



Review Articles

A la conquista de la clase obrera: Los comunistas y el mundo del trabajo en la Argentina, 1920–1935, Hernán Camarero, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2007

Historia del trotskismo en Argentina y América Latina, Osvaldo Coggiola, Buenos Aires: Ediciones RyR, 2006

Marx en la Argentina: Sus primeros lectores obreros, intelectuales y científicos, Horacio Tarcus, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI editores, 2007

Abstract

Argentine historiography in general, and the history of the Argentine Left in particular, does not receive the attention it deserves in the Anglo-Saxon academic world, due to linguistic and cultural barriers. In this article, we attempt to review for the English-reading public three recent contributions to the history of Marxism in Argentina (Horacio Tarcus's *Marx en la Argentina: Sus primeros lectores obreros, intelectuales y científicos*, Hernán Camarero's *A la conquista de la clase obrera: Los comunistas y el mundo del trabajo en la Argentina, 1920–1935* and Osvaldo Coggiola's *Historia del trotskismo en Argentina y América Latina*) covering the entire historical spectrum from the early history of Argentine socialism to the history of the PCA and, finally, to the history of local Trotskyism. We attempt to place these works in the context of Argentine historiography and of the political context in which those books were written.

Keywords

Argentina, communism, socialism, anarchism, Trotskyism

New Research on the History of Marxism in Argentina

Socialism

For many decades, the history of socialism attracted relatively scant attention from professional historians in Argentina. The main works on the subject were written by members of the Socialist Party itself, such as Jacinto Oddone, the author of two classic works on the history of socialism and the trade-unions in the pre-Peronist stage.¹ Many other socialist leaders and intellectuals – such as Américo Ghioldi, Enrique Dickmann, Manuel Palacín, Martín Casaretto, Dardo Cúneo and Luis Pan – wrote memoirs, historical assessments and biographies, especially of Juan Bautista Justo (1865–1928), the historic

1. Oddone 1934, 1949.

leader of Argentine socialism.² Most of these works were written during the rise of Peronism, when socialists saw their influence on the working class suddenly wane. They therefore described the previous decades as a ‘lost paradise’ where Argentine workers marched behind socialist and anarchist banners, offering a heavily apologetic interpretation of their parties’ past and failing to address the reasons for their own rapid political collapse. Despite their value as historical sources, these interpretations tended to ignore the complexities and strong internal controversies that marked the Socialist Party’s history, providing instead retrospective support for Justo’s reformist line.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the ascent of Peronism gave birth to a national-populist historiography on Argentine socialism. Authors like Rodolfo Puiggrós, Juan José Hernández Arregui, Alberto Belloni and Jorge Abelardo Ramos described Argentine Marxism as an exotic flower, alien to the ‘real’ national problems and prone to adopt pro-imperialist positions due to its links with foreign political currents. Though the scholarly standards of those works were very poor, they had a strong influence on local public opinion for several decades.

The first scholarly works on the history of the Argentine labour-movement began to appear in the late 1960s and early 1970s.³ ‘Militant’ historiography continued with works on the origins of socialism in Argentina inspired by a Maoist split in the local Communist Party.⁴ Those contributions had the merit of reproducing the work of German pioneers of socialism in Argentina, but they focused on an apologetic vindication of the ‘founding father’ of Argentine socialism, the German mining engineer Germán Avé-Lallemant (1835–1910), who was depicted as a revolutionary leader, as opposed to Justo’s reformism, instead of evaluating them both in their historical context. Finally, mention should be made of syndicalism, which developed in Argentina as a split of the Argentine Socialist Party in 1905–6 and became a strong current within the local labour-movement until the rise of Peronism. During the 1960s, Sebastián Marotta wrote the ‘official’ syndicalist history of the Argentine labour-movement in three volumes.⁵

From the military coup of 1976 until the return of democracy in Argentina in 1983, valuable work was done by foreign historians. This included the standard history of the Argentine Socialist Party in English⁶ and major histories of anarchism in Argentina,⁷ which complemented the pioneering work of Diego Abad de Santillán,⁸ an historic leader of anarchism in both Argentina and Spain.⁹ Within Argentina itself, the history of socialism remained largely outside the scope of professional historiography during the dictatorship. After 1983, labour-history ballooned, but research focused on the social rather than on the political history of the labour-movement. This relative neglect was probably due to the

2. See, for example, Ghioldi 1933 and Cúneo 1956.

3. See, for example, Panettieri 1967 and Spalding 1970, the latter an important compilation of historical sources.

4. Ratzler 1970 and Paso 1974.

5. Marotta 1960–70.

6. Walter 1977.

7. Oved 1978; Zaragoza Ruvira 1978; Zaragoza Rovira 1996.

8. Abad de Santillán 1930, 1933.

9. For recent contributions to the history of Argentine anarchism, see Suriano 2001, López Trujillo 2005, and Diz and López Trujillo 2007.

setbacks experienced by the working class during the 1990s. Nevertheless, there were some important exceptions: Julio Godio wrote a massive history of the Argentine labour-movement in four volumes which devoted some attention to the socialist and communist currents,¹⁰ and Víctor García Costa¹¹ and Roberto Reinoso¹² edited useful anthologies of the early-socialist periodicals in Argentina.

In recent years, following the path traced by José María Aricó,¹³ a number of works on the origins of Marxism in Argentina have appeared, such as the recent edition of a bilingual anthology of articles from the German socialist newspaper *Vorwärts*, published in Buenos Aires from 1886 to 1901.¹⁴ This renewal of political historiography on the Argentine labour-movement owes much to the Centre of Documentation and Research of Left-Wing Culture in Argentina (Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas en Argentina – CeDInCI), directed by Horacio Tarcus, which opened to the public in 1998. This is particularly important due to the wretched state of Argentina's academic infrastructure, particularly its libraries. Thanks to the CeDInCI, especially its newspaper-archive, precious sources on the history of Argentina's Left are being preserved and made accessible to historians.

Horacio Tarcus, the editor of a biographical dictionary of the Argentine Left,¹⁵ is perhaps the main intellectual historian of Argentine Marxism, which is rather paradoxical given his outspoken contempt for the local Marxist organisations. His first book, *El marxismo olvidado en la Argentina*,¹⁶ tried to reconstruct the Marxist traditions linked to the names of Silvio Frondizi and Milcíades Peña in the 1960s and 1970s by offering an analysis of Argentina's class-structure, its agrarian régime, failed process of industrialisation, and, generally speaking, the peculiarities of Argentina's capitalist development. Tarcus's latest book, *Marx en la Argentina*, goes back in time to deal with the history of Marxism in Argentina from the Paris Commune up to 1910, centring on the reception of Marx's work by socialists and academicians during the period of the First and Second Internationals. It focuses on the first Marxist analyses of Argentina's social formation, which gave birth to a tradition later elaborated upon by authors analysed in *El marxismo olvidado en la Argentina*, such as José Boglich, Liborio Justo, Antonio Gallo, Ernesto Giudici, Rodolfo Puiggrós, Luis Sommi, Jorge Abelardo Ramos, Milcíades Peña and Silvio Frondizi.

Tarcus argues that there are two ways of approaching Argentina's social formation: one which sees Spanish colonisation as predominantly feudal – a thesis upheld by liberal historians, but also by Communist and populist authors such as Rodolfo Puiggrós – and another school which argues that Argentina's settlement had a capitalist character from the start (Juan B. Justo, José Boglich, Sergio Bagú, Silvio Frondizi, Milcíades Peña and so on). A characterisation of Argentina's social formation as feudal had, as its political corollary,

10. Godio 1987–90.

11. García Costa (ed.) 1985.

12. Reinoso 1985.

13. Aricó 1999. Aricó's article on Juan B. Justo was originally written in the early 1980s, but did not appear as a book until 1999, almost a decade after the author's death.

14. Tarcus, Zeller and Carrera (eds.) 2008.

15. Tarcus (ed.) 2007.

16. Tarcus 1996.

the need for a bourgeois-democratic revolution, while the logical inference from its characterisation as capitalist was that a socialist revolution was required. In *El marxismo olvidado en la Argentina*, Tarcus reconstructed the whole debate, while clearly siding with the latter line of analysis.

Tarcus, who is a scrupulous and talented historian – according to his own account, his main intellectual influences are Eric Hobsbawm, Georges Haupt, Robert Paris, Franco Andreucci, Perry Anderson, and the local historians José María Aricó and Oscar Terán – unfortunately has a penchant for academic fads, and, therefore, the introductory chapters of his books, which outline his theoretical framework, are always the hardest to read. *Marx en la Argentina*, for instance, criticises Marx and his local followers for their *cientificismo* (a word with derogatory connotations suggesting an over-emphasis on scientific ideas) and begins by summarising Hans Robert Jauss's 'reception-theory', a branch of aesthetics derived from the 'hermeneutics' of Heidegger's follower Hans-Georg Gadamer. Whatever the faults of 'vulgar Marxism', a materialist approach – which, in this case, would have meant beginning with an overview of the social, demographic and economic structure of Argentina in the late-nineteenth century – would have served Tarcus better than Jauss's musings on aesthetics.

In *Marx en la Argentina*, Tarcus offers a periodisation of the early history of Marxism in Argentina in four stages. He shows that Marxism first entered the country in the 1870s through the French-speaking exiles of the Paris Commune, particularly the young Belgian Raymond Wilmart (1850–1937), sent by the International Workingmen's Association to Buenos Aires in 1872. Discouraged by the lack of theoretical interest of the local Communards and their readiness to turn to real-estate speculation, Wilmart eventually participated in Argentina's civil wars, married a lady from the aristocracy of Córdoba Province and died a wealthy lawyer in Buenos Aires. Tarcus locates the first reference to Marx in *La Nación*, Argentina's main bourgeois daily, in an article published in August 1872, where he is referred to as 'a true Lucifer'. But, on the occasion of Marx's death eleven years later, the same newspaper published a laudatory obituary by José Martí, then a Cuban exile in New York, which Tarcus reproduces in the appendices to his book.

To describe the second stage in the introduction of Marxism in Argentina, Tarcus shifts his focus from the French-speaking to the German-speaking community, which, in the 1880s, included a high percentage of exiles due to Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws. The main personality during that period was the mining-engineer Germán (Hermann) Avé-Lallemant who, after arriving from Germany in 1870, settled in the remote province of San Luis, on the Chilean border, where he converted to Marxism in 1888. Like another pioneer of Marxism in America, the German-American Friedrich Sorge, Lallemant operated first and foremost within the German community. Grouped around the *Verein Vorwärts*, the German pioneers of Marxism in Argentina edited in Buenos Aires the weekly *Vorwärts* and a Spanish newspaper called *El obrero*. Lallemant, a correspondent to *Die Neue Zeit*, the theoretical journal of German Social Democracy edited by Kautsky, is an important figure because of pioneering attempts to analyse the reasons for Argentina's backwardness, even if he did it from a peculiar perspective (he opposed agrarian reform and, in despair at the incompetence of the local ruling classes, harboured hopes of the 'progressive' influence of pan-Americanism). Tarcus's analysis of the Second-International period is not as exhaustive as the previous or the following ones – indeed, it has already been partially superseded by the bilingual anthology of the Buenos Aires *Vorwärts*. Nevertheless, his sections on Lallemant

remain by far the best overview of the activity and ideas of this key-figure in the origins of Argentine Marxism.

Tarcus locates the beginning of the third period in the history of Argentine socialism at the publication of the first local edition of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1893, followed shortly afterwards by the launch of the newspaper *La Vanguardia* in 1894, the formation of the Partido Socialista Obrero Argentino in 1896 and by the Spanish edition of the first volume of *Capital*, translated by Justo. Borrowing from Aricó's work, Tarcus analyses the works of that key-figure as well as those of his comrades-in-arms, José Ingenieros, Alfredo L. Palacios and Enrique del Valle Iberlucea. Tarcus points out that Argentine socialism before the First World-War was marked, politically, by the attempt to wrest control of the labour-movement from the anarchists, and, intellectually, by the growing influence of positivism.

The book closes, rather anticlimactically, with an analysis of the reception of Marx's work by the Argentine academy of the early-twentieth century, describing the views of now-forgotten practitioners of the nascent 'social sciences', such as Ernesto Quesada, Juan Agustín García and Carlos Octavio Bunge. *Marx en la Argentina* is the first in a series of books Tarcus is planning to write covering the entire history of socialism in Argentina from the viewpoint of intellectual history.

The recent compilation of articles on the history of Argentina's Socialist Party (Partido Socialista: PS), *El Partido Socialista en Argentina: Sociedad, política e ideas a través de un siglo*, edited by Hernán Camarero and Carlos Herrera,¹⁷ opens with the best overview of the historiography on the PS, from its foundation in 1896 until its break-up in 1958.¹⁸ Fourteen papers, arranged in chronological order, address different topics in the history of Argentine socialism. Despite their heterogeneity, the essays can be grouped around three main thematic loci.¹⁹

A first group of articles addresses some aspects of what Aricó called 'Justo's hypothesis' – i.e. the original, though eclectic and non-Marxist, programme developed by the leader of early-Argentine socialism. Ricardo Martínez Mazzola examines the relationship between Socialists and other political forces, focusing on their remarkable reluctance to make alliances, primarily with Radicalism. A fragment of a larger doctoral dissertation is Patricio Geli's article on the Argentine Socialists' position in the Second International's debate on international migrations. Marina Becerra provides a case-study of socialist schools, which enriches the debate on the tensions between the 'social' and 'national' questions in the PS-platform. The crisis of 'Justo's hypothesis', in the context of the First World-War and the Russian Revolution, is examined in Daniel Campione's study of the splits leading to the emergence of the International Socialist Party, which eventually became the Argentine Communist Party.

Some common concerns can be found in a second group of articles examining the development of Argentine socialism between the two World-Wars, a period marked by a

17. Camarero and Herrera (eds.) 2005.

18. Camarero and Herrera (eds.) 2005, pp. 9–73.

19. Two articles, one by Dora Barrancos on the attitude of the Socialist Party towards the female vote and another by Osvaldo Graciano on the university-policy of some socialist leaders are more difficult to classify because they focus on a particular subject over a longer period of time.

deepening of the parliamentary reformism of the two previous decades, in a national and world-context marked by the general crisis of liberalism. Hernán Camarero contributes to the analysis of these tensions with a paper on the PS's relationship with the unions, while Leticia Prislei provides an interesting study tracing the intellectual origins of a group that split with the PS at the end of the 1920s to create the right-wing Partido Socialista Independiente. The critical years of the 1930s are discussed in three articles: Nicolás Iñigo Carrera analyses the PS's attitudes towards the military government, Juan Carlos Portantiero discusses how a debate within the ranks of European Social Democracy led a group of Argentine socialists to abandon the principles of free trade and defend state-interventionism, and Andrés Bisso deals with the PS's anti-fascist activity during the Second World-War.

A third and final set of articles addresses the crisis and decline of the PS as a result of the rise of Peronism. Carlos Herrera traces the evolution of the PS's interpretations of Perón's government, focusing on the articles of Américo Ghioldi, the Party's main leader at that time. The book closes with articles by Cecilia Blanco and María Cristina Tortti, analysing the splits suffered by the PS in the aftermath of the first Peronist era (1945–55) and the links between Socialists and the Argentine New Left.

Communism

For several decades, the standard-historical works on Argentine Communism were the 'official histories' written by the Stalinised Communist Party led by Vittorio Codovilla. The pioneer work was *Esbozo de historia del Partido Comunista de la Argentina*,²⁰ in many ways reminiscent of Stalin's *Short Course*, drafted by a party-commission created for that purpose. In the following decades, other Communist leaders – Benito Marianetti, Orestes Ghioldi, Oscar Arévalo, Leonardo Paso, Athos Fava – published their own accounts of the Party's history. As Hernán Camarero noted, these works had 'a *propaganda* style and scarce critical sense, which hindered thoughtful treatment of important issues' and even led to 'misrepresentation of facts and documents'.²¹ Like Socialist-Party historiography, they were concerned with legitimising the positions of the party-leadership and failed to provide readers with a historical analysis of internal controversies and conflicts. There were also apologetic histories of the Party's union-activists' rôle within the trade-union movement.²²

Hernán Camarero's book on the Communists and the 'world of labour' in Argentina in the period 1920–35²³ chronologically follows after Tarcus's book, but deals summarily with intellectual factors, focusing instead on the social history of the Partido Comunista de la Argentina (PCA), particularly its organisational endeavours and its rôle in a series of political, union and cultural struggles. As we have seen, while the Argentine labour-movement has been staunchly Peronist for more than half a century, it actually had anarchist and Marxist origins. Based on meticulous research into a vast number of sources, many of them made available only after the fall of the USSR, Camarero describes how the PCA became a significant factor in the Argentine labour-movement by waging a successful struggle against both the capitalist class and its socialist and syndicalist competitors.

20. Partido Comunista de la Argentina 1947.

21. Camarero 2007, p. XLII.

22. For example, Iscaro 1958.

23. Camarero 2007.

Like Tarcus, Camarero owes much to British-Marxist historiography. He draws on Hobsbawm to analyse Communist political culture and labour-militancy in the interwar-period. For issues relating to workers' consciousness, subjectivity and identity, he relies on E.P. Thompson, and, to discover the 'languages of class', on Gareth Stedman Jones. He also draws on Perry Anderson to stress the singularity of the Communist Parties as unique sociological and organisational phenomena, because of their determination by an international organisation. Gramsci's influence is evident in Camarero's attempt to write the history of the PCA as 'the general history of the country from a monographic point of view'. His analysis in Chapter 4 of the Communists' contributions to the development of a working-class 'alternative culture' is again taken from the work of British historians, such as Richard Hoggart's on working-class culture in a mass-society and Raphael Samuel's studies on British Communism. To analyse the 'organisational repertoire' brought by the Communists in the 1920s, particularly the adoption of the cell-structure, Camarero draws on historians of French Communism such as Maurice Duverger and Annie Kriegel. As far as local historiography is concerned, Camarero disagrees with a view prevalent in Argentine academic circles since the 1980s (from a very distorted right-Thompsonian perspective) which argues that, in the interwar-period, especially in Buenos Aires, there took place a sort of dissolution of the working class into a more amorphous category of the 'urban poor' that would later provide the social following for Peronism.

The first three chapters of Camarero's book describe the PCA's proletarianisation, its geographical insertion, its intervention in a large number of industrial struggles, its contribution to the creation of industrial as opposed to craft-unions among unskilled and semi-skilled workers, not only in Buenos Aires, but also in Rosario, La Plata and Córdoba, the formation during the so-called 'Third Period' of its own trade-union federation, the *Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical Clasista* (CUSC), and its struggle against the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT). Camarero points out that the Communists' success in the union-field were marred by their failure to wrest control from the hands of syndicalists and socialists of the transportation- and service-sectors, which included important sections of the working class like the railway- and maritime workers, and amounted to a high percentage of the unionised workers.

The final two chapters of Camarero's book deal with the PCA's struggles in the cultural field, from libraries and schools to sports and recreational activities, as well as with the insertion of its language-sections in the immigrant-communities. The chapter on the Communists' attempt to create an alternative 'workers' culture', and indeed a whole space of socialisation, from childhood to the workplace and leisure time, independent of and antagonistic towards the dominant cultural norms, includes some interesting descriptions, such as the Party's struggle against the professionalisation of football, and its opposition to carnival as an irrational and atavistic custom. Camarero also deals with the PCA's fight against religion and the Catholic Church and its impact on the Argentine intelligentsia. The chapter on the PCA's insertion in the immigrant-communities through its language-sections shows its strength among Yiddish-speaking and Italian workers, but also among other immigrant-groups, which then constituted a significant section of the Argentine proletariat, especially in Buenos Aires. The book closes with a description of the PCA's struggle against imperialism and war.

Camarero describes the rise of Stalinism and its abrupt changes of line (from the united-front policy inherited from Lenin to the ultra-left 'Third Period' of 1928–35 and the

subsequent opportunist popular-front policy), but argues that those zigzags did not affect the PCA's growing influence on the Argentine working class. He attributes this successful Communist implantation in the labour-movement, despite the brutal repression of the 1930s under the military régimes of Generals José Félix Uriburu and Agustín P. Justo, to the PCA's fierce militancy and the organisational practices adopted during the so-called 'Bolshevisation'-process, especially the adoption of factory-cells which, whenever possible, issued their own periodicals. The attribution of so much political significance to a particular organisational form – and, moreover, one developed as a by-product of 'Bolshevisation', a phenomenon originating at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924 and usually regarded as a manoeuvre aimed at turning the Communist parties into mirror images of the Stalinised CPSU, with catastrophic long-term consequences²⁴ – is perhaps the most questionable argument of Camarero's book. But he also points out that the PCA's growth was made possible by favourable objective conditions in Buenos Aires and other large Argentine cities, such as a growing number of industrial workers, a strong immigrant-presence and precarious labour-conditions, particularly during the Great Depression.

Not unlike Tarcus's book, Camarero's presupposes a reader acquainted with both Argentina's political history and the general international political context in which those political currents operated. On the positive side, the author adopts a sympathetic but critical attitude towards his research-subject, trying to shun categorical judgments and offering instead a balanced, factual description of the PCA's history. Camarero's book is the first part of a longer study that will eventually cover Peronism's rise to power over the backs of the anarchist, socialist and Communist pioneers of the Argentine labour-movement, at a time when the Communist parties of the neighbouring countries (Chile, Uruguay and Brazil) continued to grow.

Trotskyism

Whereas, in recent years, the historiography on Argentine socialism and Communism has been enriched by a spate of scholarly works, the same cannot be said of the history of Trotskyism, which remains poorly explored. The recent republication of two works by Osvaldo Coggiola on the history of Argentine and Latin-American Trotskyism is therefore welcome, insofar as it gives readers access to pioneering research conducted in the late 1970s.²⁵ The author, a member of *Política Obrera* – currently *Partido Obrero* [Workers' Party], one of the two main trends in Argentine Trotskyism – and Professor of History at the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil), had to go into exile during the military dictatorship of 1976–83 and carried out his research as part of a doctoral dissertation directed by Madeleine

24. 'During the months which followed [i.e. after January 1924], the ECCI used the slogan of Bolshevisation in order to smother all the centres of resistance or criticism, and all possible support for Trotsky. In France, Souvarine, Monatte and Rosmer were eliminated in this way; in Poland, Warski, Walecki and Wera Kostrzewa. . . . The result was that there quickly appeared Communist leaders who were characterised by a combination of a total lack of initiative – and, often, of political intelligence – and unconditional, blind submission to the directives, even if they contradicted each other, from Moscow.' (Broué 2003, p. 832.) 'Through the process of "Bolshevisation," the KPD began to change into a party of a new type, which was soon to be known as Stalinist.' (Broué 2003, p. 835.)

25. Coggiola 2006.

Rebérioux in Paris. First published in French²⁶ and serialised in Spanish in the journal *Internacionalismo*,²⁷ it had a quite large circulation after the downfall of the military dictatorship, when the Centro Editor de América Latina published a longer version that continued the analysis up until the mid-1980s.²⁸ For a decade, it remained the only historical work on Argentine Trotskyism. An English version of its first part appeared in the British *Trotskyist* journal *Revolutionary History*.²⁹ The following section reviews the new edition, which reprints the three volumes, adding a final chapter covering the last two decades.

Coggiola quotes extensively from internal documents containing self-criticisms of the PO's positions, even acknowledging the existence of 'zig-zags' in its policies,³⁰ but he makes no bones about the fact that his book is meant as a historical vindication of the Partido Obrero's political line, and, for that reason, it has sometimes been criticised as 'sectarian'. Readers wishing for an alternative history of Argentine Trotskyism can consult the four volumes edited by Ernesto González,³¹ written from the point of view of Nahuel Moreno's current, the other main trend of Argentine Trotskyism.

The first Trotskyist groups in Argentina appeared in the early 1930s. Unlike those in neighbouring countries like Chile or Brazil, they did not amount to more than a few dozen militants. Despite their numerical weakness, during this early period a number of important theoretical and strategic discussions took place. Coggiola notes that the first Trotskyist groups were unclear about the tasks to be performed by the future proletarian revolution, nor did they have a finished characterisation of Argentina's social structure. The main bone of contention was the question of socialist revolutions in backward countries: Coggiola shows how the first Trotskyist groups, arguing that Argentina was a fully-developed capitalist country, disregarded the importance of democratic and anti-imperialist task in the forthcoming revolution. Liborio Justo (1902–2003), who used the pseudonym Quebracho, criticised that position. An unusual and eccentric figure (his codename in the correspondence among local Trotskyists was Juana la Loca – Joanna the Mad), Justo was in an exceptional position to observe at close quarters the actual behaviour of Argentina's ruling classes, being the son of Argentina's military president. Coggiola shows that, regardless of his subsequent political drift towards nationalism, Justo helped enrich the theoretical approach of Argentine Trotskyism by stressing the importance of national liberation.³² Despite its theoretical importance, this discussion did not bear fruit. The Fourth International's International Executive sent a delegate to Buenos Aires (Terence

26. Coggiola 1983.

27. Coggiola's work appeared in Issues 3 (August 1981) and 4 (January–April 1982) of *Internacionalismo*, theoretical organ of the Tendencia Cuarta Internacionalista (Fourth Internationalist Tendency) led by Guillermo Lora's POR in Bolivia and Jorge Altamira's PO in Argentina (see below).

28. Coggiola 1985, 1986.

29. Coggiola 1989.

30. Coggiola 2006, pp. 274–5.

31. González 1995–2006a, 1995–2006b, 1995–2006c, 1995–2006d, 1995–2006e.

32. For Justo's overview of the early history of Trotskyism in Argentina, see Justo 1941. Justo later abandoned Trotskyism and developed his ideas on national liberation at length in his five-volume history of Argentina, called *Our Vassal-Fatherland: History of the Argentine Colonial Régime* (Justo 1968–91a, 1968–91b, 1968–91c, 1968–91d, 1968–91e). Mention should also be

Phelan/Sherry Mangan), who managed to form a unified but ephemeral Trotskyist organisation called Partido Obrero de la Revolución Socialista (PORS), whose programmatic ambiguity revealed its precarious state. Inevitably, the new organisation broke up with the emergence of Peronism.

According to Coggiola, ‘the intervention of the masses in October 1945’ (i.e. the emergence of Peronism) ‘found the Trotskyists more scattered and disoriented than ever’. This political confusion regarding the Peronist phenomenon – undoubtedly the most important political movement in Argentina in the twentieth century – marked the next generation of Argentine Trotskyists, as they had enormous difficulties finding support among a working class that had become overwhelmingly Peronist.

The 1953 split in the Fourth International deepened already-existing local divisions: the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) of Nahuel Moreno (Hugo Bressano) joined the International Committee (IC), while J. Posadas (Homero Cristalli), leader of the Grupo Cuarta Internacional (GCI), and his followers sided with Michel Pablo and the International Secretariat of the Fourth International (ISFI). Posadas led, for more than a decade, the Buró Latinoamericano (BLA) of the ISFI, gradually degenerating into an esoteric cult with theories about UFOs (its journal *Voz Proletaria* was nicknamed *Voz Planetaria*), advocacy of preventive nuclear war by Stalinist states, etc. It should be pointed out, however, that ‘posadismo’ did provide the Latin-American Left with some well-known intellectuals, such as the historians Adolfo Gilly and Alberto Plá.³³

In 1954, Moreno set up the ICFI’s Secretariado Latinoamericano del Trotskismo Ortodoxo (SLATO), though, according to Coggiola, his ‘orthodoxy’ did not hinder him from carrying out all kinds of political somersaults, from dismissing Juan Perón as an agent of British imperialism to ‘deep entryism’ in the Peronist movement, from denouncing the Cuban Revolution as a pro-American coup to flirtations with Maoism and Castroism, etc. Criticism of Morenoism is the leitmotif of Coggiola’s work, which sees in the Morenoist current’s changing names a reflection of its shifting political line: Grupo Obrero Marxista (GOM: 1944–9), Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR: 1949–53), Federación Bonaerense del Partido Socialista de la Revolución Nacional (PSRN: 1953–6 – beginning of the turn to Peronism), Movimiento de Agrupaciones Obreras (MAO: 1956), Palabra Obrera (1957–64: deep entryism), Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT: 1964–8), PRT La Verdad (1968–72), Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST: 1972–82), Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS: 1982–8/1991), which finally split into more than twenty groups.

Coggiola does highlight, however, Morenoism’s positive contributions in the theoretical field:

It must be said that the POR was perhaps the first group to analyse Argentina’s socio-economic structure based on the category of ‘combined development.’ For other groups, for example, there was no doubt that the Argentine agrarian structure was simply capitalist. . . . The POR demonstrated, statistics in hand, that

made of his history of the Bolivian Revolution, partially translated into English in the journal *Revolutionary History* (Justo 1967, 1992). For Justo’s obituary, see Coggiola 2003b.

33. Gilly is best known in local Trotskyist circles for his book on the Mexican Revolution (Gilly 1983). Among Plá’s works, mentioned should be made of his book on Argentine historiography (Plá 1972).

in Argentina's countryside household production was socially prevalent, though the large *estancia* was economically dominant. While household-production is commercial production, it is not necessarily capitalist production characterised by the exploitation of wage-labour. For the POR, this demonstrated that the combination of different stages of economic development was at the base of Argentina's agricultural backwardness, expressed in its low productivity vis-à-vis the developed countries'. Also in relation to industry, the opinion of the GCI [Posadas], *Octubre* [Jorge Abelardo Ramos] and the UOR [Unión Obrera Revolucionaria, led by Oscar Posse and Mateo Fossa] was unanimous: Argentina was an industrialised country... Using the same methodology, the POR [Moreno] demonstrated that Argentine industry was characterised by the coexistence of a few advanced and concentrated sectors, economically dominant, with a huge handicraft-base, socially dominant'.³⁴

In another debate on the slogan of the Socialist United States of Latin America, the POR defended its original meaning, formulating it as a 'Federation of Workers' States of Latin America'.³⁵

Chapter IV of Coggiola's book opens with an assessment of the two main Argentine-Trotskyist intellectuals: the historian Milcíades Peña (1933–65) and the lawyer and professor Silvio Frondizi (1907–74), the brother of President Arturo Frondizi. Coggiola, whose book focuses on political rather than intellectual history, deals with both authors cursorily. He detects in Peña's work 'a vigour and vitality until then unknown in Marxist historiography, of which it remains an unsurpassed model and the basis for any future development',³⁶ while, at the same time, criticising Peña's sectarian characterisation of Peronism as a demagogic, regressive, Bonapartist régime.³⁷ Frondizi also gets praise for his revolutionary criticism of the Communist Party and rôle in setting up the Praxis-group, but Coggiola stresses what he regards as Frondizi's inability to become a real revolutionary leader and his somewhat erratic political trajectory.

Peña and Frondizi's works were dealt with in much greater detail by Tarcus in *El marxismo olvidado en la Argentina*. Tarcus structures his narrative around Walter Benjamin's theses in 'On the Concept of History', and sees the common denominator between Peña and Frondizi, not in their Trotskyism, but in their condition as 'tragic' figures. This purposely missing the main point reminds us of another talented historian of Trotskyism, Alan Wald, who called his book on the US-Trotskyist intellectuals of the 1930s *The New York Intellectuals*. As in Wald's case, readers will find much original and fascinating material in Tarcus's book, such as his summary and contextualisation of Frondizi's work *Argentine Reality*,³⁸ widely regarded as one of the best contemporary-Marxist analysis of Peronism,³⁹

34. Coggiola 2006, pp. 135–6.

35. Coggiola 2006, p. 136.

36. Coggiola 2006, p. 178.

37. Compare the analysis of the positions of the three main Trotskyist groups [Octubre (Jorge Abelardo Ramos), Frente Proletario – GOM-POR (Nahuel Moreno) and Voz Proletaria – GCI (Posadas)] on the nature of Peronism, its relationship with the ruling class and imperialism in Rojo 2002.

38. Frondizi 1955, 1956.

39. Tarcus 1996, pp. 124–41.

and, above all, an exhaustive commentary on Peña's six-volume *History of the Argentine People*,⁴⁰ originally written in 1955–7 and published posthumously by Peña's friends, which remains to this day the best Marxist overview of Argentine history.⁴¹ On the other hand, Tarcus's polemic against Coggiola and militant historians in general, where he sings the praises of intellectual snipers unsoiled by political activism and party-affiliation, is difficult to square with his book's characters: Peña wrote a pamphlet called *Teachers and Revolutionaries: An Orthodox Trotskyist Responds to Professor Silvio Frondizi*,⁴² and Frondizi himself was very close in his last years to the PRT-ERP (see below). Moreover, Frondizi's commitment to the legal defence of political activists led to his assassination in September 1974 by an Argentine Anticommunist Alliance's death-squad.⁴³

It was not until the mid-1950s, and especially during the military government that overthrew Perón in 1955 – when they worked in close alliance with Peronist workers against state-repression – that Argentine-Trotskyist groups struck deeper roots in the Argentine working class. By the beginning of the 1960s, however, as the workers' struggle ebbed after heavy repressive blows, Argentine Trotskyism faced the end of an era. While Posadas and his group distanced themselves from the Pabloist direction of the Fourth International – they proclaimed, in 1962, the creation of a 'Posadist' Fourth International – Moreno and his group put an end to their 'entry' into Peronism. A new generation all over the subcontinent fell under the influence of the Cuban Revolution and its 'foquist' strategy.⁴⁴ As far as international Trotskyism was concerned, the Cuban Revolution led to a regroupment-process culminating in the creation, in June 1963, of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) which was soon to openly advocate the organisation of guerrilla-struggles in Africa and Latin America. As part of this process, Moreno's group merged in 1965 with a regional grouping of north-western Argentina, led by Mario R. Santucho, to form the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT: Revolutionary Workers' Party), which was recognised as the USFI's official section in Argentina.

Coggiola points out that the year 1964 saw the emergence of a new Trotskyist group in Argentina called *Política Obrera* (Workers' Politics), originally formed around Silvio Frondizi's *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Left-Movement, also known as MIR-Praxis). After the group's proscription in 1960 and Frondizi's watering down of its programme the following year, *Política Obrera*, whose main figure was Jorge Altamira (José Wermus), developed a critique of foquist strategy and launched a drive for the proletarianisation of its members.

The influence won by the Trotskyist groups during the significant rise of working-class militancy after the *Cordobazo* of May 1969 was challenged by the rapid growth of 'left-Peronist' armed groups – particularly Montoneros – and the PRT-ERP. The latter was born in 1968 when, after a precarious unity lasting only three years, Moreno broke with Mario Santucho to create the PRT (*La Verdad*), refusing to carry out the USFI's foquist political

40. Peña 1968–73a, 1968–73b, 1968–73c, 1968–73d, 1968–73e, 1968–73f.

41. Tarcus 1996, pp. 161–310.

42. Peña 1956.

43. For Coggiola's response to Tarcus, see Coggiola 1993b.

44. Other groups coming from Trotskyism fully joined the Peronist movement; the most notable case is that of Jorge Abelardo Ramos. Peña's devastating criticism of Ramos became a classic Trotskyist critique of bourgeois nationalism (Peña 1974).

line. After the split, Santucho and his group, called PRT (*El Combatiente*) shifted more markedly towards *foquismo*, being briefly recognised as the USFI's official section. In June 1973, however, Santucho's organisation broke with the USFI to become the PRT-ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo: People's Revolutionary Army).⁴⁵ For a while, Moreno's group still called itself PRT (*La Verdad*), until in 1972 it switched its name to Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST), after uniting with the section of the Partido Socialista Argentino (PSA) led by Juan Carlos Coral.

Coggiola describes Perón's return to Argentina in 1973 as a manoeuvre on the part of the bourgeoisie when it became impossible to halt the rise of the labour-movement by repressive means alone. Argentine Trotskyism entered the 1970s structured around two main groups: Moreno's PST, linked to the American SWP, and Política Obrera, which set up an organisation called Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International (OCRFI: 1971–8) together with the Bolivian POR led by Guillermo Lora and the French OCI led by Pierre Lambert.

Coggiola repeatedly criticises Pabloism and the United Secretariat, which is blamed for infatuation with guerrillaism at its Ninth Congress in 1969 and then with bourgeois democracy after its Twelfth Congress in 1985. After the demise of the OCRFI, Lora's POR and Política Obrera set up their own international tendency, called the Tendencia Cuarta Internacionalista, which, in turn, folded in 1988 due to what Coggiola calls 'Lora's national messianism', i.e. his tendency to see world-revolution as a result of the Latin-American revolution and the latter as a product of the Bolivian revolution.⁴⁶ Moreno, in turn, after a brief flirtation with Lambert in 1979–81, set up his own political current known as the Liga Internacional de los Trabajadores or International Workers' League, which was later marked by the splits that affected its main national section in Argentina.

The original edition of Coggiola's book closes with a description of the repression under Argentina's military dictatorship – the 'dirty war' of 1976–83 – and the return of bourgeois democracy under the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983–9). That period was marked by the numerical hegemony of Moreno's MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo), by then the largest Trotskyist party in the world, followed rather distantly by Altamira's PO (Partido Obrero, the name adopted by Política Obrera after the fall of the dictatorship). PO's criticism of Moreno centred on the historical rôle of democratic counter-revolutions, which provided ideological and political cover for capital's neoliberal offensive in Latin America and for the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe. According to Coggiola, the current dispersion of Argentine Trotskyism is mainly a result of the MAS's dissolution, which took place shortly after Moreno's death in 1987.

The new edition of Coggiola's book includes a final section called 'De Menem al Argentinazo', which does not actually deal with the history of Trotskyism but, rather, with

45. The entry on Santucho in Pierre Frank's *The Fourth International: The Long March of the Trotskyists* reads: 'Mario Roberto Santucho, leader of the Argentinean PRT/ERP, murdered by security forces in 1976. A genuine revolutionary internationalist, he joined the Fourth International in 1967 through fusion of his group with the section; our failure to convince him of the correctness of the Trotskyist programme, leading to his break with the International in 1973, was a real defeat for our movement.' (Chapter 10: 'Those Who Died So That the International Might Live'.) For a scholarly study of the PRT-ERP, see Pozzi 2001.

46. Coggiola 2006, p. 461.

political developments in Argentina during the last decade. It focuses on the popular insurrection of December 2001, known as *Argentinazo*, which brought down the government of President Fernando de la Rúa, and the development of the *piquetero* ('picketer' or road-blocking)-movement among unemployed workers, where the Partido Obrero played a prominent rôle.⁴⁷ Since 2001, the membership and influence of Argentine Trotskyism has grown substantially, though the labour-electorate remains overwhelmingly Peronist. Today, the Partido Obrero is the largest Trotskyist organisation in the country, followed by a string of smaller splits from the MAS.

Coggiola's book is supplemented in this new edition by a brief overview of the history of Trotskyism in Latin America,⁴⁸ originally published in 1984 as a short book in Portuguese and later in Spanish.⁴⁹ Some chapters have been superseded by more recent research, such as Gary Tennant's work on Trotskyism in Cuba.⁵⁰ An expanded version of the section on Brazil has been translated into English and is available on the Internet at the *Encyclopaedia of Trotskyism Online*.⁵¹

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47. Coggiola 2006, pp. 349–91.

48. Coggiola 2006, pp. 393–476.

49. Coggiola 1984. This work was later published in a Spanish version as Coggiola 1993a. For an early English overview of the same subject from a social-democratic point of view, see Alexander 1973.

50. Tennant 2000.

51. Coggiola 2003a.

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