

## Presentation: On the studies about the Russian Revolution of 1917 conducted in Latin America<sup>28</sup>

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**Abstract:** The fundamental idea developed within this paper —the result of a thorough study of the recent bibliography on the relationships between the Komintern and Latin America— is that there exist new conditions, following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), in an attempt to approach, upon less passionate and less compromised bases, from the standpoint of the political parties, the history relevant to analyze the political cultures in Latin America during the XX Century.

**Keywords:** *historiography (Author); Latin America, Russian Revolution, 1917, political cultures (Thesaurus).*

### Los estudios sobre la Revolución Rusa de 1917 en América Latina

**Resumen:** La idea central que atraviesa el presente texto —producto de un estudio cuidadoso de la bibliografía reciente sobre el problema de las relaciones entre la Komintern y América Latina— es que existen nuevas condiciones, luego de desaparecida la Unión de Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas (URSS), para abordar, sobre bases menos pasionales y menos comprometidas en términos partidistas, una historia que resulta significativa para el análisis de las culturas políticas latinoamericanas en el siglo XX.

**Palabras clave:** *América Latina, historiografía (Thesaurus); Revolución Rusa, 1917, historiografía, culturas políticas (Autor).*

### Os estudos sobre a Revolução Russa de 1917 na América Latina

**Resumo:** A ideia central presente neste texto —produto de um estudo cuidadoso da bibliografia recente sobre o problema das relações entre a Komintern e a América Latina— se refere a que existem novas condições, após o desaparecimento da União das Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas (URSS), para abordar, sobre bases menos apaixonantes e menos comprometidas em termos partidários, uma história que resulta significativa para a análise das culturas políticas latino-americanas no século XX.

**Palavras-chave:** *América Latina, historiografia, Revolução Russa (Thesaurus); culturas políticas, 1917 (Autor).*

<sup>28</sup> In preparation of the text here in the authors have considered the usual literature upon the problem, and primarily the most recent works performed in Latin America as they were able to consult new archives made available to researchers, after the dissolution of the USSR.

## A real heritage worth researching

The paragraphs below do not intend to characterize what has been written in recent years —say, from the dissolution of the USSR— by historians about the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its impact in Latin America, in times of the International Communist [the Komintern].<sup>1</sup> A very difficult task, partly because the materials and the analysis continue to grow, without having available a comprehensive study to group and characterize such studies and to propose some paths to follow to continue with the task.<sup>2</sup> It does not intend to characterize the set of texts on the topic published in the current edition of *Historia Crítica*, in the form of a *dossier* to join many others that have been produced and those which will continue to be produced in the next few months. All within the framework of a new anniversary of the October Revolution, considering next October will be the commemoration of its first century.

The real purpose of this article is to remember that such Revolution, which does not really convey much, if any, to most of Young citizens of today's world, continues to be an issue of the outmost historical and historiographical interest, since it is a fact of fundamental importance for the XX Century. This from the standpoint of the forces that nurtured and shaped the past century, since it was a trial for a political organization which was not comfortable when new institutions were fostered and imposed upon the wide territory of the former Russian Empire. It was also —and for the first time in recent history of mankind, and resembling the great monotheist religions— an attempt to convert the world to its creed, with the purpose of fostering a *world revolution* against any type of previous political order. To accomplish the aforementioned, there was an attempt to create, with relative success, an *international political party*, headed by Moscow (the *International Communist*, created in 1919 by Lenin himself and the group of leaders that supported him), even if at the end the practical successful results for the societies that attempted such a change were not that many.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 The bibliography on the International Communist is extensive and repetitive. A critical and valuable perspective, even if some years have already gone by, is the one written by Pierre Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste, 1919-1943* (Paris: Fayard, 1997). More specifically for Latin America, there is a short book by Manuel Caballero, *La Internacional Comunista y la revolución latinoamericana, 1919-1943* (Caracas: Alfa, 2006 [1986]). Every official document from the Conferences held by the International Communist was published by Cuadernos Pasado y Presente and Editorial Siglo XXI between 1973 and 1984.
  - 2 In our countries, we do not find many documents similar to the North American *handbook*, therefore it is difficult to update the bibliographic status of a research problem. Then of course, there are none of such documents for a problem such as Latin America and the International Communist. However, there is a very important work instrument: Lazar Jefetz, Victor Jefetz and Peter Huber, *La Internacional Comunista y América Latina, 1919-1943. Diccionario biográfico* (Moscú/Ginebra: Instituto de Latinoamérica de la Academia de Ciencias/Institut pour l'Histoire du Communisme, 2004).
  - 3 For a history of synthesis on the USSR in the XXth Century, cf. Robert Service, *Historia de Rusia en el siglo XX* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2001 [1997]). A discussion on the first quarter of the XX Century in Eric Hobsbawm, *Historia del siglo XX* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1995 [1994]), Chapters I-VII. An overview of the communist idea in the XX Century may be found in François Furet, *El pasado de una ilusión. Ensayo sobre la idea comunista en el siglo XX* (México: FCE, 1995). And if the reader considers the excellent dissertation by Furet to be sort of unilateral, the same may be balanced with the book by Eric Hobsbawm, *Cómo cambiar el mundo. Marx y el marxismo 1840-2011* (Barcelona/Buenos Aires: Crítica, 2011), which knowingly weaves the history of Marxism and communism.

The 1971 Revolution turned out to be transcendental for the political culture, guiding the social movements in Latin America, not because the communist alternative had that many successes within its national societies, but because the feared “Moscow Whisper” became an ideological principle, followed by a significant and numerous groups of workers, greater than those actually accepted by the conservative version as part of the national histories of these countries and even if these are less than the assertions by left wing versions.<sup>4</sup>

The importance of the “Moscow Whisper” —an expression coined after the times of the Komintern— is connected to the fact that the Russian Revolution of 1917 coincided in time with the first social movements of anti-capitalist nature raising in the region, as well as with the beginning of the first socialist and anarchist preaching these societies learned about. Such preaching was mostly inspired by the European socialism and anarchism, and, later on, by the Soviet Revolution, whose actual organizational and ideological influence will express itself after 1925 when the great wave of the first anticapitalistic social movements rose and reached its greater peaks. Then a less radical and “spontaneous” new cycle and the integration process of Popular Fronts of the struggle against fascism began. Fronts in which this initial subsuming of protests from social forces were experiencing the modern industrial world; these were mostly against the commodity export and transportation sectors and certain other sectors that were emerging within the functions of the State broadening framework and, clearly amid the first intellectual modern middle classes that the society knew about.<sup>5</sup>

The truth is that, both in the realm of ideology as well as in that of social movements, *Soviet communism* became a reality in Latin America —even if there is still disagreement in terms of its real dimensions and its true influence —and ever since, many have been the testimonies of the main actors of the process<sup>6</sup> —the same happens to the number of testimonies by opponents. It is a process that marked the *culture of society*, and which created a *tradition* which would not only shaped the modern protest throughout the XX Century, but which would also have imposed a version of its “prehistory,” after the Soviet version of social struggles and its verdict upon the history of previous social movements. These were subsequently disqualified (in general, under the alternate nicknames of “petit-bourgeois,” “adventurers,” “opportunistic”) since such movements did not follow the model of socialist struggles that Moscow and the International Communist had coded; a

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4 A summary dissertation and without prejudice on Latin American politics for most part of the XX Century, even if it does show unequal emphasis according to the countries, in Alan Angell, “La izquierda en América Latina desde c. 1920,” in *Historia de América Latina. 12. Política y sociedad desde 1930*, published by Leslie Bethel (Barcelona: Crítica, 1997), 76-95.

5 Regarding the aforementioned, big matrixes must be introduced. The appearance of nuclei of modern workers, forms and rates of industrialization, previous or contemporary capital cumulation processes, migration of European workers to Latin America, literacy rates, consolidation of new middle classes, advancements in higher education and the implementation of formal democracy institutions are phenomena which resulted in an intense unequal development in Latin America. For example, the Chilean and Argentinian Communists do not resemble much of those from Andean societies such as Ecuador and Colombia, or to those from societies directly intervened by the United States, who depended directly and exclusively from plantation economies, as was the case of most of Central America.

6 For example, in Colombia, the testimony of living in Moscow in times of the International Communist, of the worker’s and popular leader, Ignacio Torres-Giraldo, *Cincuenta meses en Moscú* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 2005). But the analysis could be expanded when consulting the complete archive: Alfonso Rubio and Viviana Arce, *Inventario General. Fondo Documental Ignacio Torres Giraldo* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 2014).

model which was imposed thereon, under the form of “Twenty one Conditions,” which, according to the International Communist of 1920, any social movement or political struggle should fulfill to be part of the “correct line” of a “well oriented” struggle in favor of the “future society.”

The initial two decades of relationships between the Communist Party of the USSR and the “brotherly” parties in Latin America —most likely from 1919 and 1939, with certain extensions—, including in that range the forgotten and explosive world of Central America<sup>7</sup> —from which only Mexico is remembered as its revolutionary dynamics had greater and more complicated source— gave origin to a vision of the “revolutionary process,” which was swapped down the path into a heavy inherited burden for social movements and into a straitjacket for those historians who tried to read and tell the story, a vision that had at least three distinctive features.<sup>8</sup>

It firstly allowed the initial monopoly of the “authorized word” by the actors of the process, who at a later stage recalled the battles in which they had participated. In turn it fostered the creation of an “enlarged”, unilateral and idealized image of the role of communist parties among the social movement to the detriment of other political forces (liberalism itself, socialist organizations which were not ascribed to the Soviet communism and anarchy-syndicalist groups, if any).<sup>9</sup> Secondly, it allowed for a sustained monopoly of the interpretation of the social struggles by the communists in the XX Century. Protected by the power of the ideological disclosure of the International III, they managed to impose a vision of social evolution, of its limitations and likelihoods in our societies, thus preparing an analysis where the correctness of the endeavors by local communist leaders would always shine under the tutelage of Moscow.

In a nutshell, this is the third great inheritance that has come to us: the *Komintern* —The International Communist— established and imposed a *framework for problems interpretation* within its great lines and for the whole XX Century, which should be approached and discussed by those interested in a social change from a practical point of view and from an intellectual standpoint. In such a way, all of the “Marxist interpretations” of society and, to a great extent, most part of the interpretation of other social sciences that were born at the beginning of the XX Century, ended up to be framed within such interpretation framework, characterized by a definition coined to a great extent, from the Asian reality, according to which the history of these societies was composed by three different stages: *colony*, *semi-colony* and *neo-colony* (the latter term became normal later on, once the International Communist had already disappeared), a scheme which seemed to be true (in fact, a valid scheme for very precise moments for *some* of these societies).

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7 Rodolfo Cerdas-Cruz, *La hoz y el machete: La Internacional Comunista, América Latina y la revolución centroamericana* (San José: EUNED, 1986).

8 For example, Communist Party of Colombia, *Treinta años de lucha, 1930-1960* (Bogotá: Ediciones Paz y Socialismo, 1960), chronicle written by and official Commission of the Communist Party and embraced by many of the subsequent chronicle writers as “the true story.” Also, Medófilo Medina, *Historia del Partido Comunista Colombiano*. Book I (Bogotá: Editorial Colombia Nueva, 1980), for a disciplined, applied, not boulder chronicle, as was the rule for those written before the dissolution of the USSR by followers and associates to such political formation.

9 Even the shortest documentary exercises upon this issue, discussed the idea that the “prehistory” is important. For example, for Colombia, Diego Jaramillo, *Las huellas del socialismo. Los discursos socialistas en Colombia, 1919-1929* (Popayán: Universidad del Cauca, 1997); likewise, Sergio Grez Toro, *Historia del comunismo en Chile. La era Recabarren (1912-1924)* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2011), which deals with the Chilean society, most likely the first and most comprehensive implementation of the communist idea.

This is a scheme that determined many of the revolutionary intervention forms that took place during the XX Century in Latin America, long after the International Communist became just a blurred memory. An observation that is valid even for those opposing the usual political practice of the communist parties in the region, including the same interpretation framework, even extracting different and extremist consequences in favor of workers, the military or populist in general, as it continues to be true up to this date. It means that the “revolutionary theory” of the International Communist continued to be the base that rebel groups would use to interpret the world: most likely they didn’t know but very little about its existence.

In the specific field of the newly born social sciences, very tightly linked to “Marxism” from the beginning, — introduced as a fortunate strategy to perform a concrete analysis of society, in contrast to the pure “lyric” approaches that had dominated the XIX Century —, most of them were branded early on with that same interpretation framework, which was at the same time a very limited and schematic analysis of the social life and the history of these societies. This is not to say that social sciences did not have any other forms of expression — as proven by the history of sociology in the cases of Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. The fact is that, in the realm of their disclosure and the socialization of their analysis of the new university student’s generations the loudest in the political scenario of the intellectual middle classes, —such was the interpretation with the greatest disclosure and acknowledgement.<sup>10</sup>

## A history without documentation

Building a social and political history on the relationships between the Latin American societies and the Russian Revolution of 1917 has not been an easy task due to several reasons, among which it is impossible to leave aside the absence of relevant archives and documents to perform such a task. This is done through the prism of the encounter between the national communist parties and the III International Communist. Of course, we are referring to local archives, which, at least in the field of the testimonies of social actors and of the press branded as left wing, are multiple and revealing, even if most part of such sources are still unpublished in a way that could help researchers, analysts and policy decision makers with their task.<sup>11</sup> Rather we refer specifically to the

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10 The idea of the “general framework for interpretation” is presented in a summarized, but correct way, in Manuel Caballero, and it is one of his most fertile ideas. Caballero, *La Internacional comunista*, 19. In the case of Colombia, Mario Arrubla, *Estudios sobre el subdesarrollo colombiano* (Medellín: Editorial Oveja Negra, 1972) —but the essays included in the work were written at the earliest 60’s. The author, who practices a structural “orthodox” Marxist analysis, true to the best of Book I of *El capital*, devotes his work to Che Guevara, and had translated and achieved to publish *La revolución traicionada* by León Trotsky, without generating any analytical question due to such diverse orientations.

11 For example, the important documentation collected in José María Rojas, *La estrategia insurreccional socialista y la estrategia de contención del conservatismo doctrinario. La década de los años veinte* (Cali: CIDSE/Universidad del Valle, 1989). It is also worth mentioning that the first thirty years of the XX Century in Latin America are extremely rich in terms of periodical publications, primarily press, many of which were of popular and socialist nature. For example, for Colombia Isidro Vargas Useche, who emphasized on the issue in *Todas son iguales. Estudios sobre la democracia en Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2010), 223-268. Likewise, the dissertation by Luz Ángela Núñez-Espinel, *El Obrero Ilustrado. Prensa obrera y popular, 1909-1929* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes/CESO, 2006), again for the case of Colombian.

international archives kept and managed by the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow and which turn out to be one of the main sources to rebuild the problem.

Throughout the XX Century such repertory of documents was kept under the control of Soviet authorities, only allowing historians who expressed total affinity towards the communist regime, to consult such documents. It is very difficult to expect a critical examination regarding the events under study, and much less, a bold interpretation moving away from the canonic or ritual explanations built upon the interests of the “Soviet Nation.” On the other hand, access to such documents was under surveillance and limited, which, even by those who kept conformist opinions adapted to the “order of speech” imposed by the USSR, meant that a very big portion of such archive remained beyond any likelihood of being retrieved.

Therefore, there was a combination of documental reserve and subjugation to official interpretations that communism had given upon itself; at the end these were imposed as the dominant vision of the relationships between the USSR and Latin America during those two fundamental decades of formation of the modern political culture in the region, decades going from the beginning of 1920 to the beginning of 1939: the formal date of commencement of World War II and the practical disappearance of every ideal of a world communist revolution led by the USSR. The subsequent period would be one of crude political realism, much more demanding for communist parties in Latin America of a disciplined attitude towards the political displacement of Soviet leaders. Therefore, leaders had to use a good portion of their time justifying the policies in the USSR, by using the most incredible “dialectic maneuvers,” while in the dominant front of the scene, after World War II had ended and the so called Cold War begun, everything seemed as a battle between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Committee for the Safety of the State (KGB, as per its acronym in Russian).<sup>12</sup>

From such an old school type of political analysis, —which is not the core of this article — and that sort of not imaginative historiography, today it is difficult to find pieces to be rescued — even if such pieces do exist — and it would be much better to assume such “historical archeological” work as a study of what happens to a discipline such as History when it leaves its critical perspective aside and takes the path of apology and the disguise of truths, which resulted in a well-established “evidence” to a certain extent, for which all of the existing public documents at the time were more than enough proof.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, from the above, histories of the social movements and worker’s parties, communist parties arose; these were always sweet apologies of a history of interests, ambitions, struggles, presented in the best possible “Hegelian” style, though not very imaginative, as simple uninter-

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12 The process of the unknown history prior to the Bolshevization and dominance of the socialist movement by the communist parties in favor of the Soviets was not the exception to finding resistance, partly erased by the work of communists themselves, due to the imposition of their correct line. Jaramillo, *Las huellas del socialismo*, chapters 2 and 3.

13 The issue with the archives was not absolute. From the 30’s, and continuously until the 90’s, the sector of dissidents and that of the “repentant” started to question the partial and informal character of most part of the documents and analysis available to understand the origin of socialism and the development of its early stages; the existence of a “socialist reality,” different from the idealized, through the dominant information. Among the extensive literature, for example, Fernando Claudín, *La crisis del movimiento comunista*. Book I: *De la Komintern al Kominform* (Madrid: Ruedo Ibérico, 1978), even if the context of Claudín is not the same as the context in Latin America.

ested discussions around “right ideas” and “ideologic positions,” which, purportedly, did not seek anything different from the victory of the “final cause,” and which did not “touch” the realm of material interests of the struggles between the bureaucracies of the communist parties and inside the “Father Party” in particular. A sort of political game by which communist leaders in Latin America abided early on; leaders who embraced the learnings on whom to support in the struggles among the different fractions inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU); such support somehow depended upon their survival as dominant bureaucrats in their relevant national communist organizations.

A picture that was not easy to read, particularly after Lenin’s demise, turning into a coded and mysterious universe while Stalin was in office, forcing Latin American official communist leaders, who were already nicely settled in their positions, to opt for the simple path of leaning under the shadow of unquestionable dominant groups in the political arena, describing themselves as never taking the path of supporting any of the dissident processes known in Central-Eastern Europe. On the contrary, they rapidly and informally expressed their rejection by using the same qualifiers as the leaders of the CPSVU used for those same episodes.

## A documentation without history

After 1990, for reasons simply imposed by “history” — the dissolution of the USSR and of the so called “popular democracies” — and in a gradual but swift manner, and in a process that has not come to an end yet, the archives were opened after been closed for the longest time,<sup>14</sup> and new possibilities of investigation that did not exist before, were created. To the extent that many European and Latin American societies have today either new interpretation works on the issue of the relationships between the International Communist and such societies of countries, and/or those having documental complications that have made a myriad of information circulating that previously missed the specialized reader, and the public opinion of course, who could eventually be interested in such processes.<sup>15</sup>

The intent is not to say that there was *not any type of documentation* before 1990 to study the issue of the disclosure of communist ideals in Latin America. In fact, many political history works prove us wrong. Such documents are complementary, or primary files — according to the type of issues — and currently available for researchers; it opens a scenario in which it is *possible* to advance in the construction of new research enquiries and the production of new interpretations, moving away from the respectful formalism and the traditional dogmatism that, for many decades

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14 The works by Robert Service, a devoted British specialist on the Russian history of the XX Century, on its revolutions at the beginning and the end of the XX Century, on communism, and on the great leaders of the events of 1917, are proof of the benefit the new archives provide. In every prologue of its recent works, the author explains such new conditions of the archive work. For example, *Lenin. Una biografía* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2001); *Stalin. Una biografía* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006); and *Trotsky. Una biografía* (Bogotá: Ediciones B/Grupo Z, 2009).

15 Further consultation: Olga Ulianova and Alfredo Riquelme, eds., *Chile en los archivos soviéticos, 1922-1991*. Book 1: *Komintern y Chile, 1922-1931* (Santiago: Ediciones de la Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2005); and Klaus Meschkat and José María Rojas, comps., *Liquidando el pasado. La izquierda colombiana en los archivos de la Unión Soviética* (Bogotá: Taurus, 2009). On Spain, the documented book by Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo, *Queridos camaradas: la Internacional Comunista y España, 1919-1939* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999) is quite enlightening.

characterized any research in the field and which produced as a complement, not to anyone's surprise, a contrasting pole of historical deformations intended to be taken as selfless research. Now it seems there is a new ground, in which the false and interested appreciations of the "right wing" are not necessarily responded with judgments from the left wing, which are not very accurate or verified, and which only prove the symmetry between dogmas and the lack of love for the truth, but which need to use instruments of *historical criticism*; this is supported by documents and testimonies, approaching the analysis of the precise conditions and circumstances in which the political phenomena of today is based upon, most of which are not known to us.

Many new works — not only in Latin America, of course — are proof of the importance of such document mass that recently became part of the work for historians, and which in the past two and a half decades have modified many of our visions on the role the early USSR played in Latin America in different ways per each country. It has opened a realm of analytical opportunities which must foster the renewal of the contemporary history of our countries. For example, the formation of the modern political cultures in the particular forms in which social movements have risen from the beginning of the XX Century, and the way in which the first socialist movements ended up being a monopoly of the guidance of the Komintern and of the communist parties, who early on imposed the idea of forgetting all of the heritage of the social movement (for example, liberal and socialist heritages), leaving out the vision imposed by Moscow in its "discovery of America," in the 20's of the XX Century; the idea was the connection of the same in a real or imaginary manner with the Soviet experience and influence taken as the sole legitimate heritage.<sup>16</sup>

Thus purportedly — and this Century will be responsible for proving or denying it—, *not* everything that was done in the past in terms of documents and analysis must be forgotten; and *not* everything that is under production within the framework of the existence of new open files for consultation, needs to be considered as a great novelty. It is worth thinking upon, as the documents have been renewed, the old frameworks for interpretation have not given in, just the opposite, they have shown great vitality with difficulties for amending, since the simple appearance of new files does not automatically renew the interpretation of an issue, as historians well know.<sup>17</sup>

## New problems, new questions

Particularly it should be noted that many of the new works shown in these years include, similar to what happened in the past the agony, the confinement<sup>18</sup> and mainly the lack of irony that

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16 Klaus Meschkat, "Del socialismo revolucionario al estalinismo en Colombia, 1927-1933," in *Liquidando el pasado. La izquierda colombiana en los archivos de la Unión Soviética*, compiled by Klaus Meschkat and José María Rojas (Bogotá: Taurus, 2009), 38-44.

17 Alfredo Riquelme, Introduction to *Chile en los archivos soviéticos, 1922-1991*. Book 1: *Komintern y Chile, 1922-1931*, published by Olga Ulianova and Alfredo Riquelme (Santiago: Ediciones de la Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2005), 9, who recalls that it is not only a fact of microfilming, but that there is the need to analyze.

18 The general trend of works on the history of communism in Latin America is to confine itself to the communist environment and party quarrels, or in the defense of its political line, different from its "friends-opponents." An exception to this confinement may be the work of Hernán Camarero, *A la conquista de la clase obrera. Los comunistas y el mundo del trabajo en la Argentina, 1920-1935* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI/Editora Iberoamericana, 2007); in its compilation with Carlos M. Herrera, *El partido socialista en la Argentina. Sociedad, política e ideas a través de un siglo* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2005).



Raymond Carr,<sup>19</sup> the English historian, stressed in his time and that is felt again, as well as what seemed the greatest impossibility: connecting in real and intelligible terms the history of the early communism in Latin America with the history of these societies, beyond the conventional framework invoking the “rise of social movements,” without clarifying the concrete process of socialization, learning and adopting the “new truths,” without discussing how these new standpoints joined the liberal, socialist and positivist political inheritance and producing “syncretic” forms that remained crouched but acting. All behind the formal discourse that was repeated through the more aligned leaders to Moscow.<sup>20</sup>

But not only that difficulty of building *social history and history of society* from a concentrated and specific nucleus of problems seems to exist. Also, the presence of the formalism of political analysis and the lack of boldness to build productive analogies at research’s level are observed in many of the works. Let us give an example: there is no doubt that the Communist Party of the USSR and its leaders organized the Communist International as a large International Church, similar to the Vatican’s, and the episcopal model adopted by the Catholic Church given it good results so far, coincided to what the “brother countries” from the USSR organized. All these within the framework of a strong control through the “episcopal visit,” or the call of Moscow to account for actions undertaken or to receive instructions, and the correspondence (fulfilling the same role as the *Cartas Anuas* of the Jesuits), whilst resorting to espionage and sabotage of policies not considered to be aligned with the directives issued from the “Center.” It can be said that the analogy is extreme, and I believe it to be true, but this does not leave aside the initial impulse to break with the usual formalist picture, which is simply supported on the “Soviet revolutionary intentions,” without a minimum corroboration of sources, without assuming any ambiguity from the actors involved in the process, taking what almost always are partial testimonies as proven truths, “victims” of their own interest or their own blindness.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, in the new works we can observe a great difficulty to move from the political history to the *history of political culture*, thus not including in the analysis the consideration of complete sections of the study of ideologies and political practices. Therefore, the study of rituals, ceremonials, of how old religious traditions were transposed in the communist imagination and language, or the sociological study of the forms of the “militancy, compromise, rupture” cycle (sometimes including the conversion to the opposite gospel and public apostasy), how at least an outline of the study of the ways of assuming and living the “partisanship” does not exist — for example we do not have good portraits of the “popular and militant communist family”, although there are good presentations of the “intellectual middle-class communist ideology.” All these both in popular groups and intellectual middle-class groups, clarifying social origins, levels of educa-

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19 See, Raymond Carr, Presentation to *La Internacional Comunista y la revolución latinoamericana, 1919-1943* (Caracas: Alfa, 2006 [1986]), 18.

20 The radical-artisan heritage of the XIX Century has been mentioned several times. Much less has been mentioned, as done with good judgement by Alan Angell, the positivist heritage, which at the end of the XIX Century addressed social laws and evolutions and stages needed in the life of societies; and other previous and subsequent legacies, added throughout the XX Century. Angell, “La izquierda en América,” 72-131. Moreover, in the early XX Century, communism had to compete with liberal parties in the creation of the vocabulary of the social question in Latin America.

21 The analogy has been proposed several times, for example, by writers such as Octavio Paz or Carlos Fuentes, as recalled by Alan Angell, remembering Fuentes in that respect. Angell, “La izquierda en América,” 73.

tion, professional composition, eliminating from the analysis all ideological truths that dominated in the past and which made the study of communist militancy and emergence of the so-called “professional revolutionaries;” something very similar to what the literature of *socialist realism* had promoted finding its complementarity in Latin America in the long tradition of Lives of Saints, current readings since the time of the Hispanic domination. Those found again a broad way of diffusion at the beginning of the XX Century, through illustrated stories — at that time the format of the comic was of great interest to the Church— and education in schools and seminaries.<sup>22</sup>

There is, of course, space for posing questions upon the previous forms of insertion of socialists and communists into political battles and their way of assuming leadership and authority. These should have been transmitted in a spontaneous manner by the new generations of communists to the next generation, including cultural elements of traditional Spanish American societies of the XVIII Century and first republican century. Those must have taken the form of “living archaisms” when inserted into a type of political action that considered itself as *the model of political activity of the future*, about which not only a history concentrated on the present of the event must be tried, but brought into contact with previous realities on a long-term scale. We take into account the way to crystallize and “add history” that the command and authority seem to show in some societies of Latin America.<sup>23</sup>

From another point of view, and as it has been observed, it must be remembered that the establishment of the communist ideal in Latin America corresponds to a phase of soviet communism, in which a long record of disqualifications, condemnations and purges were already the reality of the soviet politics, and a way to deal with “differences” that seemed to have been imposed rapidly in a similar manner in the Latin American environments; this was done in a mild way in the first half of the XX Century and in extreme, radical, tragic and painful ways in the second half on the XX Century, mainly in the field of those who put into practice the idea of the armed struggle. The guerrilla experiences in Peru, Colombia and Central America recall such tragedy of internal persecution, delirium and paranoia, which are some of the worst legacies of the left wing in our countries, and, on which, unlike historical and sociological analysis, testimonial literature and journalistic research abound.

To enquire into the genesis of this way of assuming politics and to act within such a framework and referring to the field of Soviet communism and its extensions in Latin America, could be a path of productive analysis, thinking again upon dissimilar legacies that comprise our political culture, and that become a path that serves to abandon the usual tradition limiting research questions to a formalist universe; formalism that, curiously, the militant historian would *not* admit when

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22 These absences are more surprising, since the social history inspired on Marx and social sciences have multiplied examples of analysis of these topics, as observed in the extensive production of Eric Hobsbawm. For example, his analysis of millennialism, urban crowds and sects in *Rebeldes primitivos. Estudio sobre las formas arcaicas de los movimientos sociales en los siglos XIX y XX* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2001 [1959]); or his well-known review of radical artisan and labor traditions in *Gente poco corriente* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1999 [1998]); or his reflections on the relationships between objectivity and “partisanship,” or even on his own difficulties to write the history of a revolution in *Sobre la Historia* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1998 [1997]).

23 José María Rojas attempts to in “El liderazgo socialista de los años veinte: una aproximación,” in *Liquidando el pasado. La izquierda colombiana en los archivos de la Unión Soviética*, compiled by Klaus Meschkat and José María (Bogotá: Taurus, 2009), 45-80, characterize the forms of leadership and direction in the early steps of popular socialism in Colombia, using the well-known typology of Max Weber in this respect.

related to other societies and political ideology other than his own, apart from the fact that such analysis would also be a way to “liquidate a past” so unremarkable.

This renewed study of political cultures on discussion is inseparable from the analysis of the *political language* that, in the case of the language of *comrades*, is a highly suggestive subject for the research of ideologies and forms of treatment of reality through words. In principle, it seemed to be a language that tried to copy the terms of designation and classification that the Bolsheviks introduced in Russia in a direct way —Chilean communists will talk of “white terror” for example, designating all dictatorial governments as “fascist” leaving out any analysis, as the compilation and analysis presented by Ulianova and Riquelme show very well; but the case is not an exception—; the copied language that will immediately make its work of deformation of the reality, subjecting it to an interpretation that hardly considered that reality, but which will immediately become an instrument to legitimize “correct speeches and positions,” creating a long tradition of “deforming designation” of reality, which historians have collected without any kind of criticism.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the return of the global history and varied existing forms of Connected History favors the study of relationships between the Communist International and Latin America, because one of the major issues of researches on the subject is related to its localism and limitation to a specific national society. Indeed, it is not a matter of denying every particularity, but there is no doubt the Soviet politics determined a certain homogeneity of processes, and, above all, it should be considered that the Communist International was not a federation of parties, it was the organization of a world party, led by the Bolsheviks in power, already organized as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and commanded by a State under construction, which had one strategy and several tactics to extend its project and political institutions around the world, although in the end things have been a memorable fiasco, just as Manuel Caballero warned several years ago and that seems to be forgotten.

In a broader scope, the possibility of reconsidering the reactions of the “political establishment” in all its varieties, with respect to the challenge launched by the communists since the beginning of the century is opened. Without the slightest intention of denying the disqualifications, injustices and persecutions lived by communists, socialists, and left-wing people in general in Latin America throughout the XX Century, there is no doubt that magnitude of the *challenge* itself received by the establishment had an impact upon it. A modest challenge from the practical point of view and actual possibilities, but grown and transfigured from the point of view of the stated purposes and language in which the challenge was launched. Thus, following the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*, the Komintern, directly and expressly declared that its ultimate purpose was no other than the abolition from the face of the Earth of every political and social regime other than communism, therefore in strategic terms the “final aim” will have differential tactics, either of “class against class struggle” or the Popular Front. Therefore, it is necessary to know how to establish the relationship between the launched challenge, no matter how inflated it was, and the responses of a relatively weak “establishment,” especially at the beginning of the XX Century. Thus dragged by fear and facing the appearing ghost, at a time at which it has not even finished imposing the order that it constitutionally intended to assume.

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24 On the power of “building” the reality by the “legitimate languages” of Marxism and intrinsic authoritarianism see Pierre Bourdieu, “El discurso importante”. Some sociological reflections upon ‘Algunas observaciones en torno a *Leer el Capital*,’ in *¿Qué significa hablar?* (Madrid: Akal, 1985 [1970]), 134-151.

The relatively abundant documentation on some of the strikes of the late twenties in Colombia, for example, shows the importance and weight of rumor and false information, and fear of an unknown opponent, influenced by strange doctrines that came from the “barbaric Russia;” all these at a time filled with uncertainty about new forms of collective labor action, as was the case of the strikes of oil workers in 1928. But the authors who have studied the process seem not manage to connect the forms of fear of the establishment with the magnitude of the challenge posed by labor leaders. Although the documents showing the actions of military social organization planned by the “revolutionary socialism” are known —*without the slightest practical possibility*—, their decision to make revolutionary propaganda among young soldiers and their attempt to lead a workers’ strike — which simply demanded decent working conditions— to an insurrection that was imaginatively interpreted in the *model of what was thought* to have been the workers’ revolution in Russia, no attempt was made to present new forms of interpretation of the events, beyond offering related documentary evidence and repeating the same “denunciations” known since the time of the events and that later immortalized by literature; historians continued repeating it without major modifications.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, there is a broad research agenda that is now beginning to be addressed. It is hoped that this is the case given in new analytical terms, with the greatest interest in truth, with the least awe for reverential statements a thousand times sanctified and never proven. It is to be hoped that the “historical task” will be performed in the XXI Century with the renewed desire to contradict some of our most deeply rooted university beliefs that are regularly based on the good faith of our desire for social justice; nevertheless they require less to be submitted to the critical file that accompanies our work, regardless of the problem at hand.

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25 An important documentation on this point in Rojas, *La estrategia insurreccional*, second part.

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