes of the meatpacking and metalworking trades. Since the British had struck an alliance with the Soviet Union, the watchword concerning the war became: "Don't let the fighters for democracy without provisions." Thus, for the sake of distant allies, armies fighting on the battlefield, the meatpacking workers who worked fourteen hours a day in cold storage rooms, had to set aside their struggle against the English meatpacking barons, the worst exploiters of Argentine wealth and labor. Betrayal was compounded by servility. Peters, a Communist leader of the meatpackers in the South, was flown in by the conservative government so he could harangue a mass meeting of strikers and urge them to avoid any test of strength.

It was upon this betrayal that Cipriano Reyes was able to build the main strength of his Labor Party. Th
meatpackers were one of the main forces that mobilized on October 17.

**Workers and Peronism**

All across the country, the workers experienced the first years of Peronism as active participants. They took hold of the new trade unions as instruments for the realization of their class. Not only did they join them massively, they immediately used them to launch an economic struggle against the employers, demanding their share of the national income, their share of the wealth they had created.

This clearly corresponds to the first stage in the formation of the consciousness of the working class: it is a first spontaneous and economist stage during which the workers do not yet visualize their historical interests, do not get involved in politics; they do not challenge the very existence of surplus value as capitalist profit, but only how the latter is divided; they demand merely a share of the value added by their hands to the products of nature.

Moreover, in the concrete case of the Argentine working class under Peronism, the workers perceived the Peronist government, which was not merely tolerating but encouraging the activity of trade unions and making easy victories possible through the Secretariat for Labor, as their own government. They felt that they were in power and were satisfied for their sole political expression to gather periodically in the Plaza de Mayo and acclaim the Líder. Beyond that, they were not interested in politics and their attention concentrated on the economic struggle.

But even in the narrow confines of this reformist and trade-unionist framework, the struggle was active and militant. The workers participated with sincerity and fervor, feeling they were the workers fighting the bosses.

**Mass unionization and differentiation**

This is precisely why the Peronist government evolved an ambiguous attitude towards these struggles and gradually turned against the workers' sector. In principle, the government supported the unionization campaign and the struggles of the workers, in order to control the latter. It feared the possibility that the unorganized masses might be manipulated by "agitators" into support for an independent working-class policy more than the temporary furor which its policy of supporting labor unleashed among the bourgeoisie.

Even when the workers felt and were Peronist, there was a positive aspect in the unionization campaign and strikes that worried the regime: its militancy and genuinely working-class quality. It is well known that a strike of a single week will raise the consciousness of the workers movement more than months of political discussions.

This is why the government was bent on maintaining monolithic control over the trade union through the central apparatus of the CGT, and why the labor center implemented a series of "interventions" (normalizations or placing of local branches into receivership) between 1946 and 1949 against the Buenos Aires trades mentioned above [engineering, telephones, banks, printing, sugar, railroad, meatpacking] and other, smaller ones, in the interior. This is why the CGT bureaucracy was purged several times, first to replace the "corrupt ones" by the lukewarm, then the faithful by the unconditional.

Moreover, the basis of the Bonapartist policy of Peronism, the fat profits and huge reserves of currency of the first years of the postwar period, was running out fast. The strikes of 1948-1949 were less and less favorably seen by the officialdom and the ever more tightly controlled and statized CGT apparatus began to throw obstacles in the path of every economic struggle.

As a result, the strikes of these three years became more harshly fought, lasted longer and were more isolated. Already at that point, they were no longer led by trusted men of the CGT, but by rank-and-file leaders who, although Peronist, did not accept that one could bargain away the labor and suffering of their comrades.

The official apparatus adopted a cunning policy towards these struggles: it let the strikes drag on for some time, then conceded all or most of the demands voiced by the rank-and-file workers. But not before having "intervened" into the trade unions involved in the conflict. It expelled their leaders and had the police prosecute them on the charge of being communists; only then did it negotiate a solution to the conflict while proceeding with the normalization of the local branch. The "intervenors" thus appear as the saviours of workers led astray by agitators, and the very same "intervenors" can easily win the next trade-union elections, while maintaining the trade within the limits set by the Ministry of Labor, the CGT center and the whole official apparatus.

**The FOTIA strike**

The great FOTIA sugar strike was typical. It was initiated in 1948 on the basis of a series of demands concerning working conditions and wage increases. The spark of the conflict set the whole province of Tucumán on fire and a Strike Committee was formed on the margins of the CGT. The struggle lasted several weeks while the authorities accused the communists of leading the strike in order to sabotage the country. There were some actual communists involved in the struggle, such as Aguirre, a leader of the telephone workers, assassinated by the Federal Police in the Torture Chamber. But they were a tiny minority. The majority of the leaders and almost all the rank-and-file were Peronists, people who agreed with the government but were not prepared to nicely follow official instructions in a province where exploitation traditionally reached incredible levels and where the lesser degree of industrialization reduced the government's ability to maneuver and conciliate.

In the end, FOTIA was subjected to intervention: Simon Campos and the other leaders were arrested and prosecuted. At that point, negotiations began with the intervenors on the basis of an agreement that granted the
workers a 50% wage hike and other gains.

This skilful policy yielded results that clearly confirm the general framework we described: the workers militancy declined markedly.

The working class ended up not only reformist, but passive. It grew accustomed to relying on the negotiating skill of the its leaders and the benevolence of the all-powerful Lider heading the government. Conditions were emerging that would later induce the workers to passively accept the watchword: “from home to work and from work to home.”

A supporter of Peronism might say that our interpretation of the statistics is false, and that, in reality, workers stopped striking simply because they liked their lot under Peronism and had no reason to take to the streets.

Those of us who lived through those years know from their daily experience that this was not so. There are facts that can demonstrate it to new generations: for instance, sales by retailers in the province of Capital Federal and in Buenos Aires, according to the data of the Department of Statistics and the Census, dropped 50% from 1949 to 1953.

This shows clearly that the workers, as their level of combative decline, automatically began to scale down their standard of living. Less retail sales means less purchases by a section of the people. Fewer purchases indicate lower real wages, a smaller share of the national income.

In whose hands did this lost share of the national income turned end up? This is easy to figure out when we remember that 1953 was the year when the Economic General Confederation was created, and that its leaders were given broad powers in institutions, and its delegate to an international conference, Guillermo Kraft, gleefully announced that things were going really well for them. A people's leader once rightly said: “When things are good for them, they can't be good for us.

A belated reaction

This state of affairs brought about a reaction by some trade-union leaders of the new generation in 1954. Despite the official line, they organized the great metalworkers strike and other lesser movements. The strike curve showed a sudden upward leap of the number of strikers and days lost: from 5506 strikers and 59,294 days in 1953, it climbed to 119,701 strikers and 1,449,407 days lost in 1954. At the same time, though, the number of strikes dropped from 40 to 18. This means that in place of the small domestic conflicts of 1953, there were in 1954 really large strikes, including the metalworkers' which lasted over 40 days. But this reaction was already belated. For at the very same moment, the gorillas were already sharpening their swords for the September 16 coup, and the Church was preparing to provide an ideology to the “Liberating” movement and bless the bombs that would massacre women and children on the Plaza de Mayo on June 16.

Between 1949 and 1955, the working class lost its ability to mobilize independently and only came together when summoned by the officials. By 1955, when the Peronist leaderships, taking their lead from their chief who had rushed for cover on board a Paraguayan gunboat, ran off in every direction, only a few isolated convulsions —in Rosario, Avellaneda, Berisso— showed the working class continued to exist and was still able to fight. The leaders of the 1954 struggle became the organizers of the trade-union resistance in the years that immediately followed the 1955 coup, with all the limitations to be expected from people trained in the statized CGT, limitations that one can easily visualize at the mere mention of their names: Augusto T. Vandor, Elio Cardoso, Andres Framini...

Contradiction of the Peronist left

The fact is, the multi-class nature of the Peronist movement necessarily meant that all the contradictions of the class struggle would be introduced inside the movement. As a result, the attitude of all sections of the movement —including the working-class sections— towards the class struggle was determined by the dominant ideology in the class struggle. Since this ideology was the bourgeois, class-collaborationist ideology imparted by the Bonapartist leadership to the entire movement, whenever working-class sections tried to set up varieties of “working-class Peronism” or “revolutionary Peronism”, they sooner or later found themselves hemmed in, confined in the straitjacket of the official ideology of the Lider and his movement.

In a hopeless attempt to overcome this class contradiction existing inside the Peronist framework, all sorts of the ideological genres were tried out, such "national socialism," "justicialist socialism," and other variations on the same theme.

But one after the other, the leaders and activists who raised this problem ended up betrayed, neutralized or co-opted by the ruthless machine of the Peronist officialdom.

Nevertheless, a broad section of the Peronist rank-and-file continues to exercise class pressure in a positive direction, on one occasion or another, trying to overcome ideological and political restrictions by means of trade-union, political or armed struggle. This contradiction between the working-class interests of the rank-and-file and the bourgeois interests of the leadership, between the official ideology and the various attempts to overcome its limitations, is the source of the many currents developing in Peronism. This contradiction is at the heart of the tragedy of Peronism the last scenes of which constitute the most lively and fervent chapters, those richest in lessons and experiences, of this history of our own time.
The formation of a national state in Brazil began with political independence in 1822.* Several political set-ups then emerged as national socio-economic forces slowly accumulated. Monarchical rule was the first regime. The advent of a Republic in 1889 accelerated the process by creating the possibility for self-centered economic development. From 1889 to 1894, "progressive" factions of the urban layers were represented in the government. But beginning in 1894, the coffee bourgeoisie was able to control the government without mediation. Its hegemony lasted until 1930, when it finally gave way after three decades of growing crisis of the coffee economy. The "revolution of 1930" marked the completion of the process of political-administrative centralization.

From the standpoint of class rule, the outcome of the "revolution of 1930" is complex: it did not lead to any new and clear-cut hegemony. The coffee bourgeoisie no longer had the political strength to preserve its hegemony, while the other—industrial and financial—factions of the bourgeoisie, the middle classes and non-coffee agriculturalists, could not hoist themselves into power either.

Rise of the Vargas regime

The "revolution" therefore led to a strengthening of the relative autonomy of the state, a consequence of the bourgeoisie’s inability to hold on to power alone. The power of the executive branch—the arbiter of the different interests—was increased. What emerged was an "under-developed country" variant of classical Bonapartism—the regime that arises when forces balance each other too evenly and a powerful arbiter rises above them to indirectly help big business take power with the support of the toiling masses.

The period dubbed "the compromise state"—the vacuum of any genuine class rule, or the composite rule of a conglomerate of several weak sectors—was a long process (1930-1960) during which the capitalist classes consolidated, with the industrial bourgeoisie first asserting its economic supremacy in the 1950s, and then taking power in 1964.

This "compromise state" born in the "revolution of 1930" was embodied in a populist state which, for the first time in Latin American history, drew the workers onto the political scene without the mediation of social-democracy or of a Communist party. It shaped the first populist practice: attempts by the tenentes (the lieutenants’ movement) to make an alliance with the working class to achieve a stable base. For instance, Boris Fausto, a historian, has described how this group tried to use a strike by 70,000 workers to block a victory by the regional oligarchy. This is a typical populist practice. (2)

According to Fausto, during Vargas’s dictatorial Estado Novo (1937-45), the country was held together from the top down, for lack of a class with sufficient ramifications to play a hegemonic role. Its backbone was the Army High Command; in fact, the Conselho de Segurança Nacional (National Security Council), which exists down to this day, was created in 1937. The state machine grew steadily more hypertrophic and craved to absorb the economic and administrative branches, the mass media, repression and the leadership of the military and civil bureaucracy whose numbers were multiplying fast. (2)

State activities spread to the fields of economic and financial policy, labor, reform of public administration and foreign policy.

In the field of economics, there was not a coherent industrialization strategy. On the contrary, certain measures even stymied the industrial take-off (particularly the 1935-36 trade agreements with the US, lowering the tariffs that protected Brazilian industry).

The populist regime first applied a "redistributionist" model, which achieved a "provisional conciliation of interests" by means of a dynamic mode of capital accumulation featuring the expansion of employment and the domestic market, modernization and accelerated industrialization, and the urbanization of broad masses. All helped to cushion social conflict (although not without some substantial manipulation of urban workers). This model lasted until such a time as continued accumulation required further modernization and intensification of capital, including the massive destruction of unskilled jobs in the 1950s. The modernization of the textile and food sectors provides a clear example of this: employment losses were so great that massive creation of jobs in new sectors (steel and engineering) could not offset them. (3)

* This text is excerpted from Helena Hirata’s doctoral dissertation. It has been published in Spanish in Críticas de la Economía Política, Edición Latinoamericana, Mexico, nos. 20-21, July-December 1981. Translated from the French by John Barzman.


(2) Idem, p. 86ff. The army proposed to "modernize the country through the authoritarian road," a goal Fausto describes as "vague." Fausto enumerates the various organisms created in this period (CFCE, CTEP, DIP, etc).

The initial model could only be implemented through measures regulating the conditions of exploitation of the labor force. These were formulated from the "revolution of 1930" onwards. Part of Vargas's labor legislation, notably the urban minimum legal wage, took effect in 1943.

When enforced, these measures enabled large numbers of rural masses to be integrated into the urban-industrial sphere. During this populist period, the two facets of the state — accumulation and legitimation — were easy to reconcile. But as soon as the pursuit of accumulation called for a new spurt of modernization and capital intensification, their complementarity vanished. The monopolistic transformation of the economy implied less legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of the laboring masses.

To measure the performance of populism as a political tool for the transition from an agro-exporting country to a semi-industrialized capitalist country, that is to measure populism's impact on the transformation of Brazil's productive structure and social formation, we will first examine populism's ideological features, then its characteristics in another "under-developed" country, Argentina, and conclude with a study of the concrete historical case of Brazil.

### The ideological features of populism

It is the low level of capital accumulation and the consequent weakness of society's fundamental classes, that enables populist regimes to arise and deny or minimize the existence of social classes and of a struggle between these classes.

Thus, the nationalist ideologues of the ISEB (Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies), a quasi-governmental organism for the study of "Brazilian reality," started from the postulate that class struggle only existed in advanced societies. In Brazil, the struggle for liberation from foreign domination made national unity possible. This negotiation of classes was designed to provide the state with a base among the masses, unlike the oligarchic state's reliance on a coalition of elites within which a narrow sector (the large landowners and import-export bourgeoisie) controlled the political-administrative machine. Now, the popular urban masses were solicited to become the regime's class basis and source of legitimacy as well as a potential market, a source of demand: the dynamic axis of accumulation was shifting from the export of raw materials and agricultural products to the creation of a domestic market for manufactured goods. Creating a domestic market has a profound integrative effect since the industrial take-off benefits all layers and classes of the population and makes it possible to cushion strife between antagonistic classes. (4) There thus emerged a class alliance in which the proletariat was not armed with its own autonomous class organizations but assumed alien class interests. This sort of integration was only possible because accumulation was going through a particularly dynamic phase at that time. To make the links between the state apparatus and popular masses more effective, charismatic leaders appeared with a following among un- or weakly-organized masses lacking in class consciousness. (5)

Populist leaders justified the role of the state under populism as that of an arbiter above classes and the class struggle. This justification, that of all capitalist states, was more credible in this case because populism's strategy for national development is based on the distribution of income (the integrative model) and fundamental reforms (particularly nationalizations). Moreover, the state in this model takes on the role of a major employer swelling the ranks of public employees, creating jobs and thereby legitimating the state's activity.

Populist regimes' relation to industrialization must also be examined. "The secret of the populist movement is the myth of industrialization," the point of convergence of the different interests: it is the "developmentist ideology that underpins and makes effective populism" governmental strategy by bringing the classes together around a common project of national development and technological progress. Industrial take-off is supposed to make possible improvement in living standards for all and better conditions through migration from the countryside to the city. (6)

To find legitimacy among the masses that constitute its base, the dominant ideology of populist regimes integrates ideological elements drawn from the worker movement and middle classes, such as anti-imperialism even when the populist regime does not necessarily defend nationalism or the (anti-imperialist) interests of these classes on the long run and in reality. (7)

(4) For the advantages gained by each class and class fraction under populism, see J. Meireles, "Notes sur le rôle de l'Etat dans le développement du capitalisme industriel au Brésil," *Critiques de l'économie politique*, nos. 16-17, April 1974, p. 101, note 21.

(5) In general weakly organized (as in Ghana under NKRumah, and Mexico under Córdova) or unorganized (as in Brazil under Vargas). But there are exceptions: the masses were highly organized by Perón. The degree of "institutionalization" of populism is variable; as Perry Anderson states in his unpublished doctoral dissertation on Brazil from 1930 to 1964: "Getuliano was a mystique, Peronism an organization." In Brazil, indeed, nothing equivalent to the Peronist trade union or party existed. Integration was diffuse in Brazil, and populist trade unionism only took off after Vargas's regime, unlike Argentina where it constituted the initial base of the regime.


(7) Sometimes the interests of bourgeois classes can even coincide immediately with these anti-imperialist actions: for instance, the campaign against the American Can corporation, 1958, was financed by its main rival in the US, Continental C and the Brazilian industry which was in crisis. Moreover, nationalism as the ideology of autonomous national development has always been a parvenue of the state and its direct representatives and only later became an ideology appropriated by the laborer masses and fractions of the bourgeoisie; this was already true in the 19th century when the urgent national question was to curb British pressure on the Brazilian state for the abolition of slavery.

This does not mean that this ideology was never put forward by political currents with references other than the state apparatus. For instance, the Brazilian Communist Party always emphasized the nationalist policies implemented by successive populist and pseudo-nationalist governments.
### Brazil 1930-1968: a few dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880-1920</td>
<td>Golden age of the coffee growers of the Sao Paulo region</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>The Federal Republic is proclaimed</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>The Constitution of the First Republic is adopted</td>
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<td>1894-1930</td>
<td>Rule of the oligarchy centered around</td>
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<td>1929-1930</td>
<td>World economic crisis and social conflicts</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>An anti-oligarchic uprising of lieutenants brings Vargas to power; the Constitutional regime is suspended</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Women win the right to vote on a par with men</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>A Constituent Assembly adopts a new Constitution strengthening the central government at the expense of the states, and elects Vargas president</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Communist uprising followed by repression</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>Vargas cancels scheduled elections, dismisses the Parliament parties and the unregistered workers trade unions, and proclaims the Estado Novo</td>
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<td>1937-42</td>
<td>Vargas implements a policy of industrialization and social reforms (reduced workday, minimum legal wage, paid vacation, social insurance) which earns him the title of &quot;father of the poor&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Construction of the Volta Redonda steel complex</td>
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<td>1942/August</td>
<td>Declaration of war on Germany</td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td>Consolidation of the Labor Laws</td>
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<td>1944</td>
<td>Trade union elections are authorized; a strike wave breaks out; the Varguistas and Communists make an alliance in the trade unions under the protection of the Ministry of Labor</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>Vargas is overthrown by a military coup</td>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>The conservative regime of Marshall Dutra begins</td>
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<td>1951</td>
<td>Vargas is elected president on the Brazilian Labor Party ticket (PTB) and appoints Goulart Minister of Labor</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Suicide of Vargas</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Café Filho succeeds Vargas</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Kubitschek is elected president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Major construction work begins on the new capital Brasilia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Quadros is elected president; resigns a few months later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Goulart becomes president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-64</td>
<td>rise of social unrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>/April an uprising of governors and the military overthrows Goulart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>The army names Castelo Branco president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Marshall Costa e Silva dismisses Parliament and launches a dirty war against &quot;subversion&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Populism is nationalist insofar as, being based on an alliance of classes, it claims to represent the people; that is all the classes that constitute the nation. The category "the people" (related to that of "the community") is preferred to that of "classes". (8)

This borrowing from nationalism was credible for certain Latin-American populist regimes because their links to imperialism had been distended by the war. (9) But in the case of Brazil, where the phenomenon continued after Vargas, one should note the anachronistic nature of this nationalism and take into account the charismatic nature of Goulart to explain how this nationalist rhetoric could be accepted despite its lack of basis in reality. (10)

### Brazilian populism in the Latin-American context

#### A comparison with Peronism

"... The resurgence of Brazilian populism is a rather exceptional phenomenon. In fact, it began to find a new vitality in Brazil precisely at the time it began to decline, not to say disappear from the scene, in all the Latin American countries where it had developed (Arbenz in Guatemala in 1953, Rojas Pinilla in Colombia in 1957). Latin American populism was a war-time and postwar phenomenon and proved unable to survive in the international economic and political conditions that arose after the Korean War." (Weffort, "Sindicato e Politica", p. 29)

As indicated, it was the model of accumulation through import substitution that enabled populist movements to grow and consolidate power. In this respect, Brazilian populism was characterized from the outset by the fact that the system of rule did not correspond to the mode of accumulation. This required a violent break as a means to resolve the crisis at a later date.

### Argentine populism

Peronism pursued the same goal as Vargas in Brazil, that is creating the conditions for the industrial bourgeoisie's rule and accelerated industrialization of the country. But it moulded itself in strong institutions; it was based on three elements of the political system, three sources of political power: the army, the trade unions and the political parties. This high degree of institutionalization in Argentina, in contrast to Brazil, was due to the prior existence, on the one hand, of an industrial bourgeoisie and solid layer of entrepreneurs (the agro-exporters), and on

(8) Perón sometimes speaks of "enemy classes" in his speeches, but he prefers the concept of "the people." Populist speeches also use other categories akin to "the masses," like "the dispossessed," "the poor," etc.

(9) This made possible industrialization through import substitution. When the potential of this development model is exhausted, the nationalist-populist formula reaches a dead-end. See Octavio Ianni, "O Colapso do populismo," p. 157ff.

(10) Populism's survival in the Goulart government (1961-64) is explained by Weffort as the result ("a political effect") of the spectacular nature of the solution chosen by Vargas to the institutional crisis (suicide). See Weffort, op. cit., III, p. 31.
the other of a strong and, since the turn of the century, politically well-organized petty bourgeoisie. The fact is, the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) had already been in power several times and remains capable of mobilizing the middle classes down to this day. These are the reasons why the Peronist movement, faced with the challenge of also organizing the masses and incorporating them economically, socially and politically, had to develop a high level of institutionalization. The movement had to organize the different classes in order to facilitate the class alliance that would lead to industrialization and later to the industrial bourgeoisie taking over the state apparatus.

In Argentina, unlike Brazil, populism came on the heels of a period which had seen a tightening of its links to imperialism. (11) We also have to take into account the specific mechanisms established by Perón to make state intervention more effective: the centralization of the insurance system (making possible financial control over the country) and a significant increase of state investments between 1935 and 1950. (12)

As in other semi-industrialized countries, in Argentina there was a shift of the dynamic axis of the economy during the populist regime, from the agro-export sector to the industrial sector. It was this process of accelerated industrialization that made the redistribution of income possible in the Argentine case. "The share of liquid 'income' represented by payments for labor increases steadily during the Peronist period (1946-1955) and drops after Peron's downfall" (13): the figures are conclusive. This is what distinguishes Argentinian from Brazilian populism. In the latter case, there is ample room for polemics over whether redistribution of income actually occurred, independently of the fact that populist policy in Latin America — about this there is unanimity—did benefit the laboring masses as a whole — sometimes at the expense of the landed or export bourgeoisie, sometimes not. This redistributionist policy is also what marks off the ultimate limit of the populist pact, insofar


(12) Mónica Peralta Ramos, Etapas de acumulación y alianzas de clases en la Argentina (1930-1970), Argentina: Siglo XXI, 1973, p. 109: "The state, by centralizing the insurance system in a near-state monopoly, obtained a means of financial control over the country by transforming itself into the main instrument of credit and depriving the industrial bourgeoisie of its monopoly on sources of financing."

See also, idem, p. 105, table VII. Peralta proposes a criterion for periodization which is conceptual in appearance, but in reality empirical (and historical): she distinguishes three phases in Argentina's development process, which correspond to before, during and after Perón (phases of predominance of absolute surplus value, of the domestic market, and of relative surplus value). This sort of periodization entails an impoverishment of the analysis of each period, whereby the simultaneous presence of these different features is not accounted for. One should also note a certain economism in this work, as, for instance, the idea that the non-distribution of income would lead to the autonomy of the labor movement.


The Brazilian Communist Party

1945 was a crucial year in the formation of post-war populist trade-unionism. In 1943, during the Estado Novo, Getúlio Vargas had implemented the Consolidation of Labor Laws which institutionalized a system of trade-union organization — primarily inspired by Mussolini's Carta del Lavoro (Labor Charter)— organically linking trade unions to the state. One of the most important such links was the "trade union tax": this was a compulsory tax paid by all workers (whether union members or not); it was collected by the Ministry of Labor and its proceeds distributed to the trade unions.

In accordance with the orientation decided by the USSR for Communist Parties of all Allied countries, the PCB (Brazilian Communist Party) was following a policy of National Union in 1944-45, and supported the Vargas government which had just declared war on Germany. In April 1945, responding to the pressure of a broad campaign for amnesty, Vargas freed the political prisoners, including Luís Carlos Prestes. Shortly after his release and the legalization of the PCB (May 1945), the party general secretary explained what National Union meant in terms of social conflicts: "The interest of employers and workers is to resolve the unavoidable differences created by life itself directly, in harmonious, frank and loyal fashion, through mixed workplace commissions, and through mutual agreement by the class trade unions... Thanks to its trade-union organizations, the working class can help the government and employers find practical, quick and efficient solutions to the grave economic problems facing us today." (1)

The Brazilian sociologist Francisco Welfort rightly stresses the fundamental importance of the 1945 conjuncture for the consolidation of a populist trade unionism controlled by the state, thanks to PCB policy. According to Welfort, "the explanation of the 'tragedy of the Brazil labor movement'" (that is, its dependence on the state) "must be sought less in the 'unreadiness' of the working class than in the persistent orientation of its self-styled leaders to use this 'unreadiness' for their own political maneuvers." Welfort also rejects the superficial interpretation which claims Communist support for Vargas and the policy of putting a damper on strikes pursued by the PCB in 1945, was the result of an agreement designed to win amnesty and legality for the Party: "The Communists emerged on the postwar scene with a class collaborationist strategy that followed the line of the Soviet Union at that time... In truth, the Communists acted as party of order... It therefore seems clear that at the time the Communists were supporting any government that fitted into the policy established by the international agreements signed at the end of the war." (2)
and Populism in 1945

With the liberalization of the Vargas regime in early 1945, Communist activists resumed their activities in the trade unions and often earned leadership positions. As a result, the Workers Unifying Movement (MUT) could be set up in April 1945, with the participation of 300 trade-union leaders. The MUT was a trade-union organization "parallel" to the official trade-union structure and led by PCB cadres (Roberto Morena, João Amazonas, etc.). However, the MUT did not set itself the goal of bringing about a break of the trade unions from the state and did not challenge the structure inherited from the Estado Novo. It asked for greater trade-union autonomy, but within the framework of dependence on the state. For instance, in an August 1945 statement, a MUT leader argued for "for ever greater independence of the Brazilian trade-union movement, an independence which, does not mean a break with the Ministry of Labor, but actual freedom for our organizations." (3)

In the last months of his government, Getulio Vargas founded the PTB (Brazilian Labor Party) in order to organize his working-class and popular following through the Ministry of Labor and the trade unions. The PCB and PTB waged a joint campaign for Vargas to remain in power, under the slogan: "A Constituent Assembly with Getulio." Broad working-class and popular sectors mobilized in this pro-Vargas movement dubbed "queremismo" because of its central slogan: "Queremos Getulio!" (We want Getulio). But on October 29, a military coup overthrew Getulio and gave the provisional presidency to a representative of the Judicial branch, Linhares. The PCB newspaper carried the following headline a few days later: "What the people is interested in, is the consolidation of the new government." (4)

The working class had to wait 35 years for the formation of the CUT and PT and the emergence (without the PCB's participation and against its policy) of a trade unionism that really stood for class struggle, independence from the state and the rejection of any subordination of the workers to populist politicians.

Michael Löwy

(1) Luis Carlos Prestes, Os problemas atuais da democracia, Rio de Janeiro, 1947 pp. 82-92.
(3) Tribuna Popular (PCB organ) August 8, 1945, quoted by Woffort, op. cit., p. 85.
(4) Tribuna Popular November 4, 1945, quoted by Woffort, p. 103.

as it affects the profit rate negatively and compels capital to replace wages with a higher organic composition of capital.

One should note that foreign capital was quite scarce at the end of the war. This was due to Peron's nationalist policy (with anti-imperialist consequences) of increasing nationalizations and reducing the share of foreign investments to a minimum. But the change in the situation at the end of the Korean War, occurring at the same time as the problems encountered by the capitalists as a result of Peronist policy, enabled the pressure of foreign capital to have an impact on the institutional level: Law 14 222 of 1953, which regulates the transfer of profits abroad, was adopted. (Its equivalent in Brazil is Cafe Filho's Instruction 113 (Law on profits hand-over.)) These problems for the capitalists were compounded by the greater militancy of workers, their unionization, their ability to mobilize and negotiate as a result of Peron's populist movement, the constant wage increases, the tendency towards full employment and the low level of the profit rate.

Class alliances under populism: the Brazilian case

Populism's originality lies in the gap between governmental policy and the interests of capital accumulation, that is, in the last analysis, of the capitalist state. This gap is particularly wide in the case of the Brazilian populism which developed after the postwar period of capitalist reconstruction and survived in particularly contradictory and anachronistic ways until the 1964 coup.

When we say gap, we also mean contradiction —and not harmony— between the state's accumulation and legitimization functions throughout the entire period, even though the high pace of growth in urban industrial and urban employment, as a result of import substitution investments, allowed for cushioning class conflicts. The capitalist state's specific action continues to be contradictory (a contradiction whose foundation rests in the irreducible gap between private ownership of wealth and social relations of production), although its contradictions appear in disguised form under populism. But this is precisely why this regime is the one in which the limits of the capitalist state's legitimization role are displayed most obviously.

The end of slavery freed one million potential consumers, who added their numbers to those of European immigrants. The process of forming a semi-industrialized society had to go through the consolidation of a domestic market and the progressive production of final consumers' good, then equipment goods and intermediate goods. The rise of this industrial structure originated after the 1929 crisis as a response to the difficulty of importing goods caused by the crisis (financial disequilibrium, foreign accounts deficit, devaluation of the currency) in the enlargement of the pre-existing and relatively dif-

(14) Imports (yearly average): 1926-1930: 5 460 000 tons 1931-1935: 3 830 000 tons
ferentiated domestic market. Another problem addressed was the existence of a stock of capital whose capacities were left unused. (14)

As in the case of Argentina, the importance of state intervention is clear, particularly in the area of investment in infrastructural projects. This intervention was complemented by the economic policy pursued by Vargas after World War Two to enhance import of equipment goods, and conversely discourage import of consumer goods. This was the time when laws regulating the conditions of production were drafted by the newly-created Ministry of Labor: regulation of the work day, right to strike, legislation on women's and children's work, and most importantly the principle of the setting of the minimum wage by the state (Consolidation of labor Laws 1943), whose implementation was bolstered by the construction of vertical trade union organically linked to the state. (15)

These are the factors that made it possible to shift the axis of accumulation from agriculture to industry. In fact, if one measures the end of the agro-export economy's hegemony and the beginning of the urban-industrial economy's predominance, in terms of the increasing share of industry in the national income, the shift is only completed in 1956.

With respect to institutional forms, this transition was unlike Argentina's where the Peronist Party was the key instrument crystallizing the changes in "the people's" role and their incorporation into political life. In Brazil, populist-type political movements were never organized as a party. (16)

The rise of class struggle and the decline of the populist state

While, in the first years of his government, Kubitschek managed, thanks to industrialization, to maintain the pact engineered by Vargas between workers, middle layers, industrialists and the rural oligarchy as a "developmentist alliance," the survival of this integrative model became more and more difficult as time wore on.

The class alliance established by Vargas was based on a wager: the viability of an autonomous capitalist development policy. But the very change introduced into the productive structure was bound to render the temporary harmony among classes and class fractions achieved under Vargas's populist regime more difficult. The "developmentist" policy pursued during the first years of the Kubitschek government succeeded in prolonging this harmony for a time. But this very policy, by internationalizing the Brazilian economy and strengthening the industrial bourgeoisie linked to large international capital, undermined and progressively ruined the broadly integrative state born in the 1930s. This evolution laid the groundwork for the break that the 1964 coup would represent. The coup instituted a regime based on exclusion and brought out into the open the class antagonisms which has been masked during the long populist period of Brazilian history.

First indications of this break appeared in 1958 as disagreements emerged between the classes bound by the populist pact and the government. The immediate cause of these disagreements was the sudden spurt of inflation and financial unbalance problems. The urban middle classes began to suffer from the effects of inflation, leading to a general rise of the popular movement for economic demands, visible particularly in the strikes of bank workers in 1958, in the framework of populist trade-unionism. (17) The new minimum wage (January 1959) and the wage increases granted to the military and civil servants only amounted to a readjustment based on the new cost of living index and were not sufficient to allay the discontent.

In turn, the replacement of the old protectionist policy of purchasing the coffee surplus by a more modest program of price support, dealt a blow to the coffee bourgeoisie which openly came out against the government.

Stung by the contradictions of "developmentist" policy, the demonstrations of the labor movement became more and more numerous. But lacking an autonomous project of its own, the movement was channeled into serving bourgeois interests.

Statistics on the number of strikes recorded between 1945 and 1964 in Brazil show this rise in the "developmentist" period (in absolute numbers):

1945: 24
1946: 98
1947: 16
1948: 34
1949: 18
1950: 10
1951: 18
1952: 15
1953: 15
1954: 11
1955: 15
1956: 16
1957: 28
1958: 29
1959: 50
1960: 68
1961: 110
1962: 122
1963: 163

(cited in Welfort, Sindicato e politica, mimeographed, appendix)

(15) For a study of the regulation of capital-labor relations as one of the main function of any capitalist state, see Altvater, L’Etat contemporain et le marxisme, Paris: Maspero, 1976.
(16) There are many variants of such movements: getulismo, trabalhismo, jangustismo, jucellinismo, borghismo and left populism (Arrais, Brizaola) and far-left populism (the Christians of People’s Action, the MNR, etc).
"Developmentism" and anti-imperialism

Thus, the last years of Kubitschek's government saw increasing emphasis on anti-imperialist nationalism — directed against the US and taken even further under Goulart's nationalist government — at the expense of "developmentist" nationalism. The latter aimed to develop the "Nation" through modernization, industrialization, urbanization and democratization of the regime, but did not necessarily imply an anti-imperialist posture. Conversely, the sort of nationalism which prevailed and served, according to Wefort, as the "dominant political idiom in the country" from the late 1950s to 1964, focused on the defense of an autonomous national development project emanating from the bureaucratic layers of the state apparatus as the answer to the restrictions on the sovereignty of the national state. Nationalist ideology was carried forward by a vast movement encompassing intellectuals, the student movement, populist politicians and the national bourgeoisie, which this ideology was supposed to represent, but which was the first to abandon and turn against the movement when it became the political expression of ever broader layers of workers.

Among intellectuals, the debates in the ISEB (founded in 1956 as an adjunct of the Ministry of Education) ended in 1959 with the resignation of the moderates from the Institute. From then on, the ISEB reflected the opinion of the radical national current. In the universities, the UNE (National Student Union) launched vigorous national campaigns against foreign capital and the denationalization of the economy. Finally, among politicians, Brizola expropriated a Rio Grande do Sul affiliate of AMFORD (an electric power corporation) in 1959, contravening official economic policy, and launched a campaign for the expropriation of other affiliates of the same corporation in Minas Gerais and Pernambuco.

This revitalization of nationalism shows that the failure of the autonomous national economic development project, symbolized by Vargas's suicide and materialized in the massive influx of foreign capital into the Brazilian economy beginning in 1956, did not lead immediately, on the strictly political level, to the downfall of the populist pact and the nationalist ideology which fostered it. The slow death of a system of rule that corresponded less on the strictly political level, to the downfall of the regime, and less to the array of productive forces lasted a full ten years.

It is precisely at this moment of decline of populism, when class antagonisms must be erased in favor of the idea of the unity of the people, that nationalism acquired its greatest strength. In such a situation, it becomes a "conservative" movement insofar as it proposes an impossible return to the past in the name of a false dilemma: either development through a massive influx of foreign capital, or development through basic reforms, as if the latter option had not already been tried at the structural level for years.

The nationalists could not recognize the changes underway in the productive structure lest they jeopardize their own existence as carriers of an autonomous capitalist development project.

Recognizing these changes would have implied adopting a perspective that was not merely anti-imperialist but also anti-capitalist, a struggle to change the relations of production, implications which could not be assumed in the framework of the existing class alliance.

Communist Party

As for the Brazilian CP, it helped to strengthen nationalist ideology among the working class. In 1958, the PCB adopted the ideological orientation of the ISEB, labelling "the remaining preoccupation with radicalizing the class struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie to the utmost in the present stage of the Brazilian revolution" as harmful, erroneous and "vulgar economism." (18) Far from offering an independent project to the working class, the fear of isolation from the masses, an isolation suffered between 1947 and 1950 following its removal from the trade unions, led the PCB to act in accordance with the legal structure of the Brazil trade unions.

In 1945, this trade-union structure created during the Vargas dictatorship in the spirit of Italian fascist corporatism, not only stayed in place after the restoration of democratic institutions, but was given a new dynamism and consolidated by the participation of the left, particularly the CP, in the trade unions.

As a result, the 1950s experienced the growth of a populist trade-union movement, with a nationalist orientation, pursuing a policy of reforms and class collaboration, contrary to the that of the pre-1930 Brazilian labor movement — which had combined the struggle against the capitalist system and private property with open hostility to the intervention of the state in labor conflicts. Thus in April 1927, a national labor congress had-experienced the growth of a multi-class alliance, populist trade unionism of the "Developmentist pact and the nationalist ideology which fostered it...

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ers General Command, etc). These could have become the nuclei of a future labor confederation, a development proscribed by the official union structure. (20)

The political and practical consequences of the alliance between the state, the vertical trade union and national bourgeoisie appeared clearly when the National Confederation of Industries [the employers' association] and the workers trade unions joined forces, with the blessing of the Minister of War, to call demonstrations in favor of national industry in 1957 and launch a campaign against the installation of a US military base on Fernando de Noronha island. At the same time, the alliance between the Communist Party and Ministry of Labor run by Goulart in 1959, was endorsed by Kubitschek, and lasted until the coup of 1964.

Early Kubitschek governmental policy had aroused opposition from the nationalist currents. This combined with widespread discontent over the enforcement of the 1958 anti-inflation and currency stabilization program. Kubitschek therefore decided to abandon this unpopular program and operate a pragmatic break with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He also replaced various ministry officials by representatives of the nationalist current. The scuttling of the stabilization plan opened the way to a policy of industrial credit and wage increases and to the continuation of the "Plano de Metas." Nevertheless, this "partial victory" of the nationalist movement changed nothing to the basic trend of the economy towards internationalization, the trend which underpinned the economic supremacy of the industrial bourgeoisie associated with imperialism.

### Populism's usefulness declines

It should be clear how different this new situation was from the time when the weakness of the contending classes on the national scene had led to a compromise solution with a state whose legitimacy derived from the urban popular masses and no group could wield power alone. The very process by which the industrial fraction of the bourgeoisie constituted itself and acquired new strength, particularly after the "revolution of 1930" led to the growing incompatibility between the populist regime and the mode of accumulation maturing under it.

During Goulart's term in office the mass mobilizations that had appeared in the last years of Kubitschek government intensified. The great social convulsions of 1962-64 saw the appearance on the scene of additional social layers such as agricultural workers, who expressed the great political radicalization underway in the countryside and threatened the existing property structure, and lower ranks of the military, such as the sailors and sergents, whose movements undermined the very basis of state power.

The total lack of correspondence between the system of rule and the mode of accumulation ultimately required a complete political break through which the economically dominant class could become also politically hegemonic.

Populism as a strategy for accumulation: Latin America

Carlos M. Vilas

In much of the specialized literature, the term "populism" remains shrouded in vagueness and imprecision.*

Movements and political leaders, governments, ideologies and forms of political life are dubbed populist. It would take too long to try and list all the phenomena that received this label. Indeed, it seems that there has been a populism for every taste — urban populism and agrarian populism, progressive populism and conservative populism, mass populism and elite populism, native populism and Westernized populism, socialist populism and fascist populism, populism "from below" and populism "from above." In short, every kind of populism.

Finding the material base of populism

Hardly exaggerating, you might conclude that in Latin America everything between oligarchic rule, the Cuban revolution and today's Southern Cone dictatorships is one or another form of populism. In these circumstances, the term populism often loses any conceptual value and is reduced to a mere adjective.

At first sight, this vagueness might flow from the derivative character of the concept as it is applied in Latin America. In fact, the concept of populism sprang from two historical situations at the end of the nineteenth century — Czarist Russia and the US South and Midwest. These two situations exhibit such obvious differences from Latin America that keeping this term would make it necessary to reformulate the concept. But reformulating a concept does not necessarily mean imprecision. It seems that in reality the imprecision is bound up with the superstructural and descriptive character of most analyses of this question in the region. With a few exceptions, these analyses have advanced an empirically detectable body of institutional and ideological features, of governmental and sometimes "party" practices. At the same time, they have neglected the study of the structural framework in which they arise, that is, the level of development of the productive forces, the nature of the relationships of production. These analyses have naturally failed to consider the question of whether perhaps in Latin America populism is not something more — whether these politico-institutional and ideological facts do not have roots in the very structure of society, roots that would explain the coincidence of these features.

In general, the deepest going studies of the material bases of populism have been focused on phenomena such as the flight from the land, urbanization and the rise of industrialization. But these undoubtedly important questions are looked at from the standpoint of their impact on the psychological structures of the social actors, or presented as sources of dislocation and distortion within a one-sided process of development. Populism is then portrayed as one of these distortions. More recently, some authors have gone so far as to deny the existence of any link, and still more any causal one, between populism and the level of development of the economic structure and the social classes. (1) Few studies have sought explicitly and systematically either to clarify the conception of populism as used in Latin America — although it exhibits substantial differences from other types of populism — or to point up its structural roots — which means tracing its relationship to a definite phase of development and capitalist accumulation in the region and therefore also a definite stage of class contradictions. This is over and above often imprecise references to a certain connection with import substitution. Woffert and Ianni's studies are undoubtedly the major attempts at this. (2)

Strategy for accumulation

This weakness is all the more evident when you make the comparison with the abundant literature on the two previous "classical" examples [the US Midwest and Russia], which clearly points up the link with specific problems of capitalist accumulation. (3) In both of these cases, the basic explanatory factor is sought and located in the economic structure, while in Latin America — apart from the few works mentioned — the characteristic features of populism are situated on another level.

The objective of this article is to bring out what we might call the "material conditioning factors" of Latin American populism, that is to look for its economic foundations. The theses developed here suggest that the level of development attained by the society's productive forces and the dominant type of production relations not only have "something" to do with populism, but that they are precisely what gives it its characteristics. What is called populism is a specific strategy of capital accumulation — a strategy that accords an essential importance to increasing personal consumption, and possibly to income distribution. It is therefore the accumulation strategy of a certain faction of the bourgeoisie at a given stage in the process of capitalist accumulation.

Base and superstructure

This material dimension of populism in turn determines the kinds of relationship that this faction of the bourgeoisie has

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* This article is an abridged version of Carlos M. Vilas, "El populismo como estrategia de acumulación: América Latina," Crítica de la Economía Política, Ediciones Latinoamericanas (Mexico), Los Populismos, July-December 1981, pp. 95-148. Translated from the Spanish by Tania Morgan.


with other factions of the capitalist class, as well as with the other classes or subordinate factions of the capitalist class. By the same token, it determines this strategy’s politico-ideological superstructural characteristics, its scope and its limits. In other words, it appears that populism as politico-ideological practice suits first of all into the economic structure of a political formation, and from this base may be projected into the superstructures. At the same time, this thesis situates the aspects of consumption and distribution in an unusual way. The distribution of income to the subordinate classes, when it actually takes place, that is, is interpreted here as a phase in the process of accumulation, even as a precondition for it, and this is strictly from an economic standpoint — that is, not only to the extent that increasing popular consumption and income distribution can help to reduce social tensions and bolster the security factor for capital accumulation. Increasing popular consumption and income distribution are not acts of “social justice” — although the bourgeoisie may experience them as that. Nor are they mere political instruments that may be re-sorted to in order to reduce the level of social conflict — although they may be used to that end. Finally, they are not simply displays of populist demagoguery — “dividing up” what is not yet being produced. I do not deny the existence of such things as “distributivist” demagoguery, anticipatory reformist maneuvers or good intentions of noble souls. But I do say that in every case such elements are only the superstructural expressions of a mode of accumulation that necessarily involves increasing personal consumption.

It may be useful to point out that in this article I do not claim to be elaborating a theory of populism which would stand up as an alternative to what we are already familiar with. My objective is much more modest. It is, on the one hand, to formulate and support a few general propositions that highlight the structural matrix of certain politico-ideological processes, which precisely because of this matrix are called populist. On the other, it is to to look at the the superstructural projection of these components of the base in political practices, in the state. What I hope to achieve is a greater conceptual precision in analyzing the economic and political reality of the region, as well as extending the frontiers of intellectual reflection on this question, and more generally on the the peculiarities of a stage of peripheral accumulation. On another level of concerns, I hope to offer somewhat sounder bases for political interpretation and for outlining forms of action....

Politico-ideological dimension of populism

Populism combines mobilizing the masses and manipulating them, organizing them and repressing them. The latter becomes necessary when the techniques of manipulation prove inadequate to contain mobilization within the bounds authorized by the state and to keep the people’s action and organization from acquiring autonomy. The corporatist element that can be perceived in a populist state, the integration into the state apparatus of organizations that nominally represent the specific interests of workers and bosses, seems to be designed principally to diminish or allay differences and conflicts within these two classes. Likewise, through resorting to “intermediary bodies” the authorities seek to diminish and depoliticize social conflicts brought on by transition to a new mode of accumulation. A populist state may therefore, delegate to the bureaucratic apparatuses of these bodies, apparatuses that in the last analysis are given impetus by the state, regulation of its internal sectoral and special-interest-group conflicts. This can reinforce the external image of the state as sensitive to the conflicts in the society and convert the political and ideological confrontations that may arise into matters for administrative regulation.

A conciliatory ideology is thus an essential part of the populist politico-economic project. But what is new in populism is not the ideology of social harmony as such. Such an ideology was already formulated in the liberalism of Frédéric Bastiat. The innovation introduced by populism is that the social harmony it postulates is not between individuals/citizens but essentially among social classes, which until the advent of the populist state were confronted with antagonisms that threatened to destroy the social edifice; and that such harmony is achieved by broadening the participation of the popular classes in political and social life.

Compromises to facilitate the transition

The idea of social harmony reflects the reality of compromises among classes and factions within them from which the populist state springs. This state is one of compromises, but they are concluded in order to give impetus to structural transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial and urban one. This dual character, compromise and transition, is confirmed in every area of state activity. It is seen, for example, in populist nationalism. In fact, the anti-imperialism of populist states has had the aim of readjusting the mechanisms connecting the foreign sector and the internal market, not eliminating foreign capital but modernizing it, that is, shifting it toward sectors strategic for the new mode of accumulation and therefore less sensitive from the ideological standpoint. The conflicts between this new mode of productive and foreign capital bear essentially on the type of investment that forms the framework of the agricultural export pattern — public services, mining, fuel and energy, and similar things. Therefore, at the same time that the state has intervened in the “backward” foreign sector — by methods running the gamut from simple regulation and not very scrupulous monitoring of foreign activity to more or less extensive nationalizations — policies have been set in motion to attract foreign activity into the new priority sectors of industrial capital. In the framework of these policies, instruments have been devised to serve as bridges between national industrial capital (either private or state) and foreign capital — joint venture agreements, provision of modern
technology, etc. The scant success that such projects have achieved in the context of populism is well known. However, it should be noted that within this scheme itself we find prefigured some key elements of the strategy of accumulation which would spell the end of the populist model. (4)

**Redistributing the national income**

In the literature on this subject, you often see, as if it were self-evident, an equation between populism and distribution, or even distributivism, connoting “exaggerated” or “excessive” levels of distribution. This equation, however, is an overgeneralization. The presentation above suggests that the distributive element, *when it is actually there*, has been fundamentally a component of a strategy of accumulation. In this sense, populism can be characterized as a strategy of accumulation that “involves” distribution. But even in this way, with this explanation of the specific type of relationship between accumulation and distribution that is distinctive of populism, such a characterization is still excessive. Income distribution in *real terms* in favor of the popular classes is *not a constant of populism*. It is undeniable that certain populist policies have been aimed at giving a larger share of the national income to wage earners, but it is also undeniable that at the same time as the populist state has tried to distribute income, the society has managed to concentrate it, among other ways through inflation and a widening gap between productivity increases and wage increases. There have thus been populist experiments that have actually improved the incomes of the masses in real terms. Peronism in Argentina and “Batllismo” in Uruguay are probably the least disputable examples of this. (5) The Brazilian populism of the long Vargas period seems, on the other hand, to represent an opposite example, in which nominal increases were not enough to compensate for the fall in the level of real wages. (6) The Cárdenas government in Mexico, that of Goulart in Brazil and the experience of the military government in Peru present more variegated pictures. (7)

Moreover, it is well known that in their bursts of distributive generosity, the populists have generally left out the rural masses. The typical case may be Brazil, where the populist project was financed ultimately by the rural masses. When in the last gasps of populism the Goulart government tried to take its reform policy into the countryside, the attempt accelerated the breakdown of the experiment and the turning against it of all the possessing classes. The most familiar exceptions to the limitation of distributive policies to the cities are the Cardenista regime in Mexico and the phase of the Peruvian military government that concluded in 1975. In both countries, populism was based largely on a determined push given to on-going processes of agrarian reform.

This made it possible to open up the countryside for industrial production, and cleared the way for accelerated rural class differentiation, lower prices for urban labor power and a capitalist modernization of agriculture. Argentina and Uruguay — where the concept of “rural masses” has to suit the specific conditions of their agrarian economies — represent more complex cases. In these countries, there is no process of redistributing land ownership, but there was a certain modernization in the organization of production and in class relations. There were likewise some attempts to bring about a partial transfer of land rent to the dispossessed rural classes, and, of course, to the bourgeoisie and urban wage earners.

**Populist rhetoric**

The populist political language expresses with an almost transparent clarity the various constituent elements of the populist project, its ideological ingredients and the interconnection among them — the apparent subordination of production to the consumption of wage earners; accumulation through expanding the consumption of wage earners; the characterization of capitalist exploitation as a deformation and abuse, rather than as the essence of the productive system; the broadening of popular consumption and the strengthening of the trade-union organizations in order to consolidate the political subordination of the masses, to offer support to the state and head off “overflows” and “excesses” by the popular classes; the autonomous role of the state as the supreme manager of social harmony and political cooperation among the classes.

“Consumption must not be subordinated to production; that is, capital and its convenience have to be subordinated to consumption and to needs. This is the theory of *justicialismo* [the philosophy of social justice]... When we increase the standard of living and strengthen consumption, we subordinate capital to the economy and production to consumption. We do not ask the industrialists if they are going to produce more when we increase wages five times and boost consumption by five times. We do not ask them if they are departing from the optimum balance. We do not care about that. Now they are producing more... Everyone is better fed, better dressed, leading a happier life, and the capitalists are making more money.” (8)

**“Social harmony”**

“Today we know that the efforts on behalf of the workers not only do not harm progressive and well-intentioned industrialists but improve the general conditions for production and industrial development of the country and for the intellectual and economic advance of agricultural workers and the industrial trades.” (9) “In Brazil capital has no reason to fear, if it understands how
to employ the deep wisdom of self-limitation."(10) "The possessing classes that genuinely contribute to national grandeur and prosperity, honest merchants, working and fair industrialists, farmers who increase the fertility of the land have no reason to harbor fears... Those who work with the people and for the people ought never to fear the power of the people. What the law does not protect or tolerate is abuses, unbridled speculation, crime, unfairness, profits by all the castes of favorites and all sorts of traffickers who feed on the poverty of others, trade in the hunger of their fellow human beings and sell even their souls to the devil to accumulate wealth off the sweat, the anxiety and the sacrifice of the majority of the population." (11)

"We are at a turning point, where we have to choose between two roads, the road of voluntary social reform or that of violence, which builds nothing."(12) "In Europe and in Asia, as well as in the countries of Latin America, economic difficulties are perennial seeds of social unrest. It is necessary to remedy them in time in order to keep the people from becoming agitated and taking justice into its own hands."(13) "The working masses that have not been organized present a dangerous picture, because the most dangerous masses undoubtedly are those that are not organized. Modern experience shows that the best organized masses of workers are undoubtedly those that can be directed and better led on all levels... There is only one way of solving the problem of mass agitation, and that is genuine social justice commensurate with the possibilities offered by the country’s wealth and its own economy, since the welfare of the ruling classes and the working classes is always a direct concomitant of the national economy. Exceeding that means heading for an economic cataclysm. Lagging behind it means heading for a social cataclysm.... It is necessary to give workers what they earn by their labor and what they need to live decently... You have to know how to give up 30 per cent in time rather than lose everything later."(14) "The people must, therefore, organize, not only to defend its own interests but also to offer the government the indispensable base of support for carrying out its proposals."(15)

"In the economic field... We want to eliminate the capitalist economy of exploitation and replace it with a social economy, in which there will be neither exploiters no exploited... We want to eliminate the abuse of property, which in our time has come to be an anachronism that brings about the destruction of social property, because individualism practised in that way creates a society of egoists and soulless people who think only of enriching themselves, even though this can only be accomplished by driving millions of their brothers of the classes less favored by fortune into hunger, poverty and desperation."(16) "The system that is being born... must have a gratifying social meaning for a bourgeoisie that today must respect the masses if it wants to keep its business."(17)

"The common good"

"In the future, Brazilian society will no longer be divided between rich and poor, powerful and humble. It will be a people united by understanding, by a sense of reality, for the common good."(18) "My proposals were always social equilibrium, a harmony of interests between the producing class and the working classes, political concord and the sharing of the goods and wealth of the collectivity." (19) "Either we remedy calmly and with a proper sense of the circumstances the evils that afflic the people, or the people will lose confidence and harm itself, falling into deplorable excesses. If we really aspire to live like civilized people, we do not have to accept the brutalizing sway of the law of animal selection, the exploitation of man by man, as the precondition for prosperity." (20) "In a society consumed by social struggles, we are an example of social cooperation... (Facing) the infamy and shame of the exploitation of man by man [we are] a perfect world represented by the social-justice philosophy based on giving dignity to labor, on raising the level of social culture and on humanizing capital." (21) "We aspire to eliminate and end forever this fateful cycle of sterile struggles between capital and labor and open a cycle in which the goods that God has chosen to implant in this earth will be shared harmoniously so that we will all be happier, if we are able to renounce avarice, ambition and envy." (22) "Trade unions have completely common objectives with the national entrepreneurs. That is, a union leader has to know how to defend his source of work, and entrepreneurs have to defend their enterprises." (23) "Let us proceed to reconcile capital and labor under a tutelage exercised through the guiding activity of the state... because it is undeniable that we must not forget that the state, which represents all the inhabitants of the country, also has its interest to defend — the common good — without harming one group or the other." (24)
Revolutionary Marxist bibliography

Note: Works on Latin American populism are too numerous to cite here. Following, are a few articles of the revolutionary Marxist current since the 1970s.

In English

In Spanish

Chap. 2: "L'echec du populisme au militarisme."

Pérez de Benavides, caudillos y elites. La dependencia socialdemocracia en América Latina.


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Cerruti Costa, Luis. El sindicalismo, las masas y el poder.


Huizier, Gerrit. La lucha campesina en México.


Perelman. Como hicimos el 17 de octubre.


Tannenbaum, Frank. The Mexican Agrarian Revolution. 1929.

Tello, Carlos. La tenencia de la tierra en México.


Also:


Agustín: communist trade unionist in telephones, participated in the sugar-workers strike in the Tucumán region (October 1948) under Perón; arrested by police he died under torture.

Aleman, Miguel Valtiés (born 1902): leader of the PRI and president of Mexico 1946-1952. Symbol of the right-wing reaction to the Cárdenas reforms, thus the term Alemánismo.


Amilpa, Fernando: Mexican trade-unionist, leader of the CTM Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917:

Avila Camacho, Manuel (1897-1950): president of Mexico 1946-1952. He was elected deputy during the revolution of Francisco I. Madero, designated president by the military junta in the coup d'état in 1913.


Bartolomé de las Casas, the missionary, leader of the Indian resistance in the New World.

Barría, Gonzalo: Venezuelan politician, member of Acción Democrática.

Bastiat, Frédéric (1801-1850): French economist, advocated free trade and social harmony.


Bolivian revolution of 1952: launched by the MNR and the COB (Bolivian Workers' Confederation), it led to the nationalization of the tin mines and an agrarian reform.

Bonaparte, Louis-Napoleon (1803-1873): French officer, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, leader of the underground Bonapartist movement 1832-48, he preached "democratic charism". He was elected deputy during the revolution of February 1848, then president in December. By a coup d'état on December 2, 1851, he dissolved the Assembly and had his action approved by a plebiscite. Proclaimed Emperor Napoleon III in 1852, his regime remained dictatorial until around 1869. He was overthrown in 1870.

Bonapartism: French political movement in favour of a regime led by a Bonaparte. Used here as Marxist term of political analysis indicating a regime detached from the traditional parties and factions, based on the army, police and administration, centered around a "strong man" or "providential man," generally putting an end to a turbulent period.

Bordellos: Argentine trade-union leader of the CGT; close to the SF, he rallied to Perón in 1945. In 1953, as Minister of the Interior, he oversaw the repression of dissident trade unionists.

Braden, Sprullcle: US ambassador in Argentina May 1945-46, he campaigned against Perón accusing him of being "a Nazi agent".


Brazilian laborism: see Goulart and PDT.

Brizola, Leonel: Brazilian politician, supporter of the old PTB of Vargas, governor of Rio Grande do Sul (1958-61); exiled in 1964; founded the PDT on his return, associated to the SI, and was elected governor of Rio de Janeiro in 1982.

Calles, Plutarco Elías (1877-1945): Mexican president 1924-28, he fought against the Church and favored the bourgeoisie. Founded the PRM, ancestor of the PNR and PRI, and sponsored the presidents elected up until 1934. Opposed to the Cárdenas reforms, he went into exile in the US (1936-45).

Campos, Simon: Argentine trade unionist, dissident Peronist, leader of the POTT, arrested during the sugar strike in 1948.

Cárdenas, Lázaro (1895-1970): head of an army in the Mexican revolution, then general, governor of Michoacan and leader of the PNR, he was president 1934-40 and implemented a sweeping agrarian reform, the nationalization of oil and the railways, and social laws. He was then minister of Defence and later commander in chief of the army. Cárdenism is the radical wing of the PRI.

Carranza, Venustiano (1859-1920): Mexican land owner, governor, adversary of Porfirio Díaz, he supported Madero and became the head of the constitutionalist movement after the assassination of Díaz. Temporary president despite the opposition of Villa and Zapata in 1915, elected president in 1917, he was overthrown and assassinated in 1920. "Carrancismo" is the moderate wing of the Mexican revolution.

Casa Rosada: the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Castele, Braucio, Humberto de Alencar (1900-67): Brazilian marshall, designated president by the military junta in the coup d'état in 1964.

Caudillo: in Castilian "chief," with a connotation of charisma.
Glossary

Thus "caudillismo", a system of personalized dictatorship in Latin America in the 19th century.

Cedillo, Saturnino (1880-1939): Mexican general, governor of San Luis Potosí, he led an attempt at armed resistance to Cárdenas in 1938.

CGT (Confederación General del Trabajo) (Argentina): congress of Argentine trade unions founded in 1930, purged and transformed by Perón in 1943 and one of the main pillars of his regime. At the fall of Perón in 1955, the Aramburu junta replaced his leaders by military officers.

Charro: a type of Mexican costume, then nickname of a railway union leader, today term describing the "scab" bureaucrats of the Mexican unions.

CIO (Confederación de los Trabajadores de Mexico): trade-union federation of Mexican peasant associations. Founded in 1938.

Federación Obrera Tucumana de la Industria Azucarera (Argentina): sugar workers union in Tucumán province.

Framini, Andrés: Argentine trade unionist, general secretary of the CGT at the time of the coup d'état of September 16, 1955; afterwards tried to coexist with the military dictatorship. Symbolized official right-wing Peronism.


Garan, Raul (1895-1979): leader of the FORIA.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1749-1837): German writer "gorillas": pejorative term designating the army in Latin America.

Goulart, João (Jango) (born 1918): Brazilian politician, minister of labour under Vargas's second regime and Kubitschek's, vice-president under Quadros, became president 1961-64; he was overthrown by the 1964 military coup d'état. The movement of his supporters was called "janguism."

Grau San Martín, Ramón: Cuban democratic politician, carried to power by the popular uprising in 1933 he implemented a liberal social policy; overthrown by Batista in 1934; head of the Authentic party, elected president 1944-48.

Groove, Marmaduke: leader of a revolt of young Chilean officers who briefly established a socialist republic in 1932, deposed to Easter Island.

Guatemala: see Vargas

Haya de la Torre, Victor Raul (1895-1979): Peruvian student leader, founded APRA in 1923, and was presidential candidate in 1933. Imprisoned, underground, then exiled he influenced the Bustamante government in 1945 and almost won the elections in 1962. Ideologue of indigenista (native American) populism, opposed to both US imperialism and communism in the third world. From 1935, the anti-communism overtook the anti-imperialism. Allied with the army, he presided over the Constituent Assembly of 1978.

Huerta, Adolfo de la (1883-1955): provisional president of Mexico (1920) then member of the Huerta/Obrégón/Calles triumvirate until the assassination of Carranza; rebelled against Calles in 1924, exiled to the USA, pardoned by Cárdenas.


Janglismo: see Goulart

Jauretche, Arturo († 1970): leader of the FORA.

July 26th Movement: clandestine Cuban movement founded in 1955 by Fidel Castro for the struggle against the Batista dictatorship, particularly by guerrilla warfare; led the insurrection of December 1958-January 1959 and successive governments; later fused with other groups and renamed Cuban Communist Party.

Justicialismo: ideology of the Argentine CGT and Peronist party whose statutes were adopted in December 1947 (see Peronism).

Kubitschek de Oliveira, Juscelino (b. 1902): governor of Minas Gerais, president of Brazil 1955-60, he started the building of the new capital Brasilia.

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Kubitschek de Oliveira, Juscelino (b. 1902): governor of Minas Gerais, president of Brazil 1955-60, he started the building of the new capital Brasilia.
**Populism in Latin America**

**Lecén Ovando, Juan**: leader of the federation of the Bolivian miners' unions, founded the PPN.

**Lombardo Toledano, Vicente** (1893-1968): Mexican lawyer, leader of the CTRA in 1936, ally of the CP; excluded from the CTRA in 1947 for his anti-Russian orientation, he subsequently formed the People's Socialist Party (PSP).

**Machado y Morales, Gerardo** (1871-1959): Cuban general, dictator in 1924; under the impact of the crisis he was dropped by Roosevelt and withdrew in 1933.

**Manley, Michael**: Jamaican journalist and then trade-unionist.

**Lombardo Toledano, Vicente** (1893-1968): Mexican lawyer, founder of MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario - Revolutionary Movement) (Bolivia): populist party founded in 1941, created the Social Revolutionary party.

**Volya (People's National Party)** (Brazil): party founded by Brizola in the 1980s; started an agrarian reform and a guerrilla warfare.


**PDT** (Partido democrático trabalhista, Democratic Labor Party) (Brazil): party founded by Brizola in the 1980s; started an agrarian reform and a guerrilla warfare.

**Ramos**: see Raffaelli, Miguel.

**Perón, Juan Domingo** (1895-1974): Argentine soldier, taught in the officers' school, member of the Group of Officers United (GOU), he participated in the coup d'état of 1943 and took the post of Labor Secretary and then vice-president. Pushed out by the moderates on October 9, 1945, he was re-established by a popular uprising October 17, 1945. Elected president in 1946 and 1951. Overthrown by a military coup d'état in 1955 he went into exile and tried but failed a comeback in 1965. The 1973 elections brought him back to power.

**Perón Duarte, Eva María** (1919-52): of popular origin, second wife of J.D. Perón, she led the women's branch of the Peronist party, campaigned for votes for women and directed a foundation for aid to workers; proposed by the trade unions for vice-president in 1951, she became the symbol of Peronist workers.

**Pentón**: see Raffaelli, Miguel.


**Peronism**: Argentine movement supported by a majority wing of the CCT and the Justicialist Party, it received 55% of the vote in 1952, 37% in 1965; later, under the label of FRELULI (Justicialist Front for Liberation), its candidate Jorge Campora won the 1973 elections with 49.6% and called back Perón who was elected with 61.5%. Despite deep-going differentiation since 1973 it retains a sizeable electorate.


**PNR** (Partido Nacional Revolucionario) (Mexico): founded in 1929 by Calles, ancestor of PRM and PRL.

**Popular Front**, tactic of: the line of the Communist Parties decided at the 7th Congress of the Communist International (1935), advocating alliance with the national bourgeoisie in Latin America particularly when it is allied with the allies of the USSR. "Porfirato": regime of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico, 1917-1911, favorable to the oligarchy.
eminent 1974, prime minister 1976-78; elected president in 1983; active in right wing of Socialist International.

Socialist International (SI): successor of the right and center of the Second International (founded in 1889) and the Workers' and Socialist International (founded in 1923); reconstituted at the Frankfurt Conference in 1951 by the social-democratic parties.

Southern Cone (Cono Sur): Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia.

SR (Socialist Revolutionaries): party of Russian populists founded in 1901 by Tchernov and others; in 1917 three wings existed: a liberal right rallied to Kerensky, the center under Tchernov, and a left which governed with the Bolsheviks from October 1917 to March 1918.


Torrijos Herrera, Omar (1919-1981): Panamanian general in power 1968-81; demanded the nationalization of the Panama Canal.

Union Civica Radical: Argentine Radical Party, founded in 1896, in power 1916-30 under Yrigoyen.

Union Democratica: in the Argentine elections of February 1946, this coalition composed of the Communist, Socialist, Popular Democratic parties and Radical Civic Union, supported by the US, stood the radical Tamborini against Peron.

Vandor, Augusto Timoteo (b 1969): Peronist trade-unionist, leader of the CGT in the 1960s during which he incarnated the trade-union bureaucracy ready to collaborate with the different post-Peronist regimes; killed in 1969.

VAR-Palmares (Vanguardia Armada Revolucionaria-Palmares) (Brazil): armed organization in late 1960s; the "palmares" were formations of rebellious slaves in Brazil.

Vargas, Gutierrez (1883-1954): Brazilian lawyer, of a well-known family in Rio Grande do Sul (RGS), minister of Finances 1926-28. Unsuccessful candidate for president, he launched the "revolution of 1930" in October and became temporary president (1930-34). In 1934 the Constituent Assembly elected him president. In 1937, he cancelled the planned elections and established the Estado Novo. In August 1942 he declared war on Germany. Vargas was overthrown by a pronunciamento in 1945. Senator for RGS (1945-50), he formed the Partido trabalhista brasileiro (PTB) and was elected president in 1950. Committed suicide in 1954.

Vargism: see Goulart, PDT and Vargas.

Velasquez, Fidel: Mexican trade-unionist, leader of the CTM since the 1930s, symbol of the charro bureaucracy: that "fidelismo."


Villa, Pancho (1878-1923): leader of the revolutionary armies of north-west Mexico, with Madero against Diaz. After many eventful campaigns, he laid down his arms in 1920 after an agreement with Obregon. Murdered in 1923.

Zapata, Emiliano (1877-1919): peasant from Morelos, elected to the defence council of his village in 1909 he led the land occupation, then took Cuernavaca at the head of a peasant army; he broke with Madero when the latter refused to distribute land, and led a peasant uprising in the South for the agrarian reform of the "Ayala Plan" (1911). He then organized the division of land, cooperatives and rural loans and took Mexico in 1914, a step recognized by the Constitution of 1917; murdered on Carranza's orders in 1919. "Zapatismo" incites radical agrarian reform.
**Populism in Latin America**

A collection of essays selected by

Michael Löwy

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- Populism, Nationalism and Class Independence in Latin America, by Michael Löwy
- Obregonism and Cardenism in Mexico 1920-1940, by Adolfo Gilly
- Peronism Yesterday and Today, by the PRT of Argentina (1972)
- Towards a "Semi-industrial" Capitalist State - The Role of Populism in Brazil (1930-1960), by Helena Hirata
- Populism as a strategy for accumulation: Latin America
  by Carlos M. Vilas

Works Cited
Glossary of People and Events

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In most Latin American countries, workers have not formed mass political parties and trade unions independent of the ruling class. Large sections of the worker and peasant masses remain attached to populist parties, which are bourgeois parties; these govern in half the countries of the continent.

But the vulnerability of these regimes to military coups, their hesitation to stop the drain of the foreign debt and the collapse of the "economic miracles" in the current economic crisis have given rise to doubts. The experience of Cuba and Nicaragua is being examined by many activists. In Brazil, the Workers Party (PT) and United Workers Central (CUT) show the way to independent political action and class-struggle trade unionism. Many populist parties have sought closer links with the Socialist International. How far can this trend go?

The past can help to understand the limits of populism's appeal and flexibility. The essays presented here analyze what made populism attractive and what made its rule possible in the three main countries of Latin America at the high point of populism.

Michael Löwy is a research fellow of France's National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and a collaborator of the International Institute for Research and Education. Adolfo Gilly is a revolutionary Marxist and the author of *The Mexican Revolution*, widely acclaimed as a major historical work. The pamphlet of the Argentine PRT (Revolutionary Workers Party) was written in 1972-73, at a time when the party was led by people like Roberto Santutcho and Daniel Pereyra and embodied the identification of their generation with the Cuban revolution. Helena Hirata is a Marxist sociologist and a member of the Brazilian PT. Carlos M. Vilas is an Argentine independent Marxist currently serving as an economic adviser to the Nicaraguan Sandinist government.

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