

**IN THE SHADOW OF BATLLE: WORKERS, STATE OFFICIALS, AND THE CREATION OF  
THE WELFARE STATE IN URUGUAY, 1900-1916**

by

Lars Edward Peterson

B.A. History, B.A. Spanish, University of Arizona, 2004

M.A. History, University of Pittsburgh, 2006

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2014

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Lars Edward Peterson

It was defended on

March 31, 2014

and approved by

George Reid Andrews, Distinguished Professor and Chair, Department of History

Patrick Manning, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of World History, Department of History

John Markoff, Distinguished Professor, Department of Sociology

Richard Oestreicher, Associate Professor, Department of History

Copyright © by Lars Edward Peterson

2014

**IN THE SHADOW OF BATLLE: WORKERS, STATE OFFICIALS, AND THE CREATION OF  
THE WELFARE STATE IN URUGUAY, 1900-1916**

Lars Edward Peterson, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2014

The welfare state, and expanded social provision by national governments, is one of the most important political, social, and economic phenomena of the twentieth century.

Uruguay was the first country in the Americas to establish a welfare state and among the first in the world to do so. This dissertation will argue that workers had a deep impact on Uruguayan politics in the early twentieth century. As their power increased, politicians responded to labor's demands while attempting to channel workers into an orderly political process. I highlight the growth of workers' power in many different ways. First, I show how workers developed their many critiques of modern industrial life—in essence, how they articulated demands. Second, this dissertation charts the development of Uruguay's earliest labor bills—a process for which social Catholic militancy deserves credit. Third, I describe anarchism—the ascendant ideology among workers at the turn of the twentieth century in Uruguay—and its partial accommodation to welfare state-building through populist politics. Finally, this study analyses parliamentary discourse to show the increase of politicians' fear of labor's power, their legislative responses, and their other motivations for establishing a welfare state. Workers' impact on the course of reform legislation reached a peak in 1916 when they initiated a series of strikes to correct the inadequacies of one of the country's first labor laws: the eight-hour workday.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: URUGUAY’S WELFARE STATE: <i>BATLLISTA</i> POLITICS, WORKER POLITICS.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: <i>REGENERACIÓN SOCIAL</i> : RELIGION, FAMILY, VICE, AND THE MAKINGS OF A JUST SOCIETY IN URUGUAY .....	24
CHAPTER THREE: <i>SEMBRANDO UNA SEMILLA, LANZADA UNA SEMILLA</i> : SOCIAL CATHOLICISM AND EARLY LABOR LEGISLATION .....	61
CHAPTER FOUR: FROM ANARCHISTS TO ‘ANARCO-BATLLISTAS’: POPULISM AND LABOR LEGISLATION IN URUGUAY.....	105
CHAPTER FIVE: “ <i>ENCAUZANDO</i> ” “ <i>EL PRINCIPIO DE LA SOLIDARIDAD</i> ”: LABOR LAW’S DISCOURSE, PASSAGE, AND PRACTICE.....	139
APPENDIX A .....	184
APPENDIX B .....	185
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	186

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Roxlo and de Herrera Labor Bill (February 1905) (Blanco Party).....	110
Table 2. Roxlo and de Herrera “Revised” Labor Bill (June 1905) (Blanco Party) .....	112
Table 3. Uruguayan Labor Legislation: A Timeline, 1903-1916 .....	184
Table 4. Labor Bills Introduced in the Chamber of Representatives, 1917-1919 .....	185

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 .....	54
Figure 2 .....	55
Figure 3 .....	56
Figure 4 .....	57
Figure 5 .....	58
Figure 6 .....	59
Figure 7 .....	60

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are in order for making this dissertation possible. I am grateful to my committee for their mentorship over the years: Patrick Manning, Richard Oestreicher, John Markoff, and especially my committee chair, George Reid Andrews. A special thanks to Patricia Vargas, the rest of the staff at the Fulbright office in Uruguay, and for my fellow researchers, Kate Mallula and Flora Lindsay-Herrera. While doing research I benefited from the help of Carlos Zubillaga and Ana Frega at the Universidad de la República, and of Universindo Rodríguez Díaz, librarian at the Uruguayan National Library. I will always be indebted to the many fellow graduate students I have met and collaborated with through my studies. These include (but are not limited to) Suset Laboy Perez, Kavin Paulraj, Matt Casey, Isaac Curtis, Roland Clark, Keyon Zimmer, Natalie Kimball, Oscar de la Torre, and Alyssa Ribeiro. Thanks to my parents, Grant and Stella Peterson, and to my great uncle and great aunt Walter and Ponjita González for all of their help. I must also thank the many friends and a few significant others without whose support I could not have completed this dissertation: Karen Oen Balensiefer, Jared Ondvchk, Jesse Hanley, Daniel Hatfield, Hillary Lazar, Hatem Hassan, Marie Skoczylas, Matthew Rutherford, Parker Shaw, Amorette Coral Sherwood, Maryann Ullman, and Shamon Ecung.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Uruguay's Welfare State: *Batllista* Politics, Worker Politics

The welfare state, and expanded social provision by national governments, is one of the most important political, social, and economic phenomena of the twentieth century. During the first half of the 1900s, state officials around the world dramatically shifted the function of states to include the role of caretaker. States, of course, continued to be guarantors of internal order and dispensers of discipline. But a host of political forces empowered them with the additional role of managing and facilitating the health and wellbeing of citizens. State structures began to recognize an ever-expanding list of rights that legislators, bureaucrats, and the police were meant to safeguard. Some of the first rights recognized by states were those asserted by workers. These included rights to sufficient rest, to equitable pay, to organize, and to safer working conditions.

This dissertation examines the origins of the welfare state in Uruguay, the first country in Latin America to undertake comprehensive social and labor reform and one of the first in the world outside of Europe to do so. Uruguay provides an ideal test case to answer a basic question about the rise of such states: were they created primarily as the result of initiatives by political and state elites, of pressure from employers, of demands by workers and their unions, or through some combination thereof?

**The Rise of the Welfare State.** An extensive literature suggests that welfare states develop in response to the challenges posed by economic modernization.

Examining the cases of Germany and England, E. P. Hennock finds that

the State became a welfare state because it increasingly dealt with the social consequences of the way in which modern industrial capitalism was established. These consequences, often described as ‘externalities’, resulted from the narrow definition of the legal obligations of capitalist entrepreneurs, which contrasted with the obligations imposed on entrepreneurs in the older *corporatist economy*. This emancipation of the entrepreneur was a deliberate act of State, undertaken in the interest of increasing ‘the wealth of nations’ and therefore the power of states over other states.<sup>1</sup>

As Patrick Manning and Aiqun Hu argue, the idea of social insurance—which arose in Germany in the 1880s—quickly attracted the attention of state officials in other countries, including Uruguay. Following World War I, and especially after World War II, most countries around the world implemented systems of social insurance (most followed the German model while some favored the Soviet one). But while ideas for these new programs spread quickly, it was national dynamics that determined the timing of their implementation.<sup>2</sup> Daniel Rodgers similarly found that in this “new world of transferable social experience,” Atlantic countries experienced a lively exchange of state reform models.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation echoes these findings by demonstrating that Uruguayan legislators were highly attuned to the quickly globalizing discourse about social insurance, finding analogous reasons for its local adoption and even plagiarizing laws passed in Europe. They were also mindful of being one of the first countries outside

---

<sup>1</sup> Emphasis in the original. E. P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Aiqun Hu and Patrick Manning, “The Global Social Insurance Movement Since the 1880s,” *Journal of Global History*, Volume 5, Issue 1 (March 2010), 125-148.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4-7.

Europe to entertain such an expanded role for the state. Their desire to pass laws of social provisioning stemmed primarily from an anxiety to suppress labor discontent. But they also perceived in such laws a path to modernization, a way to catch up with Europe. This case study, then, adds another instance of “Atlantic crossings,” absent from Rogers’ analysis, and illustrates one of several early national conversions to the idea of social insurance.

Gregory J. Kasza grounds the appearance of “nearly all” welfare states in the maladies resulting from economic growth. Once a country reached a “minimum level development,” with its attendant contradictions, states adopted reform in response. Additionally, crises can propel welfare-state development, as the Pacific War did for Japan. Conflict pushes states to take an active interest in the health of citizens given that they comprise the “human resources” of the war machine.<sup>4</sup> As Tien-Lung Liu argues, national crises, such as war or economic disasters, allow state officials to bypass traditional interest groups and act with relative autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

Welfare-state-building involved far more than a series of political economic reforms. It took place through struggles that demanded better, safer, and more remunerative work lives; expanded access to citizenship rights, representation, and social integration; changes in family composition, function, and the roles of its members; etc. At their most basic level, welfare states responded to and expressed new notions of what it meant to be human and how humans ought to relate to one another. Historians of welfare

---

<sup>4</sup> Gregory J. Kasza, *One World of Welfare: Japan in Comparative Perspective* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 10-11, 31-32, 36, 44-47.

<sup>5</sup> Tien-Lung Liu, *The Chameleon State: Global Culture and Policy Shifts in Britain and Germany, 1914-1933* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 18-19.

states have recently noted the presence of both concurrence and disagreement between the interests of policy makers and the subjects of state intervention.

Heather McCrea's study of mid-nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Yucatan found that public health interventions were motivated by more than altruistic concern for people's wellbeing. Laws and policies, bureaucrats and doctors, were deployed as part of a civilizing and anti-insurgent mission; state officials hoped to prevent the frequent outbursts of insurrection for which the peninsula was known. Public health programs, then, certainly responded to biological ills and desires to eradicate them but they also met resistance where those efforts concealed an additional shadowy agenda.<sup>6</sup> Michael Willrich similarly noted the resistance to vaccination and other public health initiatives by lower class people in the Progressive-era United States.<sup>7</sup> Tracy Staffes—also a Progressive Era historian—argues that, while education was seen by lower-class people as a means of social, economic, and political uplift, politicians shaped public education as a means of social control meant to discipline and elicit the loyalty of unruly and alienated children.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Paulo Drinot has looked at how political, academic, and economic elites sought to transform—in terms of alleged racial characteristics such as culture and work ethic—Peruvian workers from backward, dangerous, indigenous people into modern mestizo citizens. State officials saw this policy, one often frustrated by workers'

---

<sup>6</sup> Heather McCrea, *Diseased Relations: Epidemics, Public Health, and State-Building in Yucatán, Mexico, 1847-1924* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Willrich, *Pox: An American History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Tracy L. Staffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

competing interests, as preparatory to bringing the country into alignment with the putatively advanced European nations.<sup>9</sup>

In explaining the origins of Brazilian labor law, historian John French has sharply criticized what he calls the myth of the *outorga*, or the gift. That myth emphasizes the “prescience” and benevolence of state officials who, even in the absence of any demands from below, took the initiative in granting labor protections and other concessions to workers and their movements.<sup>10</sup> That orientation is clearly visible in Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier’s classic comparative work, *Shaping the Political Arena*. The Colliers describe the process of welfare-state building in Latin America as one of “incorporation,” in which state agencies and officials gradually admitted workers and their movements to participation in ruling coalitions. While admitting that “at various points choices made within the labor movement were also important,” they conclude that “if one wishes to explain why the incorporation period took the specific form that it did in each country, the answer will focus more centrally on the dynamics of intralite politics and choices by actors within the state.”<sup>11</sup>

In a separate study, Ruth Berins Collier goes further in disassociating workers’ struggle from the calculus of high politics. To her, Uruguayan “working-class demands were not part of the reform process. Indeed, workers were not particularly oriented to electoral politics as a vehicle for achieving their collective ends. Anarchism was still

---

<sup>9</sup> Paulo Drinot, *The Allure of Labor: Workers, Race, and the Makings of the Peruvian State* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> John D. French, *Drowning in Laws: Labor Law and Brazilian Political Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8-9, 26-39.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 50. For a similar approach comparing European and Latin American cases, see John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

influential within the labor movement [an understatement] and in the new [avowedly anarchist federation] FORU, which had been founded as a labor central in 1905. In accordance with this orientation, workers were often encouraged not to take part in electoral politics. With worker demands centered on economic rather than political issues and expressed primarily through strikes rather than the vote, the politics of democratic reform must be seen in terms of the competitive mobilization and strategic interaction of Uruguay's two traditional parties."<sup>12</sup>

Criticizing the Colliers' approach, Mark Healey points to the photo of Juan Domingo Perón that adorns the cover of *Shaping the Political Arena's* first edition. The crowd gathered in a plaza has been excised, banished from visual and methodological view. "Rarely has a cover so well encapsulated the contents of a book. Their study, like the photograph, highlights those Latin American political leaders who claimed most convincingly to represent popular interests, but [kept] 'the people' themselves just offstage. Like the Plaza de Mayo, the book is haunted by workers, central to its argument but absent from its text."<sup>13</sup> In the Colliers' analysis, it is state officials who are the primary agents of change. Workers' role in forging the welfare state is largely neglected, owing to an alleged weakness on labor's part—be it organizational, numerical, or ideological—that prevented workers from having any meaningful voice in government at that time.

More recent literature has taken a far more sophisticated approach to the interactions among multiple actors that made social and labor reform possible. Three

---

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Berins Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 75.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Healey, *In the Spirit of Battle: Shaping the Political Arena and the Great Uruguayan Exception*, Working Paper #21 (Durham: Duke University Press, August 1996), 1.

arguments (sometimes overlapping) appear in these histories as causes of state reforms. First, state officials responded to pressures from workers as labor achieved significant power, especially in the context of industrialization, and sometimes with the advent of political and social revolution.<sup>14</sup> Second, protective legislation, often accompanied by universal male suffrage, became a means of channeling labor demands into representative politics through a new political party or faction. Many of these works emphasize the links made between populist state officials and their constituents garnered among newly enfranchised working class voters. Such populists include Hipólito Yrigoyen (Argentina), Getúlio Vargas (Brazil), Arturo Alessandri (Chile), Ramón Grau San Martín (Cuba), José María Velasco Ibarra (Ecuador), and José Batlle y Ordóñez (Uruguay).<sup>15</sup> Third, some works have pointed to the role of federal labor departments created by protective

---

<sup>14</sup> Revolutionary situations (as identified by the authors) include Mexico (1910-1917), Cuba (1933), and Guatemala (1951-1954). Jonathan C. Brown ed., *Workers' Control in Latin America, 1930-1979* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Peter DeShazo, *Urban Workers and Labor Unions in Chile, 1902-1927* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); John D. French, *The Brazilian Workers' ABC: Class Conflict and Alliances in Modern São Paulo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Cindy Forster, "Reforging National Revolution: Campesino Labor Struggles in Guatemala, 1944-1954," in Aviva Chomsky and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, eds., *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation-State: The Laboring Peoples of the Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); John M. Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1906-1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978); Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America: The Ecuadorian Experience* (Athens: Ohio Center for International Studies, 2000); French, *Drowning in Laws*; Carol Graham, *Peru's APRA: Parties, Politics, and the Elusive Quest for Democracy* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992); Joel Horowitz, *Argentina's Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1916-1930* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Julio Pinto and Verónica Valdivia, *¿Revolución proletaria o querida chusma?: Socialismo y Alessandrismo en la pugna por la politización pampina (1911-1932)* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2001); Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*; Carlos Zubillaga, "El batllismo," in Jorge Balbis, et. al., *El primer batllismo: Cinco enfoques polémicos* (Montevideo: Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana and Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1985). The case of the Dominican Republic departs slightly from this typology in that the Trujillo dictatorship (by definition) was not elected. However, Richard Turits has shown that the Trujillo dictatorship remained in power by cultivating, in populist fashion, a base of support among peasants through land redistribution and protecting rural workers from large land-holders. Richard L. Turits, "The Foundations of Despotism: Agrarian Reform, Rural Transformation, and Peasant-State Compromise in Trujillo's Dominican Republic, 1930-1944," *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation State: The Laboring Peoples of of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean*, Aviva Chomsky and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

legislation, not as institutions inherently beholden to either capitalists or workers as older theories have claimed, but as relatively independent institutions intervening to quell class conflict.<sup>16</sup>

**The Uruguayan Welfare State.** The multi-faceted approaches of this recent literature, incorporating the roles of multiple social and political actors, can shed considerable light on the rise of the welfare state in Uruguay. Especially because of the country's turbulent history during the first seventy-five years after independence (in 1828), the vast political, economic, and social changes that took place between 1900 and 1920 are notable and surprising. Throughout the nineteenth century, the two traditional parties—the National or Blanco Party and the Colorado Party—went to war often, frequently in alliance with a foreign power (Argentina, Brazil, or Great Britain). The 1904 Blanco uprising, sparked by hostility to the election of José Batlle y Ordóñez, marked the last civil war in Uruguay. State security forces finally gained control over the countryside and both political parties agreed to settle their differences through the electoral process. The parties' acceptance of legality and the government's relative autonomy from landed interests, then, were preconditions to welfare-state building.

Social provisioning laws passed by 1920 included accident insurance (1914), the eight-hour workday (1915), retirement pensions (1919), and several reforms affecting female and child labor. Other social-political laws, passed in the 1910s, included divorce legislation (1913), abolition of the death penalty (1907), separation of church and state (1917), universal male suffrage (1917), the end of legal discrimination against children

---

<sup>16</sup> French, *Drowning in Laws*, Tien-Lung Liu, *The Chameleon State*; Drinot, *The Allure of Labor*.



conceived out of wedlock (1914), and the further extension and secularization of public schooling.

In 1973, the esteemed Uruguayan intellectual Carlos Real de Azúa published a short work seeking to explain the origins and impacts of those reforms. Entitled *Uruguay, ¿una sociedad amortiguadora?*—roughly translated: *Uruguay, a Buffer Society?*—the essay proposed that the purpose of the reforms was to mitigate social tensions, to absorb the shocks of conflict among various interests (such as employer/employee clashes), and to construct a comprehensive social safety net. The result was to produce “a society with an egalitarian tone, presided over by a redistributive State whose agencies oversaw a prescient, benevolent and always present bureaucracy.”<sup>17</sup>

Through “the work of Don José Batlle y Ordóñez and his party,” Real de Azúa concluded, Uruguay “took on all aspects of a modern and democratic society. What’s more: some of its characteristics appeared to be very similar to those that in the West would three decades later be called a ‘Welfare State.’” Real de Azúa at least acknowledged that other actors besides Batlle had taken part in that process and that “the famous ‘batllista model’” was to a certain degree a misnomer, since Batlle’s reforms had drawn on many allies and collaborators. Despite the obligation to “to underscore the actions of all the antecedents and determinants that made [batllismo] possible,” in the end, Real de Azúa accepted the “batllista model” as a better “political fiction” than

---

<sup>17</sup> “Una sociedad de tono igualitario, regida por un Estado distributista cuyas agencias regenteaba una previsor, benévola y siempre presente burocracia.” Carlos Real de Azúa, *Uruguay, ¿una sociedad amortiguadora?* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1984), 7-9, 43-44.

others, and used it as a sort of shorthand for broader political and social changes involving numerous historical actors.<sup>18</sup>

Very few other Uruguayan scholars adopted an approach as careful and nuanced as Real de Azúa's. Instead, the dozens of biographies and national histories that examine this period take at face value a narrative that was already developing while its subject still lived: that Batlle, the visionary and humanitarian, was behind almost every meaningful political reform in the first two decades of Uruguay's twentieth century. For example, one of Batlle's first biographers, Justino Závila Muniz, concludes using dramatic present tense that "the noblest revolution that Uruguay has ever known, the one that changed its trajectory through the course of history without a single drop of blood being spilt, is being fulfilled by the government through the tireless will of Batlle."<sup>19</sup> One of the more sophisticated analyses of José Batlle's contributions argues that by the turn of the twentieth century, Uruguay's backward economic model involving the "trinity of cattle raising, large estates and British investments" had run its course. It was Batlle who possessed the political finesse to alter economic policy toward a state-directed development model that curtailed the power of foreign capital, fostered gradual industrial

---

<sup>18</sup> "A primera vista—y aun a exámenes posteriores—el Uruguay que fue modelado por la obra de Don José Batlle y Ordóñez y su partido entre 1903 y 1931—y aun persistiría por dos docenas sin muchos retoques—asumió todos los contornos de una sociedad moderna y democrática. Más todavía: algunas de sus características parecieron muy próximas al que en Occidente se llamaría tres décadas más tarde un 'Estado de Bienestar'..." "Este es, punto más, punto menos, el famoso 'modelo batllista', como suele llamársele con relativa injusticia a un proyecto que iría concitando variados apoyos y en el que muchos, sin aquella etiqueta, colaboraron." "...Comporta también la obligación de subrayar la acción de todos los antecedentes y condicionantes que la posibilitaron. La que alguna vez llamamos la 'interpretación titanesca' de la 'obra de Batlle' y que representó, entre otras, una exaltada biografía de Justino Zavala Muniz [Batlle's first of many biographers], centraba su luz sobre el personaje para colocarlo, empero, en una especie de contrapunto con un Uruguay anterior...que el país oriental de los años ochenta y noventa." Real de Azúa, *Uruguay, ¿una sociedad amortiguadora?*, 43-46.

<sup>19</sup> "La revolución, la más noble que el Uruguay ha conocido; la que cambió el rumbo de su historia sin que una gota de sangre fuera derramada, ni una libertad desconocida, se está cumpliendo desde el gobierno por la incansable voluntad de Batlle." Justino Závila Muniz, *Batlle: Héroe civil* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1945), 209.

growth, and redistributed profits to benefit almost all Uruguayans, especially workers. Thus “the eight-hour workday law,” for example, “apart from being a necessity, was a ‘gift’ from the batllista State.” No other social group(s), including the working class, had enough power to alter Uruguay’s political economy.<sup>20</sup>

Many books have been written to explain how Batlle’s political philosophy developed and its relationship to state reform or, as one historian put it, his “conscience made into law.”<sup>21</sup> Many have come up empty handed, admitting that Batlle was an undisciplined and mediocre intellectual who merely loved to argue and was active in Uruguayan philosophical debates.<sup>22</sup> They have turned up one influential book—*El derecho natural* or *Natural Law* by Enrique Ahrens—which he appears to have been assigned as part of a class at the University of Brussels during his early adult travels. No one has gotten any further, concluding vaguely like Roberto Andreón that “complemented by a historical experience, during a time period of intense syndicalism and labor struggles, Batlle arrived at a political position that was half-way between liberalism and socialism and that can be described as ‘neo-liberal’ or ‘social-democratic.’” This ideology contained within it elements that vaguely indicated a path toward collectivism although this goal appears to have been seriously impeded by the immediate

---

<sup>20</sup> “La tríada ganadería, latifundio e inversión británica...” “La ley de ocho horas fue, además de una necesidad, un ‘obsequio’ del Estado batllista.” Miguel J. Pujol, *Batlle: El estado de bienestar en el Río de la Plata* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 1996), 60-61.

<sup>21</sup> Enrique Rodríguez Fabregat, *Batlle y Ordóñez, el reformador* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Claridad, 1942), 440.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance: Milton I. Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay: The Creator of His Times, 1902-1907* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 21-23.

problems.”<sup>23</sup> The larger point, however, is that these scholars search for the origins of large social and political changes in Batlle’s mind.

Labor historians and political historians have attempted to broaden the story of Uruguay’s pivotal first twenty years of the twentieth century by expanding its *dramatis personae*. Estela Abal Oliú and Isabel Ezcurra Semblat describe how the Blanco Party, defeated in 1904 on the battlefield, became a competitive political party by initiating modest efforts to attract a following among workers.<sup>24</sup> A few labor histories have also been written that attempt to protagonize workers of that time period. Most of these too, however, have not escaped the tendency to frame narratives with reference to Batlle. The only detailed labor history that covers those years, Fernando Lopez D’Alesandro’s *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya (History of the Uruguayan Left)* carries the revealing subtitle, *La izquierda durante el batllismo (The Left During Batllismo)*. Uruguay’s workers are constantly portrayed as beholden to José Batlle’s politics; and their interaction with, reaction to, or influence on almost any other state official is all but completely absent. The Uruguayan left, according to López D’Alesandro, orbited Batlle.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> “Complementada por la experiencia histórica, en una época de intensificación del sindicalismo y las luchas obreras, Batlle llegó a una concepción política que está a medio camino entre el liberalismo y el socialismo y a la que puede calificarse como ‘neo-liberal’ o ‘social-demócrata.’ Esta ideología contenía en sí elementos que indicaban un camino hacia el colectivismo, aunque esta meta apareciera muy vagamente, oscurecida por los problemas inmediatos.” Roberto Andreón, *Humanismo batllista* (Montevideo: Arca, 1996), 43; Arturo Ardao, *Batlle y Ordóñez y el positivismo filosófico* (Montevideo: Número, 1951); Jorge Buscio, *José Batlle y Ordóñez: Uruguay a la vanguardia del mundo: Pensamiento político y raíces ideológicas* (Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2004); Manuel Claps, with the collaboration of Mario Daniel Lamas, *El batllismo como ideología* (Montevideo: Cal y Canto, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Estela Abal Oliú and Isabel Ezcurra Semblat, *De las lanzas a las leyes: El Partido Nacional y la cuestión social*, Second Edition (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Plaza, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Fernando López D’Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Anarquistas y socialistas: 1838-1910* (Montevideo: Ediciones del Nuevo Mundo, 1988); Fernando López D’Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: 1911-1918: La izquierda durante el Batllismo [Primera parte]* (Montevideo: Ediciones del Nuevo Mundo, 1990); Fernando López D’Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya:*

A more nuanced position is that of Gerardo Caetano and José Rilla, who state that “assigning ‘quotas of responsibility’ with precision for this advance of social reformism does not appear to be an easy thing.” They allege that workers at the time saw the reforms as concessions extracted from recalcitrant state officials. (As we will see in Chapter 4, this was not actually true, at least for anarchists). State officials for their part explained social legislation as the fulfillment of their ethical obligations. “It is obvious that between these two perspectives—both somewhat exaggerated—stood the reality of things. But it is also clear that reforms relating to labor’s rights would not have been extended to society without the support of the ruling [Colorado] party, regardless of the strength mustered—and in some cases deployed—by union activity.” Lacking an alternative framework, Caetano and Rilla default to the traditional one. The actions of José Batlle and his faction remain the focus and explanation for Uruguay’s welfare state.<sup>26</sup>

The seeming inescapability of this frame is somewhat understandable. The owner of the most widely distributed newspaper in the country at the time (*El Día*), and the leader of the majority political faction (*batllista*) of the party in power (the Colorado Party), Batlle was perfectly positioned to spin narratives of social and political progress around himself. As I discuss in Chapter Four, some anarchists fell prey to a political polarization from which Batlle benefited and that he helped create—that it would either

---

*Tomo II: 1911-1918: La izquierda durante el Batllismo [Segunda parte]* (Montevideo: Ediciones del Nuevo Mundo, 1992); Fernando Lopez D’Alessandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: La fundación del partido comunista y la división del anarquismo (1919-1923)* (Montevideo: Vintén Editor, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> “No parece fácil discriminar con precisión las ‘cuotas de responsabilidad’ en este avance del reformismo social.” “Es obvio que entre estas dos visiones—algo exageradas—circuló efectivamente la realidad de las cosas. Pero también parece claro que las reformas en el plano del derecho laboral no se habrían extendido al conjunto de la sociedad sin el sostén del partido de gobierno, por más fuerza que tuviera—y que en ocasiones tuvo—la movilización sindical.” Gerardo Caetano and José Rilla, *Historia contemporánea del Uruguay: De la colonia al siglo XXI*, Second Edition (Montevideo: CLAEH and Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2005), 152.

be his politics (the best deal anarchists, socialists, and workers could get) or those of the religious, economic, and political reaction.

One of the few exceptions to this trend is historian Carlos Zubillaga, scholar of the early period of labor organization beginning in the 1880s and leading up to the considerable strength exercised by unions starting in 1905. He finds that as workers gained power, state officials took note and began to wrestle with how to placate labor and quell possible insurrection. “Labor legislation,” he says, “came as a tardy response by the Uruguayan political system to claims articulated by unions for thirty years; these political ideals were born along with workers’ aspirations, and by journalists and politicians sensitive to the global conditions of degradation in which the majority of wage laborers lived. Nothing could be further from the truth that Uruguayan labor legislation followed the model of a ‘concession.’” Amplifying the narrative of who built the welfare state, Zubillaga also wrote about Uruguayan Catholicism and the various positions different factions within the Uruguayan Church took regarding state reform. Though his studies end just as the twentieth century begins, his work marks an important departure from the all-Batlle orientation of Uruguayan literature. His break with the national historiography was underscored by his recent publication of both a book on popular culture and a biographical dictionary filled with hundreds of life histories, large and small, of workers who contributed to labor politics between 1870 and 1910.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> “La legislación del trabajo...resultó la tardía respuesta del sistema político uruguayo al reclamo formulado desde treinta años antes por organizaciones sindicales, corrientes políticas nacidas al conjuro de las aspiraciones obreras, publicistas y políticos sensibles a las condiciones de degradación en que vivía y trabajaba la mayoría del mundo asalariado. Nada más alejado, pues, que la legislación laboral uruguaya, del modelo de una legislación ‘concedida.’” Carlos Zubillaga, *Pan y trabajo: Organización sindical, estrategias de lucha y arbitraje estatal en Uruguay (1870-1905)* (Montevideo: Librería de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, 1996); Carlos Zubillaga and Jorge Balbis, *Historia del*

**Workers and Their Movements.** Following Zubillaga's lead, this dissertation will argue that workers had a deep impact on Uruguayan politics in the early twentieth century. Using tactics as diverse as strikes, introducing labor legislation, petitioning, and supporting political campaigns, workers influenced the development of Uruguay's welfare state. Politicians responded to labor's demands while attempting to channel workers into an orderly political process. Workers' impact on the course of reform legislation reached a peak in 1916 when they initiated a series of strikes to correct the inadequacies of one of the country's first labor laws: the eight-hour workday.

Between 1882 and 1903, 500,000 people came to live in Uruguay; by the first decade of the twentieth century, the country's population hovered around 1 million. Of the foreign nationals living in Uruguay in 1900, approximately 37 percent were from Italy, 29 percent from Spain, 14 percent from Brazil, and 7 percent from France.<sup>28</sup> While the country had had a large African and Afro-Uruguayan presence at the time of independence, the influx of immigrants during the 1800s reduced the proportion of people of color to less than 1 percent by the end of the century.<sup>29</sup>

---

*movimiento sindical uruguayo*, vol. 1-4 (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1985), 137; Carlos Zubillaga, *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)* (Montevideo: Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana and Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1988); Carlos Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra: Aportes a un diccionario biográfico de los orígenes del movimiento sindical en Uruguay (1870-1910)* (Montevideo: Librería de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, 2008); Carlos Zubillaga, *Cultura popular en el Uruguay de entresiglos (1870-1910)* (Montevideo: Librería Linardi y Risso, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> *Anuario Estadístico de la Nación: 1917* (Montevideo: Tipografía Moderna de Manuel Diego Arduino, 1919), 15; *Anuario Estadístico de la Nación: 1904-1906*, Volume 1 (Montevideo: Imprenta Artística y Encuadernación, de Dornaleche y Reyes, 1907), 44.

<sup>29</sup> George Reid Andrews, *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 6-7.

By 1910, the population of Montevideo was 320,505, one-third of the national total.<sup>30</sup> The countryside, with abundant grasslands, had been and would remain sparsely populated and dominated by livestock production. A few families owned vast estates operated by handfuls of rural workers. At the turn of the twentieth century, Uruguay had little in the way of industry. Most workers labored in small workshops and other modest establishments. The country's only large employers were the meatpacking plants (called *frigoríficos*), the port, and the largely foreign-owned trolley and railroad companies.

Anarchism traveled with immigrants to Uruguay during the late nineteenth century, took root, and flourished so that by the early 1900s, it was the ascendant ideology among workers, followed by Catholic unionism and then socialism. Influenced by anarcho-syndicalism, anarchist unions followed a model of organization known as resistance societies, patterned after the social organization they hoped to build following the anticipated revolution against state and capital. Resistance societies sought to include all workers of a particular trade and empowered each member to shape his or her association through direct democracy. Representatives were delegated to manage the day-to-day affairs of the organization and to represent the society to larger labor associations. Explicit in their abhorrence of authoritarian institutions, anarchist unions recognized no arbiter between themselves and employers. After decades of trial and error, Uruguayan anarchists in 1905 managed to establish an umbrella federation to coordinate solidarity and struggle among resistance societies. Named the Uruguayan Regional Workers'

---

<sup>30</sup> *Anuario Estadístico de la Nación: 1917*, 16.



Federation (Federación Obrera Regional Uruguaya) or FORU, it had counterparts in Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay.<sup>31</sup>

After anarchists, social Catholic workers were the most prominent faction in labor politics. Organizing along religious lines, especially in the Círculos Católicos and the Christian Democratic Union (Unión Democrática Cristiana), Catholic workers were especially active between 1901 and 1905 (see Chapter Three).

Socialists attempted with little success to build a counterpart to FORU called the General Union of Workers (Unión General de Trabajadores) or UGT.<sup>32</sup> The Socialist Party, however, managed to become an important minor party, especially with the election to Parliament of its first representative, Emilio Frugoni, in 1911.

**The Labor and Radical Press.** The origins of the radical press date back to the first unionizing efforts by Montevideo workers in the 1870s, including the first known strike in 1876. The newspaper *El Internacional*, first published in 1878, was an important piece of infrastructure for the new labor movement.<sup>33</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, workers were able to support a handful of newspapers at any given time, and a dozen or more (depending on the year) by 1920.

Labor and radical newspapers were usually produced not by professional journalists but by workers and activists who wrote and edited the papers in their spare time, usually for no pay. Many papers relied on “voluntary contributions” for funding—a

---

<sup>31</sup> Zubillaga, *Pan y trabajo*, 37-38.

<sup>32</sup> López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Primera Parte]*, 81-83; Universindo Rodríguez, Silvia Visconti, Jorge Chagas, and Gustavo Trullén, *El sindicalismo uruguayo: A 40 años del congreso de unificación* (Montevideo: Ediciones Santillana, 2006), 24.

<sup>33</sup> López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Anarquistas y socialistas: 1838-1910*, 39-40, 43-44.

sliding scale based on what the patron could pay. Papers sponsored by unions drew on member dues for additional support. A few publications also supplemented their revenues with limited advertising. Consequently, the fortunes of these newspapers varied wildly, with some managing to produce only a single issue while others continued publication for years or even decades.

By 1900, the radical press was split between newspapers published by labor organizations and those produced by a particular political current with no direct connections to organized labor. For labor unions, operating a newspaper was a mark of stability and prestige. So long as the labor organization persisted, so too could its newspaper. For instance, *Despertar*, the newspaper of the tailors' resistance society, appears to have enjoyed uninterrupted publication from 1905 to beyond the period of study, matching the union's general prosperity. The FORU published several iterations of its newspaper (*La Emancipación*, 1907; *La Federación*, 1911; *Solidaridad*, 1912, 1919-1921, 1923), opening and closing them depending on the federation's fortunes.

Newspapers propounding a particular ideology (Fabianism, anarcho-communism, socialism, etc.) were a more precarious enterprise. With the exception of newspapers like *El Socialista*—the Socialist Party's mouthpiece—these publications generally had no institutional backing. Often, radical newspapers began as an explicit effort to fill in an ideological gap in the city's propaganda journalism; this was always spelled out in its first issue and column. For instance, while establishing their affinity with anarchism, the editors of *El Libertario* in 1905 stated that “we join the press...to bring our undoubtedly sectarian but sincere voice to our brothers that suffer as we do the scourges of the

exploiters, the lash of all slaveries. We join the press to fill a necessity *felt* by us and, we believe, by those that find themselves in circumstances similar to our own.”<sup>34</sup>

Some labor and radical newspapers had substantial circulations. In late 1899, the anarchist newspapers *El Amigo del Pueblo* and *La Aurora* each published 1,500 copies of each issue.<sup>35</sup> In 1908, the Italian-language anarchist newspaper (printed in Buenos Aires and distributed in Argentina and Montevideo) *L’Agitatore* had a print run of 2,500 copies.<sup>36</sup> In 1909, the anarchist newspaper *La Nueva Senda* printed 2,000 copies per issue.<sup>37</sup> And in 1910, the liberal newspaper *Verdad* published 3,000 copies per issue, a high circulation but perhaps not surprising given the cross-class appeal of its secular humanist positions.<sup>38</sup> As a point of comparison, in the mid-1910s, the first mass-marketed Uruguayan newspaper—José Batlle’s privately owned *El Día*—had a daily circulation of between 22,000 and 26,000 copies.<sup>39</sup> Most labor and radical newspapers appeared semi-monthly though some came out once per month. *El Amigo del Obrero*, a social Catholic paper, was the only labor publication to publish twice weekly. Because of the high number of Italian immigrants, there were a few radical Italian language newspapers such as *L’Agitatore*. Other newspapers like *El Obrero Sastre* compromised

---

<sup>34</sup> “Nosotros venimos á la prensa...á traer nuestra palabra, indudablemente sectaria, pero sincera, á nuestros hermanos los que sufren como nosotros las flagelaciones de todos los explotadores, el latigazo de todas las esclavitudes. Venimos a la prensa...a llenar una necesidad *sentida* en nosotros mismos y, creemos, en todos los que como nosotros, se encuentran en iguales condiciones.” Emphasis in the original. “Nuestro saludo,” 5 February 1905, *El Libertario*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> “Gastos,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, December 1899, 4; “Lista de subscripción,” *La Aurora*, September 1899, 4.

<sup>36</sup> “Bilancio Amministrativo,” *L’Agitatore*, 17 December 1908, 8.

<sup>37</sup> “Subscripci[ó]n á favor de ‘La Nueva Senda,’” *La Nueva Senda*, 1 October 1909, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Verdad*, October 1910, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Milton I. Vanger, *Uruguay’s José Batlle y Ordoñez: The Determined Visionary, 1915-1917* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 23-24, footnote 8; Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 24.

by having an Italian language section, usually comprising most or all of the last page of an issue.

Newspapers would occasionally print subscription lists, but subscribers often used pseudonyms to conceal their identities from employers and the police. While the editors of a particular newspaper were usually known, many articles were anonymous or carried pseudonyms. (Aliases were a common tool of even mainstream newspapers in Uruguay; José Batlle was known to have several pseudonyms that he employed in writing articles and columns.)<sup>40</sup> This attests to the threat of repercussion by employers and the police under which propagandists published.

Given the precariousness with which it operated, the radical press arguably offers the best indicators of public opinion among Uruguay's subalterns; all newspapers must strive to resonate with their readership but the radical press was always under a special pressure to do so. Because of this symbiosis—between persuasive propagandists and accurately represented readers—I argue that these newspapers were creators as well as conveyors of sentiments from below. As the broader literature suggests, to look at labor law and elite negotiations over it (in Uruguay or elsewhere) in the absence of any account from below, is to miss the undercurrent that motivated or augmented such changes in the first place; it is to identify effect in a vacuum devoid of cause.

**Chapter Summaries.** The questions that guide this study form the bases of the following four chapters. First, how did Uruguayan workers elaborate ideas about right and wrong, and how did their answers translate into concrete demands made to employers and the state? In Chapter Two, by examining moral talk (on questions of religion, gender

---

<sup>40</sup> Vanger, *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordóñez*, 33.

roles, and vice), I analyze how Uruguayan workers understood social obligations in light of industrialization and the attendant poverty and insecurity. Looking at the discourse of labor newspapers helps explain why certain social and labor reforms passed while others did not. It shows the bottom-up preferences for change, ones that upheld the nuclear family and reinforced traditional gender and age roles, while pushing for more equitable relationships among men.

How was labor law proposed and what role did workers play in formulating those proposals? What role did Catholic workers—a sizable group that has been largely neglected in the literature—play in class struggle? Chapter Three covers the earliest effort to pass labor reforms in Uruguay, an effort undertaken by Catholic workers’ organizations. I explore the currents within Catholicism that in early twentieth-century Uruguay enabled and sanctioned a radical form of Catholic unionism with a social reading of the Gospel and a will to institutionalize such a vision. The efforts of the *Círculos Católicos*—a kind of labor union, mutual aid society, and social/religious group—culminated in the successful introduction of a labor bill into Parliament intended to legally mandate a weekly day of rest for all workers. The campaign mobilized thousands of workers and, though the bill ultimately failed, social Catholics managed to plant the seed of labor reform, giving it the legitimacy of divine mandate.

Given how influential anarchism was to labor politics, key to my argument is explaining how workers went from generally opposing state intervention to accepting state regulation of labor relations and the workplace. In short, how did the state colonize anarchism? In Chapter Four, I examine *anarco-batllismo* as an ideology that developed among many leading anarchists. Proponents considered Batlle to be an exception to

politics as usual and advocated pragmatic support for him during his second term in order to help destroy capitalism and finally separate church and state. This coincided with a willingness—identified with alarm by orthodox anarchists at the time—among workers to engage in mainstream politics and accept some forms of state mediation. In this chapter, I also show the attempts and tactics that state officials used to restrain, placate, and channel labor demands. It shows the development of a strategy among state officials to negotiate with moderate elements among workers while marginalizing their radical counterparts.

Finally, what policy goals did state officials articulate while drafting and debating labor law? How did the actions of workers impact these objectives and when were politicians most likely to seriously attend to the task of reforming labor-state relations? Chapter Five answers these questions by examining parliamentary discourse—articulations of policy that were politically salient. This discourse reveals legislators’ goals of putting Uruguay at the vanguard of the continent by enacting advanced labor legislation. But the development of this discourse also demonstrates how attuned they were to working class organization and action and to most labor demands. Ultimately, Parliament would act on labor law only when pushed to do so by workers’ actions. And the goal of this legislation, largely realized, was to channel workers’ demands and energies into the orderly processes of representative politics and the state mediation of class conflict. This final chapter, along with Chapter Three and Four, demonstrates how workers and their movements were a key element in producing the many reforms listed above. Methods included strikes, especially those that threatened the country’s export sector—the state’s main source of revenue; public air meetings; petitions and, on one occasion, the direct introduction of a labor bill. As I conclude, in 1916 when the eight-

hour workday law went into effect, workers became the enforcers and reformers of what turned out to be a bad law.

## CHAPTER TWO

*Regeneración Social: Religion, Family, Vice, and the Makings of a Just Society in*

Uruguay

On the morning of April 15, 1910, Montevideo readers of *Adelante!* found an unusual addendum to the newspaper. A four-page foldout, tucked between the paper's pages and entitled "Catechism of the Anarchist Doctrine," awaited assembly into a twelve-page pamphlet and distribution by faithful libertarian proselytizers. A group identifying itself only as "an Anarchist Group" had utilized the Catholic mass as a template to compose a liturgy of anarchist beliefs. They had included "The Creed," "The Articles of Faith," the "Our Father," the "Hail Mary," and "The Ten Commandments," only altered to strip away any authoritarian elements of religion so objected to by anarchists, leaving only that which they saw as materialist, liberatory, and radical.<sup>41</sup> Within the pamphlet, the anonymous authors had attempted to describe a just society based on regenerated social relations including those of family, community, and political economy.

The group responsible for the "Anarchist Catechism" identified in their publication the majority of social problems that appeared in other labor newspapers from that era. Rewritten within the anarchist liturgy, the Ten Commandments appeared as follows:

First, love Humanity above all things.

---

<sup>41</sup> "CATECISMO DE LA Doctrina Anarquista," *Adelante!*, April 15, 1910, between pages 2 and 3. Another "Libertarian Catechism" appeared in the anarchist newspaper *Aurora* a few years later. This one, however, listed a series of questions and answers about anarchism. "Catecismo Libertario," *Aurora*, November 1913, 3.



Second, do not speak in vain of it.

Third, spread the ideas of anarchism.

Fourth, honor whoever is worthy of honor.

Fifth, do not kill.

Sixth, do not prostitute yourself nor prostitute anyone else.

Seventh, do not exploit.

Eighth, respect women.

Tenth, use your goods to benefit everyone.

Oddly enough, they wrote no counterpart to the third commandment even though the original offered so many possibilities (“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images”). As Jesus concluded, so did this anarchist group, saying that “these ten commandments can be contained in two: to serve and love Humanity above all things and not shove your fellows into a corner.”<sup>42</sup>

Two other sets of Ten Commandments appeared within this period of reform. The first, printed by the socialist newspaper *La Voz del Obrero*, predated the anarchist rendition by some eight years:

---

<sup>42</sup> “El Primero, amar á la Humanidad sobre todas cosas. El segundo, no hablar de ella en vano. El tercero, propagar las ideas anarquistas. El cuarto, honrar al que sea digno de ello. El quinto, no matar. El sexto, no prostituirse ni prostituir á nadie. El séptimo, no explotar. El octavo, respetar á las mujeres. El décimo, utilizar los bienes en beneficio de todos.” The ninth commandment appears to have been accidentally left out. “Estos diez mandamientos se encierran en dos: en servir y amar á la Humanidad sobre todas las cosas, y en no dar al prójimo contra una esquina.” “CATECISMO DE LA Doctrina Anarquista,” *Adelante!*, April 15, 1910, between pages 2 and 3.

I Show some backbone against the powerful.

II Do not sell your work for poor wages.

III Love and help your work companions as though they were your brethren.

IV Be active in all labor struggles.

V Love your wife and raise her consciousness.

[VI] Do not exploit your children [by sending them to work] prematurely and do not let them grow up to be ignorant.

VII Do not envy the pastimes of the idle rabble.

VIII Do not drink alcohol [or, perhaps, “do not become a drunk”].

[IX] Do not limit your conception of the *patria* to established borders.

X Do not believe that the working class is condemned to servility, and lend your help to the triumph of justice and equality.<sup>43</sup>

The second was of Christian democratic origin and appeared in 1908. Since Christian democrats held to the original Ten Commandments, they decided to create their own Ten to describe what anarchists, socialists, and liberals *actually* believed:

*First*—Love *yourselves* above all things.

---

<sup>43</sup> DECALOGO DEL OBRERO[:] I Tén erguida la espina dorsal ante los poderosos. II No vendas á vil precio tu mercancía trabajo. III Ama y ayuda á tus compañeros de trabajo como si fueran tus hermanos. IV Toma parte activa en las luchas gremiales. V Ama á tu esposa y haz de ella una mujer consciente. [VI] No explotes prematuramente á tus hijos y no les dejes crecer ignorantes. VII No envidies los goces de la canalla ociosa. VIII No te alcoholices. [IX] No restrinjas el nombre de patria den[tro] de un límite establecido. X No creas que la clase obrera esté condenada á la servidumbre, y ayuda al triunfo de la justicia y de la igualdad.” “DECALOGO DEL OBRERO,” *La Voz del Obrero*, January 5, 1902, 3-4.

*Second*—Blaspheme day and night in public and in private.

*Third*—Have orgies on Good Friday, get drunk on Sunday, and sanctify May 1<sup>st</sup> with riots, rock-throwing, brawls and at night attend anticlerical meetings to listen to the *Red* poet's explosive long-winded speeches.<sup>44</sup>

*Fourth*—Disrespect father and mother even to the point of beating [them]...

*Fifth*—Kill all kings, priests, friars, nuns and any others that do not think like *me*.

*Sixth*—Practice all the *rubbish* recommended by the *moralizers* down at the International Center...<sup>45</sup>

*Seventh*—Rob all that you can from the State, the Church and *the worker*.

*Eighth*—Lie as often as necessary to disparage Catholics and especially the Church.

*Ninth*—Divorce yourselves and appropriate someone else's wife as you please so long, of course, as you do not run the risk of a thrashing.

*Tenth*—Covet all that can be coveted because, since enjoyment is the supreme purpose of life, nothing should stand as a limitation or impediment.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> The Red Poet is likely a reference to Ángel Falco, possibly the most famous anarchist poet and orator in Uruguay at that time.

<sup>45</sup> The Centro Internacional de Estudios Sociales (International Center for Social Studies) was anarchism's most important institution in early twentieth-century Uruguay. It functioned as a think tank, strike center, social hall, and meeting space for resistance societies and other political groups.

<sup>46</sup> "El Decálogo de los liberales, socialistas, anarquistas y otros bichos[:] *Primero*—Amarse *á sí mismos* sobre todas las cosas. *Segundo*—Blasfemar día y noche en público y en privado. *Tercero*—Celebrar banquetes de promiscuación en Viernes Santo, emborracharse en día domingo, santificar el 1.º de Mayo con motines, pedradas y palizas y asistir por la noche á las conferencias clerófobas y las peroratas explosivas del poeta *Rojo*. *Cuarto*—Hacer caso omiso del padre y de la madre, pudiéndose también llegar á apalearlos, cuando se permiten contrariar los derechos de la conciencia libre. *Quinto*—Matar á todos los

An analysis of the three sets of commandments reveals six different themes, underlining radical and reformist positions on subjects that would engulf Uruguayan (and, to a large degree, worldwide) public opinion: a) sources of authority and the instruments of social change, b) attitudes toward humanity, c) family, gender, and childhood, d) the nature of exploitation, e) vice, and f) propaganda. Documents such as these exemplified the flurry of moral discussion taking place among and between elites and subalterns at the beginning of the twentieth century as Uruguayans debated the elements of a just society. In so few words, these three sets of commandments spell out the country's greatest social tensions using a lexicon understandable to almost every Uruguayan, atheist and believer, liberal and conservative: the language of religion. This discourse formed the backdrop of the labor and other reform legislation passed in Uruguay between 1914 and 1918.

**Religion as a Lens.** In the context of these debates, religion often became a lens through which the other issues were analyzed and treated. Religion was already at the center of national politics as liberals launched efforts to separate the state from the Catholic Church.<sup>47</sup> These initiatives included banning crucifixes in hospitals, expanding public education while chipping away at religious education, divorce legislation, and dissolving what was left of the system of *patronato real* (state patronage of the Catholic

---

reyes, curas, frailes, monjas y demás personas que no piensen como yo. *Sexto*—Practicar todas las *porquerías* recomendadas por los *moralistas* del Centro Internacional y ser catalogados después en la serie de los *Mono Pancho*, perláticos, enge[ñ]ados, embrutecidos, abobados, etc. *Séptimo*—Robar todo lo que se pueda, al Estado, á la Iglesia y al obrero. *Octavo*—Mentir cuantas veces sea necesario para hundir á los católicos y sobre todo á la Iglesia. *Noveno*—Divorciarse y apropiarse de llapa de la mujer alj]ena como guste y plazca, siempre que no haya peligro de una paliza inminente. *Décimo*—Codiciar todo lo que es codiciable, porque siendo el goce el supremo fin de la vida, nada puede servirle de límite ó enfrenarle.” Emphasis in the original. “El Decálogo de los liberales, socialistas, anarquistas y otros bichos,” *El Demócrata*, May 15, 1908, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Gerardo Caetano and Roger Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya (1859-1919)* (Montevideo: Ediciones Santillana, S.A., 1997), 167-168.

Church that remained from the colonial period. In 1908, census takers asked Uruguayan residents about their religious affiliation and—in a possible political move by the *batllista*-dominated government bureaucracy—created the category of “liberal” for people to indicate either atheist, agnostic, or at least anti-clerical conviction. Out of just over one million residents, 150,669 (14 percent) identified as liberal while 637,681 were Catholic (61 percent). Bearing directly on gender dynamics around religion (see below), there were twice as many male to female liberals while no significant gender gap existed between Catholic men and women.<sup>48</sup>

Anticlericalism—including atheism to a large degree—became a crucial point of convergence among the many sectors of the left, reformist and revolutionary. The staff, supporters, and readers of anticlerical newspapers such as *El Libre Pensamiento* (1905-1906) and *Salpicón* (1909-1910) provided points of contact and some coordinated action between anarchists, socialists, and liberals. For instance, in 1909 the Liberal and Socialist parties ran on the same ticket and won a seat for each: Pedro Díaz for the former and Emilio Frugoni for the latter.<sup>49</sup>

This broad left did not eschew religious symbolism. To the contrary, anarchists, socialists, and liberals horrified Catholics—including left-leaning Christian democrats—with their vilification of religion and their inversions of religious imagery to critique their

---

<sup>48</sup> *Anuario estadístico de la República Oriental del Uruguay*, 1908 (Montevideo: Imprenta Artística y Encuadernación de Juan J. Dornaleche, 1911), 948-949.

<sup>49</sup> After the electoral victory, the editors of *Salpicón* criticized the liberal-socialist coalition not on the grounds of principle but efficacy. In their opinion, “Colorados are the liberal party in Uruguay” and again, “there is no liberal party outside of *Coloradismo* and there never will be.” The editors suggested that voters should have instead worked with Colorados rather than further factionalize the anti-clerical vote. That being said, the coalition’s victory wasn’t all bad. “Something is something. What’s more, you have to start with a little to get a lot.” “El partido liberal uruguayo es el colorado.” “Partido liberal fuera del color[d]ismo, no lo hay ni lo habrá.” “Algo, es algo. Además, por poco se empieza para llegar á mucho.” “Libero = socialistas,” *Salpicón*, 28 December 1910, 2.

enemies or society at large. Jesus himself became a contested figure in radical and liberal discourse. One newspaper attacked him as the latest great charlatan displacing past “imposters” such as “Zarathustra,” peddlers of superstition all.<sup>50</sup> *El Libertario*, while disparaging Christian democracy, said that “There is more sublimity in Spartacus inciting the slaves against their masters than in Christ commanding to put away the sword that should have, not cut the ear, but rather impaled the chests of [his] executioners.”<sup>51</sup> This last statement, of course, said nothing about Jesus’ positions regarding social justice but merely the effectiveness of his pacifist tactics.

But Jesus could also appear, stripped of overtly religious connotations, as a radical—a poor worker who condemned inequality but, following his death, became a figure co-opted by reactionary religious forces.<sup>52</sup> He was a modernist with a message relevant to current struggles against hierarchy, oppression, and backwardness. (See Figures 1 and 2.) He even appeared alongside other martyrs (and anarchist heroes) who were murdered for trying to enlighten humanity; these included Socrates, Giordano

---

<sup>50</sup> “*El Antecristo*,” *La Acción Obrera*, September 20, 1908, 1.

<sup>51</sup> As clarification, when a group of people came to arrest Jesus one of his followers is said to have defended him by cutting off one of their ears. Jesus commanded him to put away his sword (saying “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”) and miraculously restored to the injured his ear. Mathew 26:47-52. “Hay más sublimidad en Espartaco incitando á los esclavos á rebelarse contra sus amos, que en Cristo mandando envainar la espada que debiera, no cortar la oreja, sino atravesar el pecho de los sayones.” “Las insinuaciones jesuíticas de ‘Democracia Cristiana,’” *El Libertario*, 20 March 1905, 1.

<sup>52</sup> These reactionary forces could even be the chroniclers of Jesus’ life! The socialist newspaper *La Voz del Obrero* stated on one occasion that “the bourgeoisie, generally, does not read the Gospel... But if one of them were to read the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, surely they would say, ‘The servants [given] the five and ten talents are model workers.’” The columnist continues throughout the article to question (satirically) Matthew’s “authenticity,” given that he portrayed (with stories such as the one about the talents) Jesus as advocate of hierarchy, servitude, and capitalism. (One can imagine a similar objection to Jesus’ prescription to the Pharisees: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s,” Matthew 22:21). Matthew, according to the columnist, contradicts himself when he quotes Jesus’ famous statement, “The poor are always with you”; Jesus meant this as a lamentation not as a prescription. “EL BURGUE[S] DEL EVANGELIO,” *La Voz del Obrero*, January 1902, 3.

Bruno, and Francisco Ferrer.<sup>53</sup> Anarchists—either inspired by how Jesus spoke truth to power or pragmatically invoking the most revered figure in Christian society—sometimes quoted the Gospels to critique social wrongs. Decrying the death penalty, one columnist from the anarchist paper *El Amigo del Obrero* labeled state officials “modern scribes and Pharisees.” “Are you they that with the Gospel in hand give young hearts lessons on meekness and forgiveness, having them take as exemplary the story of the adulterous woman? And couldn’t it be shouted to you before the cruel spectacle of your vengeful work [capital punishment], repeating the words of the Nazarene: ‘He among you that is least guilty, let him cast the first stone’[?]”<sup>54</sup> In the “Articles of Faith” found in the Anarchist Catechism, radicals affirmed their belief that “there have been too many Christs... that have been shot, hung or tortured.”<sup>55</sup>

The voices of anarchists and socialists often blended together in decrying the hypocrisy of Christians (especially Catholics) and offered alternate readings, even subversions, of religious texts and icons. (See Figure 3.) In calls such as “*no God, no king, no boss*,” these radicals represented the oft-stated three ills afflicting the world as a Trinity—religion (especially the Catholic Church), capital, and the state.<sup>56</sup> Priests were often depicted as exploiters. In one instance, they were called “liars” for claiming that

---

<sup>53</sup> Francisco Ferrer, founder of the Modern School movement that advocated a libertarian pedagogy, was executed by the Spanish government in October 1909. He was accused of participating in anarchist plots against the government but never given a trial. His murder prompted worldwide protests and he became an important hero and martyr to anarchists, socialists, and liberals. “La voz del moribundo,” *Guerra Social*, August 27, 1911, 3.

<sup>54</sup> “Vosotros sois los que con el Evangelio en la mano dais lecciones de mansedumbre y de perdón á los corazones infantiles, haciéndoles tomar por ejemplo la historia de la mujer adúltera? Y acaso no se os podría gritar ante el espectáculo feroz de vuestra obra de venganza, repitiendo las palabras del Nazareno:-- ‘El que de vosotros sea menos culpable, que arroje la primera piedra.’” “Un Ajusticiado,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, January 1900, 2.

<sup>55</sup> “...Son ya demasiados los Cristos...que han sido fusilados, ahorcados y atormentados.” “CATECISMO DE LA Doctrina Anarquista,” *Adelante!*, April 15, 1910, between pages 2 and 3.

<sup>56</sup> “Ni Dios, ni rey, ni amo.” *Solidaridad*, “A LUCHAR...[sic],” May 1915, 2

poor workers were miserable because of their sins: “The priest lies when he affirms that a *merciful and kind* God has been so cruel as to have lashed the human race with a whip so terrible.” Want was a product of human action, not divine design.<sup>57</sup> One radical proposed that anarchists “speak to people as Jesus [spoke] to the Jews of an ‘inevitable future’ ...that would bring as a consequence the rule of justice above the desires of the wicked who wish...to continue living...in stubborn greed, in the most abject...heresy.”<sup>58</sup> Such were the social implications of religion for folks on the far left, even when they tended to be atheists.

With Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*—a document that for the first time in papal history dealt with the social question, teaching that employers had greater obligations to employees than those inherent in the wage contract—left-of-center Catholicism appeared in the form of Christian democratic parties and movements in Europe and Latin America.<sup>59</sup> In Uruguay, through their newspaper *El Demócrata*, Christian democrats attempted to swipe the banner of reform from liberals and move leftist politics away from the anarchist and socialist camps. Appropriating the language of religion, Christian democrats declared that “we have the Gospel which is the social book *par excellence*, the book that speaks clearly of all rights and all duties.” And within this version of the Gospel “there is no slavery here for the poor, there is no protection for the

---

<sup>57</sup> “Miente el cura cuando afirma que un Dios *misericioso y bueno* ha sido tan cruel que haya desencadenado un flagelo tan terrible sobre el género humano.” Emphasis in the original. “¿Por que existe la miseria?,” *Solidaridad*, May 1915, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Such anarchists “habla[n] á los seres como Jesús á los judíos, de un ‘porvenir inevitable’ ...que traerá como consecuencia el reinado de la justicia por encima del deseo de todos los malvados que querrían...seguir viviendo...de su empecinamiento avioso [sic], en la más abyecta...[sic] herejía.” “Por la práctica,” *Aurora*, January 1913, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Some atheist anarchists were impressed with the critique of capitalism found in the *Rerum Novarum*. For instance, the social messages of both Pope Leo XIII and the somewhat progressive archbishop of Uruguay, Mariano Soler, were quoted in the anarchist newspaper *La Aurora*. “LOS DEPENDIENTES DE ALMACÉN,” and “VERDADES,” *La Aurora*, September, 1899, 2.



rich and powerful.”<sup>60</sup> From that notion of social obligations based on a particular reading of Christian doctrine came “that liberatory idea of social redemption which is not static but comes by *constant practice* of that commandment dictated by Christ Jesus: LOVE ONE ANOTHER...”<sup>61</sup>

For their part, the social Catholic movement of the *Círculos Católicos* preferred direct negotiation between labor and capital rather than cooperating on legislation with a secular government like that of Batlle. But unlike their libertarian counterparts, they did not necessarily believe in militant action (in many cases not even in strikes), believing that this undermined the spirit of Christ-like love, the key foundation of a just society.<sup>62</sup> Their message, founded on their religious belief, was one of mutualism, faith, and patience. Meanwhile, socialists and liberals were less inclined to explicitly appropriate religious language and imagery in framing their ideological contentions. But both critiqued Catholics and the Catholic Church based on the expectations they derived from a reading of Christian doctrine.<sup>63</sup> And both occasionally slipped into implicit religious imagery as they outlined their hopes for a regenerated society.

---

<sup>60</sup> “Los demócratas tenemos el Evangelio que es el libro social por excelencia, el libro donde se habla claro de todos los deberes y de todos los derechos.” “...No hay esclavitud aquí para los pobres, no hay protección para los ricos y los fuertes.” “Retorno á la verdad,” *El Demócrata*, October 15, 1906, 2.

<sup>61</sup> “...Esa idea salvadora, de redención social que no es en definitiva sino *práctica constante* de aquel mandamiento dictado por Cristo Jesús: AMAOS LOS UNOS Á LOS OTROS...” Emphasis in the original. “Progreso y miseria,” *El Demócrata*, October 1, 1906, 2.

<sup>62</sup> The notion of Christ-like love as the attribute that should govern all social relations appeared frequently in the Catholic newspapers *El Bien*, *El Amigo del Obrero*, and the yearly *Almanaque del Amigo del Obrero*. Instead of strikes, these newspapers often advocated religious gatherings of employers and employees so as to foster Christian charity in relations of production. The idea was that elbow-rubbing would cool tensions, employers would concede a living wage, workers would be appeased and submit to social hierarchies, and both groups would treat each other with fraternal love. See for example: “Corporaciones obreras,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 21 October 1903 and 28 October 1903, 1.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, an anonymous writer for *Salpicón*, a newspaper dedicated to the anti-clerical cause, used several readings from Matthew to show that Jesus’ radical notion of forgiveness was non-hierarchical—that it precluded supervision by any authoritarian “imposters.” Jesus intended for reconciliation to happen between offender and victim without any mediation. Therefore, the Catholic

**Vice.** The Catholic unionist, Christian democrat, anarchist, and socialist presses were united in portraying vice—defined as prostitution, gambling, drugs, and alcohol—as a direct consequence of exploitation, the manifestation of a system that created want as it did wealth. In the language of eugenics prevalent at the time, vice was often described as degrading the human stock and a grave social danger. Like religion, it too became an important device in analyzing social and economic inequalities.

Many working-class newspapers regularly printed warnings and discussions, often including interviews with doctors, about the physical dangers of tobacco and alcohol as well as drugs such as morphine or opium.<sup>64</sup> But warnings of physical ailments were almost always placed within the context of economic hardship. *Despertar* reported on the affliction of morphine and opium addiction in France and England; among the principal victims were “the poor poets, artists in need of comfort, women wanting to forget, [who] go one by one toward the ‘artificial paradises,’ the most tempting of which is morphine.” Yet some artists reported that they took no pleasure in abusing the drug (“The pleasurable visions they would have abandoned without any struggle”); rather, they used it to motivate their work, to make a living. One doctor stated that with morphine, “memory expands prodigiously, original ideas come, the possibility of conceiving and creating beautiful works become a reality. The artist has superhuman visions and

---

confession was a “monstrous” distortion of that principle of forgiveness because priests forgave trespassers regardless of any true rapprochement between the estranged parties. “¿Deberá ser tolerada la confesión en las naciones civilizadas?” *Salpicón*, 14 December 1910, 6-7.

<sup>64</sup> Some unions were far more concerned with drug and alcohol abuse than others. Among the most concerned were: the socialist Carpenters’ Union, the Resistance Society of Railroad Workers, the Resistance Society of Tailors, the anarchist Woodworkers’ Union, and the *Círculos Católicos*.

inspirations.”<sup>65</sup> The allegory to all types of labor is useful: workers sacrificed both health and independence to satisfy the vagaries of the market, to make ends meet.

*Despertar* made the connection between substance abuse and exploitation even more succinct on its inside front cover as it called for a boycott. “SMOKERS: The cigarette [brands] Londres, La Paz, El Guerrillero, La Elegancia, Criollos and the tobacco from the factory Julio Mailhos, are made by machines, therefore, besides wronging cigarette workers [by displacing their labor], they are more damaging to your health as they are made with cotton paper. **No one smoke those cigarettes!!**”<sup>66</sup> Even as the socialist paper *La Voz del Obrero* named alcohol “that enemy of humanity” and called for the creation of anti-alcohol and “temperance” leagues to combat it, it also recognized the reasons why workers consumed alcohol: “Workers drink to supplement the insufficiency of their diet, or to relieve the difficulties of certain professions: the blacksmiths to calm the thirst caused by the forge’s fire; the coal seller and the upholsterers to wash out the dust from their throats... What is necessary to know well is that alcohol, always and by any form, is poison.”<sup>67</sup> The paper placed the blame for alcoholism on the unhealthy and

---

<sup>65</sup> “Los poetas pobres, los artistas que necesitan consuelos, las mujeres que quieren olvidar, se van así, uno á uno, hacia los ‘para[í]sos artificiales’, entre los cuales el más tentador es la morfina.” “A las visiones de placer habrían renunciado sin pena.” “...la memoria aumenta prodigiosamente, las ideas originales acuden, la posibilidad de concebir y de crear obras bellas se convierte en realidad. El artista tiene visiones é inspiraciones sobrehumanas.” “Una víctima de la morfina,” *Despertar*, August 1905, 13-14.

<sup>66</sup> “FUMADORES: Los cigarillos Londres, La Paz, El Guerrillero, La Elegancia, Criollos y tabacos de la casa Julio Mailhos, están elaborados á máquina y por lo tanto, á más de perjudicar á los obreros cigarreros, son más perjudiciales á la salud por estar hechos con papel de algodón. **¡¡Nadie fume esos cigarrillos!!**” This call for a boycott first appeared first in the April-May 1906 issue and continued at least through December 1906. An earlier version appeared beginning in the first issue (July 1905) but did not mention machinery displacing workers. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>67</sup> “...Ese enemigo de la humanidad...” “Propaganda contra el alcoholismo,” *La Voz del Obrero*, Second Sunday of July, 1901, 2. “Los obreros beben para suplir la insuficiencia de su alimentación, o para paliar los inconvenientes de ciertas profesiones: los herreros para calmar la sed que provoca el fuego de la fragua; los carboneros y los tapiceros para lavarse el polvillo de la garganta... Lo que es necesario saber bien es que el alcohol, bajo cualquier forma que esté y siempre, es veneno.” “EL ALCOHOLISMO,” *La Voz del Obrero*, First Sunday of August, 1901, 1.

dangerous work conditions so many daily endured. Framed in this way (as many other newspapers also did), if exploitation were to cease, so too would alcoholism and substance abuse.

Newspapers often portrayed alcohol as walking hand-in-hand with violence. “How many mothers, how many wives, how many children curse alcohol! How many nights are endured [by women and children] with worry and fear, between the anxiety to see the man with a lazy look and blood-shot eyes, with foam and insult on his lips, who beats his own children, or with the even greater fear that he has fallen victim to a street brawl or has made another perish.”<sup>68</sup> (See Figure 4.) Numerous columns and poems reported on the serious threat alcohol consumption (always portrayed as a male activity) posed to women and children.<sup>69</sup> Small wonder that the Anarchist Group (mentioned above) made “respect women” their eighth commandment.

Even more than alcohol and substance abuse, leftists worried about prostitution. Sex work appeared in three ways. First, men (and some women) framed it as a threat to patriarchal authority. Many women were said to have entered prostitution as a consequence of being seduced (often as an adolescent) by the employer while working in the factory. The destitution of families brought women and girls into the arena of work for pay, exposed to the world outside the safety of home. One columnist in *Despertar* reported that “in the factory the woman is oppressed and seduced. In the factory she is

---

<sup>68</sup> “¡Cuántas madres, cuántas esposas, cuantos hijos maldicen el alcohol! Cuantas noches pasadas en zozobras y espanto, entre el temor de ver al hombre de mirada vaga y ojos sanguinolentos, con la espuma y el insulto en los labios, con la marcha insegura, que pega á sus propios hijos, ó el temor más grande aún de que en las riña[s] callejeras haya caído víctima ó haya hecho á otro perecer.” “El alcohol,” *Despertar*, October 1905, 26.

<sup>69</sup> See for instance: “Sección Literaria,” *La Voz del Obrero*, First Sunday of October, 1905, 2; “LA TABERNA,” *La Voz del Obrero*, Second Sunday of April, 1901, 2.

exploited and barely paid. Her misery is taken advantage of to dishonor her and then scorn her thereafter. To vilely deceive her is a great victory for men.”<sup>70</sup> In one article, representative of the anxieties of working class fathers, the columnist portrays the male worker as emasculated—forced by the wage system to turn over the lion’s share of the wealth he produces as well as “female toys” (his daughter(s)—to his employer.<sup>71</sup> Second, prostitution was forced on women by extreme need or by that of their husbands.<sup>72</sup> From thence came the sixth commandment in the Anarchist Catechism to “not prostitute yourself nor prostitute anyone else.” Finally, some perceived prostitution to be a consequence of the “liberation” of women whereby they expressed their sexuality openly and with many partners, a subject treated below.

To Christian democrats, the link between prostitution and modern economic and political structures was clear. One writer described prostitution as a product of capitalism. “The apostasy of Christianity...has created, with prostitution in the civilized countries, a cancer, debasing women” in its wake. The columnist concluded that “*Liberalism, father of bourgeois tyranny and creator of exploitative capital, is the father of prostitution.*”<sup>73</sup> The degenerate (and degenerative) elements of capitalism, based on egoism and exploitation, created the “need” for vice, which constituted a serious threat to the family—especially to women and children—and therefore to forthcoming generations. If

---

<sup>70</sup> “En el taller se la oprime y se la seduce[.] En la fábrica se la explota y apenas se la paga. Se aprovecha su miseria para deshonrarla y se la menosprecia después. Engañarla vilmente es para el hombre gran victoria de que se ufana.” “La mujer,” *Despertar*, September 1905, 21. Also see: “LA MUJER,” *El Demócrata*, September 1906, 2-3.

<sup>71</sup> “Trabajando,” *Aurora*, January 1913, 1-2.

<sup>72</sup> “Misericordia,” *La Acción Obrera*, October 20, 1908, 1; “La eterna esclava,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, December 1899, 2; “PROSTITUCION [sic],” *El Demócrata*, November 1, 1906, 1.

<sup>73</sup> “La apostasía del cristianismo...ha creado, con la prostitución, en los países civilizados, ...un cáncer, ... rebajando á la mujer...” “El *liberalismo* padre de la *tiranía burguesa* y creador del *capital usurero* es el padre de la *prostitución*.” Emphasis in the original. “PROSTITUCION [sic],” *El Demócrata*, November 1, 1906, 1.

vice (or the political economy that sustained it) was not eliminated, regeneration of society was unlikely.

**Family.** In the context of battles over exploitation and vice, the nuclear family became a critical arena where social regeneration could begin. Conservatives, reformers, and radicals alike saw the family as the basic unit of society. If it could be transformed, so too could the national or even the human family. Reconstituting the family meant determining its proper structure and conditioning each member to ascribed roles. In the context of industrialization, dispossession, and massive migration to and from Europe, families splintered and ideas about the roles of their members came into question. In response, reformers focused their attention on reconstituting the family with special attention to the needs of women and children.

Between 1900 and 1915, newspapers of all ideological stripes clamored for familial regeneration. Columnist after columnist claimed that, in the face of the capitalist growth and development, family structures and mores had disintegrated. The ideologies born amidst the struggle between capital and labor further strained the social fabric of families.

To Christian democrats, divorce legislation (an important plank of Batlle's platform and finally passed in 1913) served only to further test family relationships. But to reformers it gave women the means to leave bad families and form better ones. If anything, it broke the monopoly of bad husbands by threatening them with competitors. But reformers and Christian democrats, along with some socialists and anarchists,

subscribed to a nuclear family with distinct roles for men, women, and children.<sup>74</sup> And it was upon this basic structure that the existing political economic system waged bitter war. In this respect, Christian democrats in particular used a radical critique of political economy to reassert traditional conceptions of authority and family with a determined role for each of its members based on sex and age. Christian democrats and reformers, however, departed from radicals in imagining a national family wherein governors (though often reprimanded) became “*fathers of the patria and of the people.*”<sup>75</sup>

Radicals, especially anarchists, dismissed the trap of the permanent marriage contract by advocating the creation of families based on the concept of free love.<sup>76</sup> The marriage contract (even with the possibility of divorce) was likened by one anarchist to prostitution: “The [prostitute] is obligated by necessity and sells herself for a little while; the [wife] is more contemptible because without necessity she sells herself forever.”<sup>77</sup> The ability to enter and leave family structures would provide the flexibility to “create families freely without theological or legal impositions.”<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> See for instance: *Despertar*, where an anarchist columnist tells women to “Adore your home; may the man find it clean when he comes home so that he does not have to find in the cantina that happiness and those enemies [vices] that distract him.” “Adornad vuestro hogar; que el hombre al llegar á el lo encuentre limpio, alegre y tranquilo, para que no tenga que buscar en la cantina esa alegr[í]a y esos enemigos que lo distraen.” “El alcohol,” *Despertar*, October 1905, 26. Also, see: *El Demócrata*, where lawmakers are reprimanded for doing nothing to restrict female and child labor outside the home. The same article champions the “distinctive qualities” of the sexes, saying that women ought to be subject always to male kin or to a husband. “LA MUJER,” *El Demócrata*, October 1, 1906, 1.

<sup>75</sup> “*Padres de la patria y del pueblo.*” Emphasis in the original. “LA MUJER,” *El Demócrata*, September 1906, pg. 2-3

<sup>76</sup> By “free love,” anarchists did *not* mean a sexual free-for-all. Anarchists shared popular notions of serial monogamy. In fact, they had great esteem for the family unit. They simply believed that families should be freely constituted and held together by love, not legal or religious force.

<sup>77</sup> “*La [prostituta] se v[e] obligada por al necesidad y se vende por poco tiempo; la otra, es m[á]s despreciable, porque sin necesidad se vende para siempre.*” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, from a quote, July 1900, pg. 1

<sup>78</sup> “*La creamos libremente sin imposiciones teológicas ni legales.*” “*Cómo somos nosotros,*” *Adelante!*, December 15, 1909, 1.

A columnist for *El Tirapié* was horrified to read of the recent religious marriage of a female anarchist. Since her fiancé was devout and did not share her political views, she had consented to a Catholic wedding, complete with communion and confession. The columnist chided her by saying that if all anarchists were to start making allowance for matters of personal “convenience” (such as having a Catholic fiancé), the world might end up with anarchist police! “The anarchist should live as anarchically as possible.” In a bizarre combination of libertarian and Catholic symbolism, he/she concluded that to bring a crucifix and rosary “to your home” was one of the greatest insults to “the holy mother anarchy.”<sup>79</sup> To anarchists, free love was a crucial part of regenerating society since it granted freedom and self-determination to members of the family unit outside the prescriptive reach of religious or political authorities.

Ideology became a divisive matter within families, however, even as it united others. Two poignant instances reveal such conflicts within families over political belief. Both were one-sided conversations between the columnist and a parent. In the first, the son explains to his severe father why he fled home, claiming that the anarchist path he had chosen followed reason and logic in contrast to “paternal authority” based on tradition and force. Said son to father, “You say that I don’t care about the family! How much more could I care about it since I include it as part of the great human family, on behalf of which I fight, am insulted, and perhaps will die. Oh, the little family! It is the germ of all ills, the tabernacle of egoism, where love of fellow beings is sacrificed in holocaust to an old and evil prejudice that kills solidarity and fosters antagonism from man to man; it makes the human sentiments regress toward primitive animalism!... Oh

---

<sup>79</sup> “...El anarquista debe vivir lo más an[ár]quicamente que le sea posible.” To bring a crucifix and rosary “á su hogar” is an one of the “greatest insults” to “la santa y madre anarquía.” “Un casamiento religioso y los anarquistas,” *El Tirapié*, September 1912, 3-4.



why, my father and all fathers of the earth, can you not be parents to all sons? Why do you restrain your paternal love, giving it only to one or a few members of humanity, wanting only their good? Why do you not want all children to be those of all parents and all homes to be part of the great human home?”<sup>80</sup> Rebellion from traditional authority structures had caused at least this young man to identify with a broader conception of family even as he embraced an ideology foreign to his biological father. So too the fight for a just political economy quickly bled into a struggle for the just constitution of the family.

The second one-way conversation appears to be a letter from son to mother and is even more touching. In it the son explains why he left Argentina, evading (it seems) conscription and joining his anarchist companions in Montevideo, whom his mother called “malhechores” or evildoers. Echoing the first monologue, the son speaks of a greater human family, a greater *patria* or nation, but tenderly recognizes his mother’s personal loss at his flight. He closes the letter in a supreme compliment and moving religious imagery often used by even atheist anarchists: “I have seen you as a [Virgin Mary] whose son they ripped from her side—the son she cares for, the son she loves. I have seen you suffer, and I have suffered.”<sup>81</sup> More than a compliment, the author was

---

<sup>80</sup> “[i]Dices que no me preocupo de la familia! Y qué más que preocuparme de ella, cuando la encierro dentro de la gran familia humana, y por ésta lucho, y por ésta me insultan, y por ésta, quizás, moriré? [i]Ah! [i]La pequeña familia! [i]Esta es la germen de todos los males, el tabernáculo del ego[í]simo, donde se sacrifica el inmenso amor hacia los semejantes todos, en holocausto á un prejuicio antiguo y odioso, que mata la solidaridad y engendra el antagonismo de hombre á hombre, y hace retroceder al sentimiento humano, h[a]cia la animalidad primitiva... [i]Oh! [¿]por qué, tú, padre mío, y todos los padres de la tierra no lo sois de todos los hijos? [¿]Por qué restringís vuestro amor paternal dándole s[ó]lo á uno ó á varios miembros de la sociedad humana y queriendo s[ó]lo para ellos bienestar, s[ó]lo para ellas la felicidad?... [¿]Por qué no quer[éi]s que todos los hijo lo sean de todos los padres y que todos los hogares sean parte del gran hogar humano?...[sic].” “EN FAMILIA,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, August 1900, 4.

<sup>81</sup> “...Te he visto como una Magdalena á la que le arrancan de su lado al hijo que quiere, al hijo que ama. Te he visto sufrir, y he sufrido...[sic].” “A MI MA[MÁ],” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, July 1900, 1-2.

perhaps connecting the Gospel story of the Virgin Mary, popular model of ideal womanhood in Catholic societies, who sacrificed her beloved son (in this case an anarchist revolutionary and much like the radical Nazarene of old) for the redemption of the human family. Sacrifice, then, was a salient image among workers—a transcendent act of solidarity that went against the egoist logic of capitalism, and the patriarchal home and state.

Some families were built in adherence to shared ideology. In a touching obituary written by the activist Adrian Troitiño for his departed partner, he describes her as his “companion in ideas and misfortune.”<sup>82</sup> Shared beliefs on spiritual matters (whether atheist, Catholic, or otherwise) further strengthened families and made them more able to bear the burdens of exploitative labor. Like-minded anarchist and socialist (as well as some Catholic) couples invested time, energy, and resources to provide radical education for children, jointly passing the torch of revolutionary thought on to the next generation.

**Women.** Placed in the role of homemaker (whether economic circumstances made this possible or not), women received an enormous amount of attention as radicals and reformers debated how exactly to regenerate society. Uruguayans demonstrated conflicting feelings over the issue of women’s emancipation. Social and labor legislation ended up mirroring this tension by its uneven response to the many social issues that affected women on a daily basis; these tensions also found expression in both labor and mainstream newspapers.

In order to restore and rejuvenate the family into its proper “natural” frame, women came under particular scrutiny, especially women’s supposed deficiencies. Of all

---

<sup>82</sup> “...Compañera de ideas y de infortunio.” “Varias,” *La Acción Obrera*, June 5, 1908, 4.

these, “superstition” was most virulent and dangerous. Newspaper after newspaper complained about women’s duped condition, indoctrinated by their mothers and deceived by priests into believing the dogmas of organized religion. This notion was one of the only significant things on which liberals, socialists, and anarchists could agree. In 1908, *La Acción Obrera* reported a bizarre occurrence in which a group of Catholic ladies, strapped for cash to celebrate the festival of their neighborhood’s patron saint, conned the managers of a newly installed trolley company, who believed they were funding a party on their company’s behalf. The newspaper chided the businessmen for their over-reaction to the swindle but also took a moment to reprimand the women. Said the columnist, “we lament that in the twentieth century, [women] continue to be blind instruments” of priests. “Girls and ladies in general, tear from your faces the veil of ignorance that imprisons your understanding. Be true women, take ownership of your decisions,... Do not allow anyone to direct your actions, lift up your brow and do not permit yourself to be dragged about by those who exploit your sincerity and ignorance, abandon those buildings that they mistakenly call Church[es] or Temples of God, being in fact houses of larceny... Only then will you be respected and worthy enough to take the place that belongs to you alongside the men that aspire to have genuine liberty, only then will you be fortunate and free.”<sup>83</sup> According to anarchist, socialist, and liberal men (and some women), the first step in everyone’s regeneration—but especially women’s—was a

---

<sup>83</sup> “Lamentamos que en pleno siglo xx, sigan siendo instrumentos ciegos...” “Señoritas y mujeres en general; arrancar de vuestra faz la venda de la ignorancia que aprisiona vuestro entendimiento; sed realmente mujeres, sed dueñas de vuestras decisiones,...no permitáis que nadie sea director de vuestros actos [sic], levantad la frente y no os dejéis arrastrar por los que comercian con vuestra candidez é ignorancia, abandonad esas casas que por mal nombre, le llaman Iglesia ó Templos de Dios, siendo en realidad casas de latrocinio... Sólo así ser[é]is respetadas y dignas de ocupar el lugar que os pertenece al lado del hombre que aspira á su libertad integral, s[ó]lo así seréis dichosas y libres.” “De la localidad: Católicos y...,” *La Acción Obrera*, September 20, 1908, 3.

rejection of religious belief, hence the dictum in the Socialist ten commandments to “Love your wife and [to] make a conscious woman of her.” (See Figure 5.)

The image of religious women vacillated between hapless (but sincere) victims of the clergy to being their full partners in crime. Sometimes both versions appeared in the same document. In one article, entitled “The Sister of Charity,” the author admits that perhaps in times past religious women might have been worthy of praise for their work “in favor of those less fortunate,” but not today. Today she is “a schemer that goes from room to room in the hospitals inquiring as to which of the sick are not Catholic in order to sit by the head of the bed, not to offer anything the patient’s body needs but to whisper in their ears a thousand dark things; to torture them by enumerating the thousand punishments that await them in the next life,... finally, to threaten them if they resist” conversion. All this she did while people suffered pain and thirst around her, without acknowledging their needs.<sup>84</sup>

So prevalent was the stereotype of the religious/superstitious woman that one columnist, likely female, for the socialist *La Voz del Obrero* abandoned the paper’s normal atheist position and simply assumed the existence of God when addressing women. Instead of trying to demonstrate religion to be a farce, the article appropriated the libRARY language of humankind’s equality before God. “Poor working women!... Your situation is dire but do you know why you live without complaining? It is because of the beliefs that you have inherited from your mothers, which they received from your

---

<sup>84</sup> “En favor de los infortunados.” “...Una intrigante que va de una sala á otra de los hospitales averiguando cual de los enfermos no es católico, para ir á colocarse al lado de su cabecera, no con el santo fin de ofrecerle aquello que su postrado cuerpo necesita, sino que para murmurarle al oído mil ideas oscuras, para torturarlo con la enumeración de mil castigos que lo esperan en la otra vida..., para amenazarlo, por fin, si el enfermo se resiste...” “Como son ellos,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, March 1900, 2.

grandmothers. You believe piously that God has destined the poor to suffer labors and privations and this lie the priest repeats to you—that priest that exploits in the name of God, that priest that propagates falsity to live in idleness while humble and sincere believers are enslaved by a minority whom God could not have privileged; this minority condemns their fellow beings to suffer a thousand penuries and privations.” The columnist ends by imploring women to join socialists in eliminating these wrongs.<sup>85</sup> The superstition here is not that God exists but that the Supreme Being could countenance inequality and suffering in his name.

Many male newspaper columnists also clearly demonstrated a patriarchal jealousy against the subversion of their authority by the priest. One poem written by an anarchist announced, “Goodbye!... With you I will not be happy/ because you will love the temple more than the home/ and the priest more than your own husband!”<sup>86</sup> Leaving women and children to the influence of the clergy was seen as reprehensible. One article denounced the “liberal” or “atheist” who exerts no control over family since he “lets” his wife go to church and raise their children in the Catholic faith, doing lasting “moral” damage to their family.<sup>87</sup> A columnist in the liberal newspaper *El Libre Pensamiento* went so far as

---

<sup>85</sup> “¡Pobres mujeres obreras!... [sic] Penoso vuestra situación, y ¿sab[é]is porque vivís sin protestar? Por las creencias que hab[é]is heredado de vuestras madres y que ellas á su vez recibieron de vuestras abuelas. Vosotras creis [sic] á pi[e]s juntos que Dios ha dispuesto que el pobre sufra trabajos y privaciones, y esa mentira os la repite el cura, ese cura que explota en nombre de Dios, ese cura que vive propagando falsedades para vivir en la haraganería, mientras los humildes y sinceros creyentes son esclavos de una minoría á quien Dios no puede haberles dado privilegios, porque esa minoría condena á sus semejantes á mil penurias y privaciones. Mujeres obreras: pensad en las miseria, en las privaciones, en el trabajo penoso, en el porvenir que os espera, y si ten[é]is un poco de buen sentido, tendr[é]is que daros cuenta que deb[é]is uniros para defenderos de la explotaci[ó]n y del fanatismo.” “A las mujeres obreras,” *La Voz del Obrero*, First Sunday of February, 1902, 3.

<sup>86</sup> “Adiós!...[sic] Contigo no seré dichoso:/ pues tú amarás, más que el hogar, el templo/ y más al cura que á tu mismo esposo!” “A una hija de María,” *El Ferrocarrilero*, May 31, 1906, 2.

<sup>87</sup> “EL LIBERALISMO,” *El Libre Pensamiento*, January 1, 1906, 11-12.

to compare the religious training women and girls received in the Catholic Church (submission, absolute obedience to males, etc.) to preparing them for prostitution.<sup>88</sup>

One might expect anarchists, who had questioned so many social conventions, to be a bit more progressive with regard to gender. This was only sometimes true. Even positive statements on women's abilities were often followed by qualification and difference-making. One male anarchist stated that "the woman possesses the same faculties as the male...; she has a brain to develop and to think with like the male." "Even if men initiate the great ideas ... women, through their moral strength, enlarge those ideas and give them permanence."<sup>89</sup> Women, then, were not the initiators of revolutionary projects. Their contributions were real and perhaps equal to those of men but their roles were distinct and separate. This position appeared to be the best women could expect from anarchist men.

One female anarchist writer reprimanded males of all stripes, including leftists, for their complicity in women's subjugation. "You [male] revolutionaries, busy with making and unmaking constitutions, how have you not considered that all liberty would be empty while one half of the human species remains enslaved?"<sup>90</sup> This probably came in response to pressures from within the movement where anarchist men seemed to never fully accept anarchist women as totally liberated. Patronizingly, a writer for *Despertar* announced that "we do not believe that our emancipation is possible without yours

---

<sup>88</sup> "La Prostitución y los clericalismos," *El Libre Pensamiento*, March 25, 1906, pg. 2 (38)

<sup>89</sup> "La mujer posee las mismas facultades que el hombre...; tiene cerebro para desarrollarse y pensar como el hombre..." "Si bien el hombre inicia las grandes ideas, los pensamientos sublimes de p[er]feccionamiento y progreso, la mujer, a fuerza de su dominio moral, engrandece y aun hace estable esos mismos pensamientos." "Razonamiento del día: Influencia social de la mujer," *Solidaridad*, May 1915, 4

<sup>90</sup> "Vosotros, revolucionarios, ocupados en hacer y deshacer constituciones, ¿cómo no habéis pensado en que toda libertad será un fantasma mientras viva en esclavitud la mitad del g[é]nero humano?" "La mujer," *Despertar*, September 1905, 21.

[meaning women]; what's more, we are certain that if you would give your children a rational and libertarian education the upcoming generation would have the Glory to carry out the hoped for Social Revolution.”<sup>91</sup> One anarchist paper dedicated two lengthy columns to discuss whether anarchist women had taken being “liberated” the wrong way and now engaged in promiscuous sex and even prostitution where no economic need existed.<sup>92</sup>

These ideas, prevalent along the ideological spectrum, that women were simply not independent enough (of superstition, of competing male authority, etc.) perhaps explains why women's education expanded substantially during the reform period (including the founding of the Women's College in 1913) while women's suffrage fell by the wayside for almost a generation after universal male suffrage; women would not get the vote in Uruguay until 1932. Many males, and apparently some females, believed that Uruguayan women were at a tutelary stage. They would get the vote (or in the case of anarchist women full emancipation) with time and study under male supervision.

**Children.** Portrayed in the anarchist newspapers as clean slates upon which the structures, prejudices, and behaviors prevalent in society painted a monstrous portrait, children were a major concern to reformers and radicals alike. Children embodied activists' hopes for a better future society but also their fears that humanity would remain

---

<sup>91</sup> “No creemos posible nuestra emancipación sin la vuestra; es más, estamos seguros que si á vuestros hijos di[e]rais la educación racional y libertaria que predicamos, á la generación naciente le cabr[í]a la Gloria de realizar la tan deseada Revolución Social.” “Por la mujer,” *Despertar!* December 1905/January 1906, 61-62.

<sup>92</sup> “Algunas consideraciones sobre la emancipación de la mujer,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, July 1900, 1; “Nuevas consideraciones sobre la emancipación femenina,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, August 1900, 1.

in stasis and fail to progress. Talk of the plight of children often emphasized violence and exploitation, leading to lost childhoods and generations of dysfunctional adults.<sup>93</sup>

What I will call “scenario literature” appeared often in newspapers: stories of tragic upbringings (due to overwork, little or no education, sexual abuse, etc.) leading to adulthoods consumed by every kind of vice. Girls succumbed to prostitution. Boys turned to drinking and criminality; these led to violence, especially against their own spouse or offspring. The cycle would complete its revolution by producing more children at risk of becoming like their degenerate parents. [If these stories were numerous, cite some examples.]

One such causal chain appeared in the anarchist newspaper *El Amigo del Pueblo*. It began as a discussion of positivism, claiming that philosophy demonstrated the lack of free will. Structures impinge on human agency and, therefore, accountability. Change the system and the outcomes of human behavior will conform to the new structure. The columnist then offered the case of a boy who “at the tender age of 5 or 6 years old” sells newspapers for a living early in the morning. By the age of 10 he is working at the factory and because his work is so poorly compensated the manager is able to lay off his father and mother. The boy suffers the effects of poor food, shelter, and overwork while underage. Meanwhile, the rich get richer from his labors. “The boy becomes a man and his situation is always the same: he is always ignorant, he is always poor, he is always a victim of injustice. The instinct to propagate the species joins him to a woman who he loves and from this union children are born, conceived in love to live in hate. But every

---

<sup>93</sup> Newspapers reported frequently on the abuse of children in the homes of elites (as servants), at the hands of clergy-members, and even in the mostly religious schools (also by clergy-members). See for instance: “¡SANTOS VARONES!” *El Libre Pensamiento*, February 25, 1906, 31.



child will burden the family with more expenses and misery escalates.” He loses his job. Hunger and sickness plague the family. The boy that became a man “will see that society refuses him bread, refuses him light, refuses him justice, and feeling himself victimized, he victimizes,” and begins a life of crime. The system, then, was the source of crime.<sup>94</sup>

Christian Democrats were no less concerned with structure and often placed blame squarely at the doorstep of Parliament. On one occasion, the newspaper dressed down legislators for not speedily passing labor legislation, claiming their negligence exacerbated the very social problems legislators attempted to tackle including prostitution, child insubordination, juvenile delinquency, the lack (and alleged need) of juvenile prisons, lack of education, and infant mortality. If parents had more time (better wages for fewer work hours and Sundays off), and especially if women were freed from being overworked, these problems would not exist. But instead, the author fumed, senators and deputies spoke of juvenile detention centers and secularizing schools.<sup>95</sup>

Children were believed to be capable of seeing the world as it was, their vision untrammelled by exploitative structures they had not yet been totally socialized to accept. For instance, *Tiempos Nuevos* produced this catechism between mother and son:

*Mother*—What are you doing, impertinent one? Don’t you know that you’re not allowed to touch the fruit?

*Son*—But why, mom?

---

<sup>94</sup> “El niño llega á ser un hombre, y su situación siempre es la misma: siempre es ignorante, siempre es pobre, siempre es víctima de al injusticia. El instinto de conservación de la especie lo une á una mujer á quien ama, y de esta unión nacen hijos concebidos en el amor, para vivir en el odio. Pero cada hijo acarrea á la familia obrera más gastos, y la miseria va en progresión ascendente.” “Verá que la sociedad le niega el pan, que le niega la luz, que le niega la justicia, y sintiéndose herido, hie[r].” “El atentado de Monza,” *El Amigo del Pueblo*, August 1900, 3.

<sup>95</sup> “La mujer y los niños,” *El Demócrata*, October 15, 1906, 2.

*Mother*—Because they belong to someone else.

*Son*—That well-dressed boy is taking some.

*Mother*—But he hasn't stolen them; he's bought them with money.

*Son*—How do you get money?

*Mother*—You get it by working.

*Son*—Since you work all day you must have money to buy fruit.

*Mother*—I don't have any because I bought you bread.

*Son*—Then the mother of that kid gives him fruit instead of bread.

*Mother*—No, she's given him both bread and fruit.

*Son*—Then that boy's mother must work harder than you do.

*Mother*—No, that lady doesn't work at all.

*Son*—If she doesn't work, who gives her enough money to buy so many things?

*Mother*—We give it to her.

*Son*—What fools we are, mom!<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> “*La madre*—¿Qué, haces, impertinente? ¿No sabes que no se pueden tocar las frutas? / *El niño*—¿Por qué, mamá? / *La madre*—Porque son de otro. / *El niño*—Y aquel otro niño tan bien vestido se las lleva sin embargo. / *La madre*—Pero no las ha robado, las ha ha [sic] comprado con dinero. / *El niño*—¿Y cómo se encuentra el dinero? / *La madre*—Se gana trabajando. / *El niño*—Entonces tu que trabajas todo el día, tendrá dinero para comprar fruta. / *La madre*—No tengo más porque te he comprado pan. / *El niño*—Entonces la madre de ese muchacho, en vez de darle pan le da fruta. / *La madre*—No; le ha dado pan y fruta. / *El niño*—Entonces trabaja más que tú la madre de ese muchacho. / *La madre*—No; esa señora no hace ningún trabajo. / *El niño*—Entonces si no trabaja ¿quién le da el dinero para comprar tantas cosas? /

Scenarios such as these, in which didactic children exposed for adults the otherwise invisible systems of oppression, were a common trope in labor newspapers. Reformers and radicals hoped to preserve that critical faculty and enable children to create a different world based on it.

The need to illuminate the clean canvas of children's minds drove parents, newspapers, and organizations to promote and fund education. For anarchists, socialists, and liberals, the point of departure for a truly emancipatory education was, as one might expect, secular education. (See Figure 6.) Education was the preferred method of averting the dysfunction and degeneration that scenario literature threatened. Education was conceived of as *the* instrument that would—almost eschatologically—empower the up-and-coming generation to end social injustice. (See Figure 7.) Many union buildings housed a library for members. Parents were encouraged to supplement their children's education at home.<sup>97</sup> The movement of “modern schools” associated especially with anarchism took root in Uruguay with the opening of La Escuela Moderna de la Villa del Cerro on June 14, 1908. The school featured classes steeped in the most “rational” of pedagogies and available to both children and adults.<sup>98</sup> The issue of public education revealed powerful social pressure; though public spending on education had increased dramatically in the late nineteenth century, school construction expanded further during Batlle's two administrations. And given the anti-clerical social pressures, politicians

---

*La madre*—Se lo damos nosotros. / *El niño*—¡Que tontos somos mamá!” “La madre y el niño,” *Tiempos Nuevos*, 23 December 1910, 3.

<sup>97</sup> “Lectura para los hogares: Lo que olvidan muchos padres,” *El Ferrocarrilero*, November 30, 1906, 7-8.

<sup>98</sup> “Escuela Moderna,” *La Acción Obrera*, June 5, 1908, 1. Anarchist labor newspapers were particularly interested in modern schools and celebrated their opening in places as far away as rural Italy or as close as Buenos Aires. “Nueva Escuela Moderna,” *Adelante!*, June 1, 1909, 3-4.

committed the state to an explicitly secular public education, taking steps to displace the Catholic Church as the predominant schoolmaster. Coupled with legislation that restricted child labor, government seemed to have gotten the popular message that a child's place within the nuclear and national family was in the classroom by day and at home at night, not in the factory.

**Men.** As can be seen from above, the labor press enjoined men to act in particular ways in the family and with regard to vice, religion, and exploitation. Regenerated males were the primary worker of every household, had no competition over the regulation of the home and its members (particularly females), and struggled against their own exploitation as well as that of others. Education (especially a rational one) and hard work were crucial in immunizing men from the pitfalls of vice, cruelty, egoism, and emasculation. *El Ferrocarrilero* warned that boys without an education and not taught a trade “acquire effeminate customs, lack muscular vigor, are stupid, ...egoist, cruel, cowardly and prone to acquire all manner of vices.”<sup>99</sup> Since religion was feminized in most radical circles, true men were often conceived of as moral and irreligious. To some, religious belief created not effeminate men but monsters. Said one writer for *Adelante!*, “The man that believes in God or only in an authoritarian principle, becomes nature's most vengeful and cruel animal.”<sup>100</sup> Men needed to maintain a balance between soft control of family while avoiding the hazards of holding power. The outcomes of reform

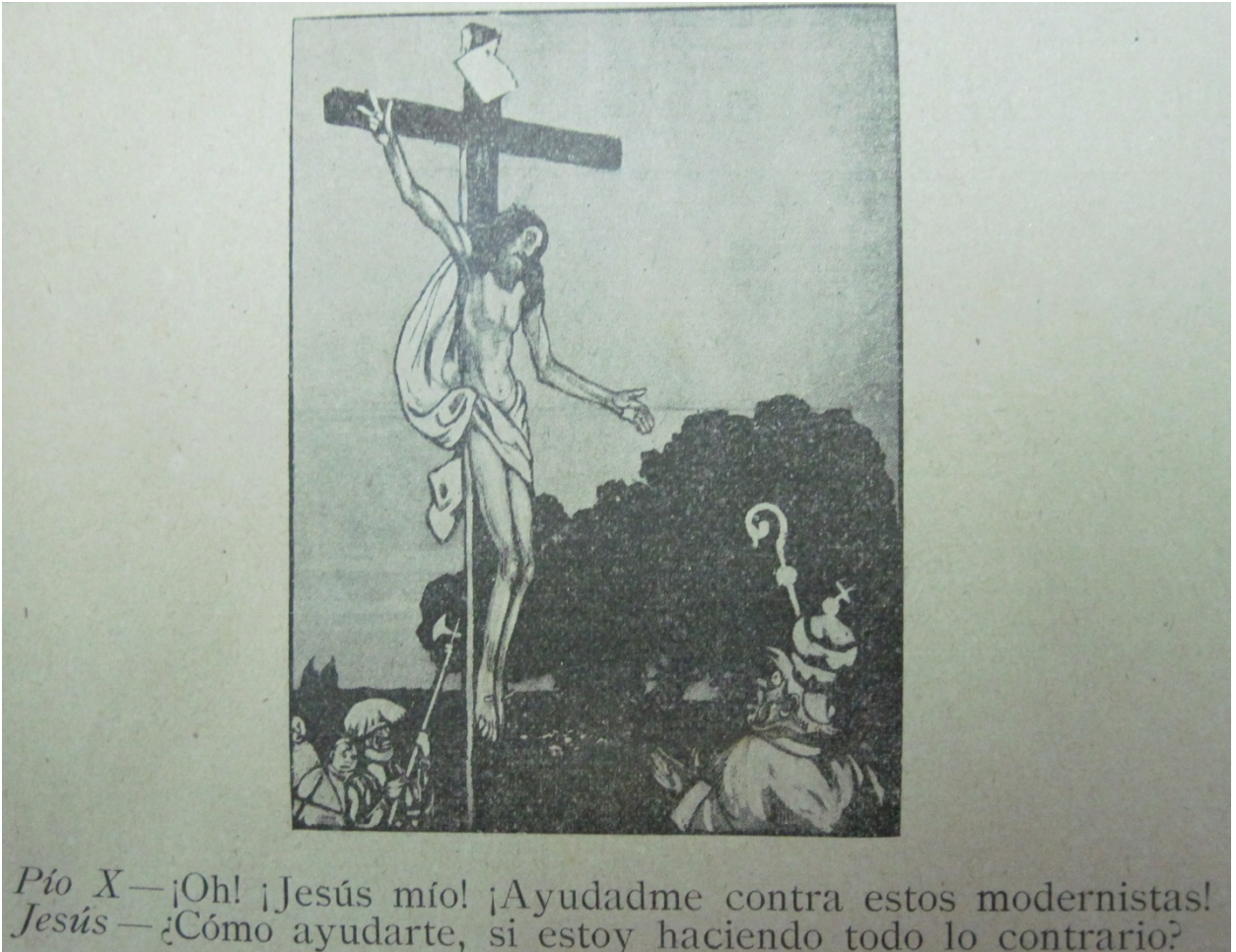
---

<sup>99</sup> “...Adquieren costumbres afeminadas, carecen de vigor muscular, son tontos, ... ego[i]stas, crueles, cobardes y propensos á adquirir todo género de vicios.” “Lectura para los hogares: Lo que olvidan muchos padres,” *El Ferrocarrilero*, November 30, 1906, 7-8.

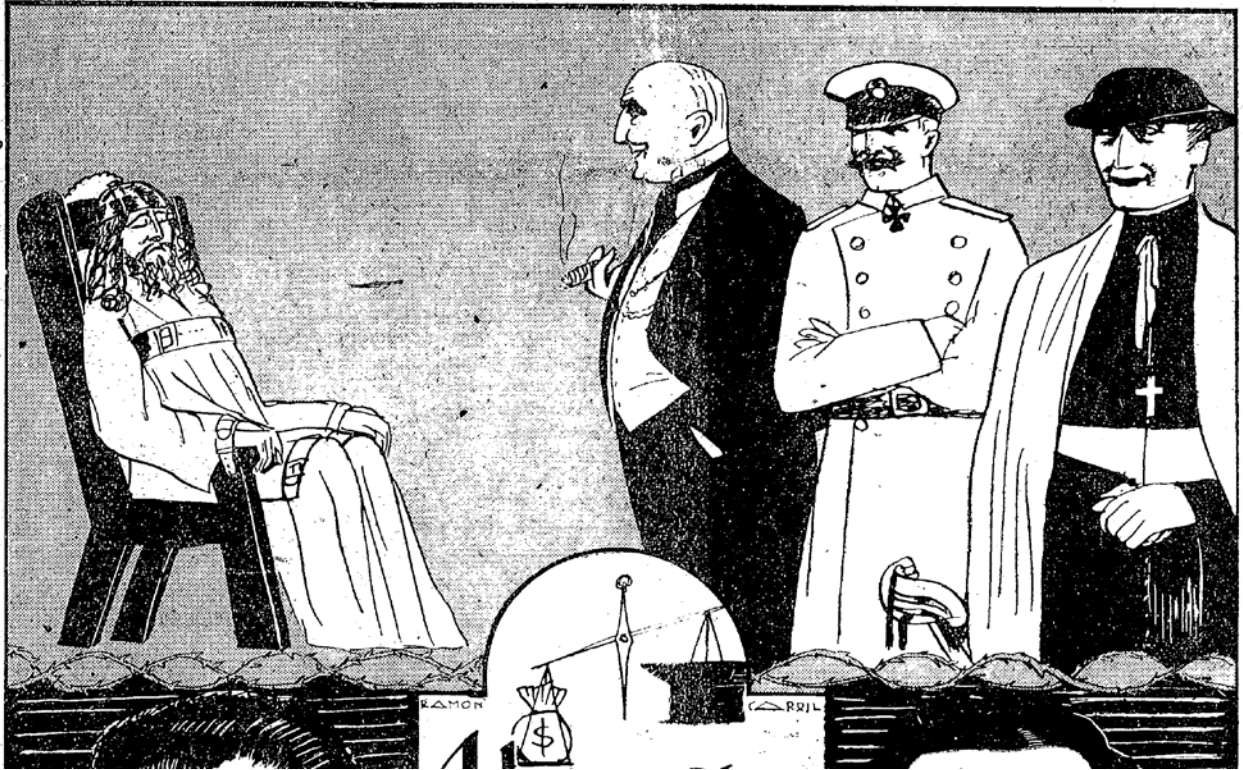
<sup>100</sup> “El hombre creyente en un dios ó en un principio autoritario solamente, se convierte en el animal más vengativo y cruel de la naturaleza.” “El amor libre en la sociedad presente,” *Adelante!*, July 1, 1909, 3.

legislation seemed to enshrine these conceptions of manliness. Unions—bastions not only of class struggle but also male camaraderie and masculine performance—won governmental support and recognition. Collective bargaining and other labor laws made it possible for more families to live on one salary, that of the father/husband. Laws restricted child labor, expanded education for boys, girls, and women. Finally, all adult males gained the right to vote in 1918 while women remained disenfranchised, reaffirming the public and political arena as restricted male space. While the outcomes of future labor and social legislation were a mixed bag, state officials and employers in Uruguay bowed to popular pressure and (sometimes grudgingly) enacted certain reforms, yielding a partially regenerated society.

**Figure 1.** “[Pope] Pius X—‘Oh Jesus! Help me against these modernists!’ Jesus—‘How can I help you if I am doing everything to the contrary?’” Appearing in *Salpicón*, anti-clericals had clearly appropriated Jesus as a modernist, one that would have been horrified by and actively working against backwardness embodied here by the pope. *Salpicón*, 26 October 1910, 7.



**Figure 2.** The anarchist conception of Jesus as a martyr and symbol of martyrdom for social justice obviously persisted into the 1930s. The evil trinity (according to anarchists) of institutional injustice—capitalism (the businessman), the state (the military officer), and the Church (the priest)—conspires to electrocute Jesus and celebrates his death. *Unión Sindical*, 20 August 1931, 1.



**Figure 3.** The heading reads “Metamorphosis” and the caption announces “[an] interesting transformation of work instruments [on] the day of the Great Revolution.” This appears to be a reversal of Isaiah’s prophecy: “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4). Perhaps this is Joel’s command: “Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong” (Joel 3:10). The plowshares and pruninghooks would become weapons of war in order to carry out the “Great Revolution,” presumably then to be permanently beaten back into tools. *Adelante!*, 15 July 1909, 1.





**Figure 4.** “The Disastrous Effects of Alcoholism.” A man, perhaps with two drinking companions in the background, suffers the deleterious effects of alcohol consumption to the consternation of an angelically portrayed woman who cannot bear to watch. (The German script suggests that the picture was reprinted from a European newspaper—a common practice for labor newspapers at the time.) *Adelante!*, 1 May 1909, 3.



Los efectos desastrosos del alcoholismo

**Figure 5.** A shirtless male (probably representing a worker) has cut down the cross and, perhaps out of the very wood of “superstition,” built a guillotine. Instead of religious mystery, he offers light and, through the guillotine, justice. The lamp hanging from the guillotine gives the current date—1920—and the artist appears to indicate another watershed moment in modern social discontent: the French Revolution of 1789. The newspaper is celebrating May Day. *Solidaridad*, May 1920, 1.





**Figure 6.** “Education in the Workshops of Don Bosco and in some Public Schools.” Don Bosco was a Catholic school and often the focus of attacks on religious education. Perfectly disciplined children sit with funnels in their heads as the teacher-priest figuratively dumps religious dogmas into their heads (rosaries, crucifixes, a devil, and curiously, an all seeing eye). The broader criticism made by liberals, anarchists, and socialists was that religious education distorted a child’s development and inhibited their ability to question the inequities of modern society. *Salpicón*, 14 December 1910, 1.





**Figure 7.** “In order to end them, behold our weapons.” Happy children watch as the implements of education—the ABCs and a quill, suited in armor—kill the man. Is it a businessman, a politician, or simply a patriarch? The symbol is generic enough to offer many interpretations. However, the central message is clear: it was the new generation of educated children (progeny of workers given some of their humble clothes) that would topple the suited Goliath(s). *Salpicón*, 9 November 1910, 1.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Sembrando una semilla, lanzada una semilla: Social Catholicism and Early Labor*

#### Legislation

The previous chapter described anarchists, socialists, and social Catholics as sharing similar ideas about political economy, gender and family roles, and vice. This chapter and the next explore how those three movements differed in practice. In fact, these differences made the three political movements all but completely irreconcilable enemies in the field of labor politics. Though socialists and social Catholics, along with one faction of anarchism (the subject of Chapter Four), all contributed to the creation of a welfare state, they influenced the process at different times, precluding cooperation.

The initiative for labor reform belongs to Catholic workers organized into the *Círculos Católicos* and the Christian Democratic League. Given the importance of their role in producing labor reforms in Uruguay, surprising little attention has been paid to Catholic workers and their movements; what notice they have received has been largely negative. Fernando López D'Alesandro's three-volume history of the Uruguayan left makes no mention of them. Christine Ehrick's book references Catholic social action but only mentions one of the reactionary varieties: how Catholic women employed a quasi-feminist discourse to combat progressive legislation such as divorce. Carlos Zubillaga's work on social Catholicism dwells far more on the Uruguayan high clergy (especially Archbishop Mariano Soler) than on Catholic workers organized in the *Círculos* and the Christian Democratic League. The prevalent opinion among Uruguayan historians appears to be represented by the late José Pedro Barrán, who portrays Catholicism—

including individuals such as Archbishop Soler—as monolithically reactionary and incapable of progressive action. This chapter endeavors to refute that position.<sup>101</sup>

In Uruguay, progressive Catholics seized a propitious moment at the turn of the twentieth century, when they enjoyed both papal and local support, to push for the country's first labor bill, mobilizing workers to an unprecedented degree. That moment was brief and social Catholicism would later wither in Uruguay due to internal Church dynamics and local responses to the national political climate. But progressive Catholics were a—perhaps even *the*—critical catalyst for Uruguayan labor law; they were the first to mobilize on a mass national scale for protective labor legislation and the first to introduce it into Parliament—twice in fact—marking the first time the legislature had taken up the social question. Although their direct lobbying initiatives ended in failure, their actions represented a serious challenge from below that neither party could ignore. Social Catholics deserve credit for beginning the cycle of party competition by challenging Colorados and Blancos to outbid each other in at least verbal support for labor law.

**The Círculos Católicos de Obreros.** Historian Carlos Zubillaga traces the origins of the Círculos Católicos to mid-nineteenth-century Europe. Founded in France in 1855 and later reorganized in 1871, the Círculos Católicos de Obreros became an important national organization. In the early 1880s, two lay Catholics by the names of

---

<sup>101</sup> Christine Ehrick, *The Shield of the Weak: Femenism and the State in Uruguay, 1903-1933* (University of New Mexico Press, 2005); López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Anarquistas y socialistas: 1838-1910*; López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Primera parte]*; López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Segunda parte]*; López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: La fundación del partido comunista y la división del anarquismo (1919-1923)*; Zubillaga, *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)*. For José Pedro Barrán's positions on the Catholic Church, see his first four chapters where he takes up the religious side of the conservative question. José Pedro Barrán, *Los conservadores uruguayos (1870-1933)*, Second Edition (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2004), 11-77.

Luis Pedro Lenguas and Juan M. O'Neill, associated with the poor immigrant church of San Antonio de Padua in Montevideo, imported the Círculos to Uruguay. Lenguas remained an important leader within the institution for decades, serving as the co-editor of its mouthpiece, *El Amigo del Obrero*, for the first five years of its publication. In early 1885, the Pope gave the association tacit approval and in 1891 the now intercontinental organization gained formal papal approval. By 1899, the Círculos reported that they had reached nearly 2,000 members and had established twelve chapters: three in Montevideo, three in the department of Canelones, and six others in the countryside towns of Salto, Mercedes, Fray-Bentos, Minas, Durazno, and Trinidad.<sup>102</sup>

The Círculos model arrived in Uruguay in time to fill a large void: the urban populace was growing and with it labor insecurity and class conflict. It was a time, as Milton Vanger describes, when “labor unions were weak, their leadership was anarchist or Marxist, and their existence was ephemeral... Not only were employers more powerful than unions but [the] government regularly broke strikes and arrested strike leaders.”<sup>103</sup> The Catholic organization gave devout workers an alternative to joining or, more likely, shunning, the often explicitly anti-religious labor unions.

The Círculos served the same needs as unions: they were mutual aid societies, cultural-religious institutions, labor organizations, and political blocs. They offered their adult male working-class members and families a variety of services, including health care, accident insurance, funeral services, and other forms of material solidarity. They established libraries, educational opportunities, and a newspaper. And they put on

---

<sup>102</sup> Zubillaga, *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)*, 106-108, 118; *Almanaque de El Amigo de Obrero para 1900* (Montevideo: Imprenta Latina, 1899), 99-106, 112.

<sup>103</sup> Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 3.

numerous social and religious events. Their diverse functions ensured permanence. Association with the Church also gave them a respectability in Uruguay that other labor organizations lacked.

Uruguay may have been the first country in the Americas to adopt the *Círculos Católicos* movement. In 1892, the *Círculos* crossed the Río de la Plata to Buenos Aires, quickly taking root and from there fanning out across Argentina. Ten years later, the organization boasted 1,500 members in Buenos Aires and 20,000 members across the country.<sup>104</sup> Relations between the Montevideo and Buenos Aires *Círculos* remained amicable and close but with what appears to have been a hierarchical undercurrent. To judge from *El Amigo*'s reporting, the Montevideo *Círculo* assumed the role of the "parent" organization, the Buenos Aires chapter (at least in the early years) as the "offspring." Argentine members would come "home" but Uruguayan counterparts never visited Buenos Aires (or, at least, no such trips were reported). On October 5, 1902, during the Uruguayan *Círculos*' second labor conference (an assembly of Catholic workers), the president of the Argentine chapter and other members were in attendance to sign a reciprocity treaty. In language reminiscent of labor internationalism, the president of the congress, Luis Pedro Lenguas, declared that "the borders that separate our two *círculos* are now erased and from today onward the doors will remain open to all workers who find themselves forced to leave one or the other country." Two hundred Argentine delegates visited Montevideo in 1903 (see below). Years later, as the Uruguayan *Círculos*

---

<sup>104</sup> "Los *Círculos* de Obreros EN BUENOS AIRES," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 6 February 1902, 1.



drifted toward conservatism, the organization's dynamism waned and the bonds with Buenos Aires loosened.<sup>105</sup>

In July 1904, *El Amigo* claimed to have extended the Círculos movement into Brazil with the establishment of a chapter in Porto Alegre. A few months earlier, a priest from Porto Alegre, Father Albuquerque, had made an unexpected trip to Montevideo and met with members of the Montevideo Círculo. He returned home eager to start a local chapter and soon converted the bishop of Porto Alegre to the idea.

**Christian Democracy and the Christian Democratic League.** As political scientist Stathis N. Kalyvas points out, Christian Democracy “was the unplanned, unintended, and unwanted by-product of the strategic steps taken by the Catholic church in response to Liberal anticlerical attacks.” It was neither the cynical creation of conservative Catholics to diffuse criticism of the Church nor a way to channel papal policy into mass politics. Rather it was almost the other way around—a groundswell of activity by many social Catholics to legislate progressive religious principles; the high clergy then responded by legitimating such activity. This can be shown, for instance, by the late promulgation of *Rerum Novarum*, well after many of Europe's Christian Democratic parties had already appeared.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> “Quedan pues borradas las fronteras que separan á nuestros círculos y de hoy en adelante sus puertas estarán abiertas para todos los obreros que se vean obligados á abandonar uno ú otro país.” “2.º Congreso Obrero: COMPLETO ÉXITO: CR[Ó]NICA DE LAS SESIONES DEL DOMINGO: Discurso de bienvenida y contestación,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 5 October 1902, 1; “Círculos de obreros ARGENTINOS: DELEGACIÓN A MONTEVIDEO,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 2 August 1903, 1; “Los Círculos Obreros ARGENTINOS: DELEGACIÓN Á MONTEVIDEO,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 6 August 1903, 2; “BIENVENIDOS,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 9 August 1903, 1.

<sup>106</sup> Catholic parties appeared in Germany in 1871, Belgium in 1884, the Netherlands in 1888, and Austria in 1890. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1-6, 64 (especially footnote 4), 187-215.

By the first labor conference of the Círculos Católicos in 1900, references to Christian democracy had begun to appear in Uruguay. “Our Círculos de Obreros, are nothing more than a preparation for Christian social democracy,” commented Archbishop Mariano Soler, the conference’s last speaker. In Uruguay, Christian democrats were a militant collection of apparently younger social Catholics determined to, as Zubillaga explains, “transform from within and through generational reform the character of the Círculos—pushing them from the banality of functioning as a mere charity or welfare institution to leading the struggles of the proletariat.” They were agitators doing double militancy within the Círculos and outside it. For at least the first decade of the twentieth century, the influence of the Christian democrats within the Círculos was widespread and obvious from the pages of *El Amigo del Obrero*. In fact, it is fairly clear that the Christian democrats were the faction pressing hardest from within for the Círculos’ participation in working class struggles, including the campaign for a legally-mandated day of rest (see below).

By 1903 the Christian democrats had, without separating themselves from the Círculos, created their own organization: the Christian Democratic League. In 1906, the League founded its own newspaper, *El Demócrata*. But by then, the League seems to have lost support as the Church moved toward conservatism. Even so, a stunted Christian democratic movement would persist. Because they acted as a militant vanguard within the Círculos Católicos, the Christian democrats were an internal source of contention, though rarely were such disagreements publicized in the Catholic press. Finally, (as will

be seen below) the Christian democrats in Uruguay and around the world evaded ecclesiastical control—something that would land them into trouble later.<sup>107</sup>

**Uruguayan Social Catholic Visions.** In January 1899, in one of the first issues of *El Amigo del Obrero*, the editors both expressed and attempted to spur a renewed social Catholic push in Uruguay. The opening article spoke of a world gone astray, teeming with iniquity and in need of the restoration of “Christian customs.” The lost principle so integral to justice and the rehabilitation of “kingdoms and peoples” was to “give to everyone their due; ...to the employer what is the employer’s; to the worker what is the worker’s; ...to society what is society’s, and of greatest importance, to God what is God’s and to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” Far from a defense of liberal property rights, the article redefined what it meant for everyone to have “their due.” Fairness and Christian custom “oblige and command the powerful industrialist that, before committing an act of injustice against the worker in his charge, he should ruin himself once or a thousand times.” And rather than commit injustice against their employers, workers should “suffer for Christ hunger, thirst and nakedness.” At some recent but unspecified time, the world had deviated from that sacred custom, leading to the “implantation” of “ghastly pagan customs.” Such ills were hardly inevitable. “We are not like Sodom without the just.” On the contrary, readers were as “Israelites in the midst of Babylon.”<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> “...Transformar desde adentro y por renovación generacional el carácter de los Círculos, llevándolos de ser el resabio de la concepción caritativo-asistencial, a protagonizar las reivindicaciones de los sectores proletarios todo ello.” Zubillaga, *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)*, 165-176; “Es cierto que nuestros Círculos de Obreros no son más que una preparación para la democracia social Cristiana, que es la dueña incontestable del porvenir.” “LA SESION SOLEMNE del Congreso: Los discursos: DISCURSO INAGURAL PRONUNCIADO POR EL EXCMO. Y RVMO. ARZOBISPO MONS. SOLER,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 31 May 1900, 1.

<sup>108</sup> “...Dar á cada uno lo suyo; ...al patrón lo que es del patrón, al obrero lo que es del obrero; ...á la sociedad, lo que á la sociedad corresponde, y como fundamento más principal aun, á Dios lo que es de Dios y a César lo que es del César.” “...Ordenan y Mandan al industrial poderoso que antes de cometer un

The editors did not envision a world free from hierarchies. The state and its caretakers would command in the public sphere, “industrialists” in the private sector of employment. Workers would humbly submit to these power differences. And all would be equal before God, everyone accepting obligations of equal exigency. What the heralds of this Catholic movement advocated was a return to an imagined past—an idyllic rendition of feudalistic privilege and obligation. But this imagined past could never become the present, if for no other reason than because the Círculos also became inveterate defenders of *some* liberal democratic rights: speech, petition, press, and suffrage, all framed within a Christian context. This was the radical component of Catholic social thought—the notion that the less powerful, equipped with a particular reading of Christian principles, could demand a refurbished corporate society in which none shirked obligation. Charity on the part of employers would eliminate want and ignominy. Workers would have no need to strike and would reciprocate with deference—an earned deference.

Seven years later, the editors of *El Demócrata*, newspaper of the Christian Democratic League, pushed even further. The solution to “the social question” could only be economic. The “worker’s *moral resurrection* must be preceded by *material resurrection* or, in other words, we must win over the people to *the truth* via the road of *justice*.” That “truth” was “*Christian truth*,” and that “justice,” again, was one that recognized reciprocal social obligation. But Christian democrats struck an even more radical chord by stressing delinquency on the part of the powerful, for “how great a debt

---

acto de injusticia contra el trabajador á sus órdenes, debe arruinarse una y mil veces...” “...Sufrir por Cristo, el hambre, la sed y la desnudez.” “...Costumbres espantosamente paganas.” “...No estamos en condiciones de Sodoma sin justos.” “...Israelitas en medio de la Babilonia.” “Restauraremos las costumbres,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 29 January 1899, 1.

of justice have the moneyed classes contracted with the proletarian classes,” who had the “*sacred right* to be treated as a brother.” The paper also announced the creation of “professional unions”—labor organizations that could even include sympathetic employers—to press for economic reforms in workplace and government. Christian democrats here advocated a syndicalist tactic of autonomous action, stressing that “it is necessary that all conscious workers convince themselves that they shall gain no benefit from *party battles*, because [political] parties are nothing more than a genuine expression of ambition, of aristocratic interests that reserve no role for the people.”<sup>109</sup> All of these positions were a manifestation of what historian Robert H. Craig described as “the disquieting radicality of Christian faith,” the “‘Galilean vision,’ the view that the practice of love and justice, rather than the legitimation of wealth and power, are the hallmarks of Christian witness.”<sup>110</sup>

***Rerum Novarum***. The famed papal declaration of 1891 came as a late response to portentous social changes that included industrialization, class conflict, and secularization. These provoked divergent ideological responses that ranged from Social Darwinism to social democracy to radical alternatives such as socialism and anarchism. The papacy was even tardy to validate grassroots Catholic responses to the challenges of industrial society. The encyclical, translated to mean “Of New Things,” sought to

---

<sup>109</sup> “La *resurrección moral* del obrero tiene que ser precedida de la *resurrección material*, ó en otras palabras tenemos que conquistar el pueblo *á la verdad* por la senda de *la justicia*.” “La *resurrección moral* del obrero tiene que ser precedida de la *resurrección material*, ó en otras palabras tenemos que conquistar el pueblo *á la verdad* por la senda de *la justicia*.” “...*La verdad cristiana*.” “...Cuan grande es el débito de justicia que las clases pudientes tienen contraído con las clases proletarias.” “...*Derecho sagrado* á ser tratado de *hermano*.” “Es necesario que todos los obreros conscientes se convenzan de que ningún provecho sacarán de *las luchas de partido*, porque los partidos no son más que la genuina expresión de ambiciones, de intereses aristocráticos en las que no hay parte ninguna reservada al pueblo...” Emphasis in the original. “Volviendo a marchar,” *El Demócrata*, 1 July 1906, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Robert H. Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 3.

reconcile rich and poor rather than revolutionize the economic system(s) that produced those class disparities in the first place. *Rerum Novarum*, then, proposed a grand compromise based on reciprocal obligation. Because of this, the encyclical became known in Uruguay as “the Magna Carta of Labor”—unwittingly and appropriately referencing a document the powerful were forced to sign in the face of bottom-up anti-autocratic revolt.<sup>111</sup>

Social Catholicism of necessity had two components: a radical or progressive model of social regeneration and a self-definition in opposition to secular alternatives. Both components are unmistakably included in the *Rerum Novarum*. The document begins by identifying the social question, describing the paradox of the nineteenth-century world as an era of potential and dissipation, inspiration and despair. These same contradictions were similarly described by most any progressive or radical ideologue of the period, including Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* and Peter Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread*. “That the spirit of revolutionary change,” the encyclical began, “which has long been disturbing the nations of the world, should have passed beyond the sphere of politics and made its influence felt in the cognate sphere of practical economics is not surprising. The elements of the conflict now raging are unmistakable, in the vast expansion of industrial pursuits and the marvelous discoveries of science; in the changed relations between masters and workmen; in the enormous fortunes of some few individuals, and the utter poverty of the masses; the increased self-reliance and closer mutual combination of the working classes; as also, finally, in the

---

<sup>111</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: The Struggle to Reclaim Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). “La Carta Magna del Trabajo.” “Unión Democrática Cristiana: Fiesta obrera,” *El Bien*, 13 May 1909, 3.

prevailing moral degeneracy.” The leaps of scientific discovery were not further discussed; they were uncontroversial. However, “the changed relations between masters and workmen,” the pope explained, had undone the ancient corporate protections (especially through guilds) that had shielded the weak. “Hence, by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition.” “Rapacious usury” only made matters worse.

But before solutions were proposed, roughly a quarter of the document attempts to dispel the secular radical challenge. The pope defended the primacy of property rights and the (regulated) pursuit of material gain as, respectively, the foundation of a healthy society and the engine of orderly economic growth. Pope Leo’s notion of property attacked socialism as fiercely as it did capitalist excess: “As effects follow their cause, so is it just and right that the results of labor should belong to those who have bestowed their labor.” Contra socialism, private property should exist. Concomitantly, the full rewards of production (profits) should be equitably distributed to employer and employee. Adherence to a specific set of rights and obligations would mitigate class conflict. The worker should accept any labor contract “freely and equitably agreed upon.” Further, he was “never to injure the property, or to outrage the person, of an employer; never to resort to violence in defending his own cause, nor to engage in riot or disorder; and to have nothing to do with men of evil principles, who work upon the people with artful promises of results, and excite foolish hopes which usually end in useless regrets and grievous loss.” Peace could only be achieved if both parties stood down; if the cycle of violence was broken, a humane relationship could be (re)built. Employers were no less

obliged to respect workers since they were “not to look upon their work people as their bondsmen, but to respect in every man his dignity as a person ennobled by Christian character.” Trying to get ahead was “creditable” “but to misuse men as though they were things in the pursuit of gain, or to value them solely for their physical powers—that is truly shameful and inhuman.” Nor should he overwork those in his charge. “Lastly, the rich must religiously refrain from cutting down the workman’s earnings, whether by force, by fraud, or by usurious dealing; and with all greater reason because the laboring man is, as a rule, weak and unprotected, and because his slender means should in proportion to their scantiness be accounted sacred.” The pope then asked rhetorically, perhaps mournfully, “Were these precepts carefully obeyed and followed out, would they not be sufficient of themselves to keep under all strife and all its causes?”<sup>112</sup>

Intended (as I argue) to redirect otherwise lapsed Catholics into a Christian socially conscious movement, was *Rerum Novarum* a success? Certainly in part. It validated the social campaigns of Catholics who might have otherwise been left walking along the edge of a heretical precipice. Without papal backing, Christian democracy might have withered rather than become a permanent fixture in many European and Latin American political systems. In Uruguay, the encyclical was *the* document referenced to validate, guide, and inspire Catholic social action. It even impressed some local radicals. As noted in the last chapter, some Uruguayan anarchists admired the critique of

---

<sup>112</sup> For a full English translation of the *Rerum Novarum*, visit the Vatican website at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_1-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html).



capitalism found in the *Rerum Novarum* as well as the relatively progressive teachings of Mariano Soler.<sup>113</sup>

Admiration of the encyclical in Uruguay was prevalent among Christian democrats, the Círculos Católicos, and even some conservative Catholics. Between 1905 and 1909, social Catholics marked the occasion of May 15<sup>th</sup>—the anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*—as an alternative to May Day. This actually replaced to a great extent the Catholic celebration of May 1<sup>st</sup>, not as International Workers' Day, but the veneration of Saint Phillip and Saint James the Just, patron saints of Montevideo. In 1906, *El Bien* explicitly made May 15<sup>th</sup> the new workers' day by saying that that year “the Christian Democrats have resolved to commemorate the glorious anniversary which, being the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, celebrates the cause of the proletariat.” How better to impact local labor politics than to propose an alternative celebration? In 1905, a meeting took place at which an “immense” crowd of “men from all social classes” congregated to “praise Leo XIII, the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, and Christian Democracy.” In 1906, over the weekend, before the now sacred date, Christian democrats held a “simple and very cordial meeting” at the Iglesia de la Concepción followed by breakfast. Two days later, they celebrated the actual anniversary with a gathering of workers. Amid widespread strikes in 1907, Christian Democrats celebrated May 15<sup>th</sup> by having Presbyter Oyasbenere bless a new flag that would symbolize their cause. It was white with a star in a corner emitting golden rays; amid those rays they simply wrote “Democracy.” Christian democrats in 1908 planned the grand opening on May 15<sup>th</sup> of a consumer cooperative with the unwieldy name of “I Am of the People.” The next day they opened a “Popular Library” and on the day after,

---

<sup>113</sup> “LOS DEPENDIENTES DE ALMACÉN,” and “VERDADES,” *La Aurora*, September 1899, 2.

they held a mass followed by a retreat in the countryside. Other celebrations were held in 1909.<sup>114</sup> We should recognize in this assembly of sacred dates (May 15<sup>th</sup>), symbols (the white flag), texts (*Rerum Navarum* and a social reading of the Gospels), heroes (Pope Leo XIII, Jesus the carpenter), institutions (the Círculos Católicos and the Christian Democratic League), and infrastructure (the consumer cooperative and popular library) the explicit attempt to invent a social Catholic labor culture—one in opposition to its secular variants. After all, anarchist and socialist competitors had similarly invented, locally and transnationally, a culture of resistance with similar accoutrements.<sup>115</sup>

Some radicals recognized in the papal decree an attempt to make Catholicism competitive in labor politics against secular alternatives. Socialists at *La Voz del Obrero* believed that “Catholics championed by Leo XIII wanted to divert workers’ attention from the socialist current, which invades everything, and attempted to form a Catholic pseudo-socialist party just as Wilhelm II of Germany did with his project of state socialism under the yoke of his authoritarian government. But neither the one with his papal decrees, nor the other with imperial decrees, achieved his goals because in front of everyone stood the great mass of conscious workers organized into a Party of the lower

---

<sup>114</sup> “...Hombres de todas las clases sociales.” “Se vivió á León XIII, al 15 de Mayo, y á la Democracia Cristiana.” “Unión Democrática Cristiana: El 15 de Mayo,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 17 May 1905, 1; “...Los demócrat[a]s cristianos han resuelto conmemorar el glorioso aniversario que para la causa del proletariado acuerda la fecha del 15 del actual...” “UNION DEMOCRATICA CRISTIANA,” *El Bien*, 13 May 1906, 1; “...Sencilla y cordialísima reunión.” “Los demócratas cristianos,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 16 May 1906, 1; “UNI[ÓN] DEMOCRÁTICA CRISTIANA,” *El Bien*, 3 May 1906, 1; “Unión Democrática Cristiana: La bendición de la bandera,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 15 May 1907, 1; “Soy del Pueblo.” “La Unión Democrática Cristiana festejando el 15 de Mayo,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 13 May 1908, 1; “DEMOCRACIA CRISTIANA: LA FECHA DE HOY: SU DIGNA CONMEMORACION,” *El Bien*, 15 May 1906, 2; “En el campo social: 15 de Mayo de 1891,” and “Unión Democrática Cristiana: Importante conferencia,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 15 May 1909, 1-2; and “Unión Democrática Cristiana: Fiesta obrera,” *El Bien*, 13 May 1909, 3.

<sup>115</sup> See, for instance, “Chapter VIII: Anarchist Rites and Symbols,” Juan Suriano, *Paradoxes of Utopia: Anarchist Culture and Politics in Buenos Aires, 1890-1910*, trans. by Church Morse (Edinburgh, Oakland, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2010).

class [the Socialist Party of Germany], the resplendent banner of world socialism.”<sup>116</sup> In fact, social Catholicism had made great inroads into Germany’s political system, as well as those of other European countries.

Some local social Catholics were explicit in their attempts to divert militants from secular radicalism. Celebrating ten years since the foundation of the Círculos in Buenos Aires, the Argentine newspaper *El Pueblo* declared that the subsequent expansion of chapters across the country had “won so many sons of the people for the cause of social order and have contained the advance of socialism and anarchism in the Argentine Republic.”<sup>117</sup> In Uruguay, Pope Leo XIII became known as “the Pope of the Workers;” a People’s Pope; and the founder of Christian democracy as a counterpoint to secular liberal democracy.<sup>118</sup> Those associated with *El Amigo del Obrero* came to see Catholicism as fighting a two-front war: it battled socialism and liberalism in the arena of representative democracy, and anarchism in labor politics. Christian democracy was an antidote to all these opponents.

---

<sup>116</sup> “Es cierto que los católicos capitaneados por León XIII quisieron desviar la atención de los trabajadores, de la corriente socialista, que todo lo invade, é intentaron formar un partido pseudo-socialista católico, al igual de Guillermo II de Alemania, con su proyecto de socialismo de estado, bajo la férula de su gobierno autoritario pero ni los unos, con sus encíclicas papales [*Rerum Novarum*], ni el otro, con sus rescriptos imperiales, lograron sus deseos, pues en frente de todos estaba la gran masa de trabajadores conscientes organizada en Partido de clase bajo [the Socialist Party of Germany] la esplendente bandera del socialismo mundial.” These statements came in response to *El Industrial Uruguayo* which had alleged an association between Catholic “pseudo-socialism” and the socialist Workers Party in Germany associating both with a common founder—Fernando Lasalle—and the common repression both faced from Bismarck. In fact, *La Voz* clarified that both had been repressed for different reasons. Christian democrats had been persecuted because of their powerful alliance with Polish Catholics (however, once separated from other Catholics their power was insignificant); socialists, however, had received the bulk of the repression. “Con ‘El Industrial Uruguayo,’” *La Voz del Obrero*, First Sunday of October 1903, 1.

<sup>117</sup> “...Ganado á tantos hijos del pueblo para la causa del orden social y han contenido el avance del socialismo y del anarquismo en la República Argentina.” *El Pueblo*, reprinted in “Los Círculos de Obreros EN BUENOS AIRES,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 6 February 1902, 1.

<sup>118</sup> “LE[Ó]N XIII,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 23 July 1903, 1.

One speaker at the second *Círculo* labor conference, held in 1902, proposed the possible redemption of unions from atheist radicalism. “The object of our constant worries should be the welfare of the worker... Since our adversaries—the socialists, the communists, [the] anarchists—unite everywhere and by all means, licitly and illicitly, organizing the masses; we also should organize them to save them; we should not remain idle, we should work, [we should] go to the people...; we should organize the unions; this is the main object that should deserve our attention... Our adversaries tell us that we have never bothered with the welfare of the worker and that charge is true to a certain point because it is quite evident that we could have done much more and to date we have done almost nothing with respect to unions. Often unions are exploited, mocked and oppressed and our duty is to organize them as unions so that they may resist all attempts, so that they can defend their rights.”<sup>119</sup> And so, equipped with a certain legitimacy from above and a social-religious lexicon (developed as a discourse between clergy and lay militants), Christian democrats went out into the world seeking to “redeem” it.

***Descanso Dominical—First Attempt.*** The *Círculos Católicos* and the early Christian democrats should be remembered for one special reason. Though ultimately unsuccessful, they were, through grassroots activism, the first to introduce labor legislation in Uruguay. They were the catalyst that set labor, government, and society to

---

<sup>119</sup> “El objeto de nuestras constantes preocupaciones debe ser siempre el bienestar del obrero [...]. Ya que nuestros adversarios los socialistas, los comunistas, anarquistas, se levantan, se aúnen por todas partes y por todos los medios, lícitos e ilícitos, organizando a las masas; nosotros también debemos de organizarlas para salvarlas; no debemos permanecer ociosos, debemos de trabajar, de ir al pueblo [...]; debemos organizar los gremios obreros; ese es el punto principal que ha de merecer nuestra atención. [...]. Nos dicen nuestros adversarios que nosotros nunca nos hemos preocupado del bienestar del obrero y ese cargo hasta cierto punto puede tener fundamento, porque es muy evidente, que podríamos haber hecho mucho más y casi no hemos hecho nada hasta la fecha respecto a los gremios. Muchas veces los gremios se ven explotados, burlados y oprimidos, y nuestro deber es organizarlos gremialmente, para que resistan el atentado, para que puedan defender sus derechos.” *Diario de Sesiones del Segundo Congreso*, 10 October 1902, 215 as quoted in Zubillaga, *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)*, 119.

the task of labor reform, mobilizing what was perhaps the first instance of a social movement in Uruguay. As I describe below, it was also their initiative that provoked the first manifestation of party competition over a new and growing electorate as factions of Colorados and Blancos vied to appear more labor-friendly than the other. In other words, they were the beginning of mass politics in Uruguay.

The campaign involved a grievance common among workers at the time and one that happened to intersect with religious obligation: the right to a weekly day of rest—*descanso dominical*. Support for this demand could be found in *Rerum Novarum*, which warned the employer that “justice obliges that, in dealing with the working man, religion and the good of his soul must be kept in mind. Hence, the employer is bound to see that the worker has time for his religious duties.”<sup>120</sup> Interest in a campaign for this particular demand first appeared in the pages of *El Amigo del Obrero* in April 1901. The newspaper had picked up a story from the foreign labor newspaper *Güttenberg*—official newspaper of a typographers’ union—on a German movement for the *descanso*. Editors of *El Amigo* agreed with the campaign. “The worker is not a machine of steel muscles, like one that moves under the guidance of the calloused hand of the son of labor: his body is not made of bronze or iron but of clay, subject to fatigue and illness: therefore he has a right to proper rest to avoid premature aging.”<sup>121</sup> The newspaper pledged solidarity with the

---

<sup>120</sup> *Rerum Novarum*, verse 20.

<sup>121</sup> Note that the newspaper had earlier reported on at least one strike where the demand was Sundays off. “Noticias: Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 20 January 1901, 3. “El obrero no es una máquina de músculos de acero, como la que trabaja y se mueve bajo la acción de la encallecida mano del hijo del trabajo: su cuerpo no es de bronce ni de hierro; sino de un barro azás deleznable, sujeto á la fatiga y expuesto á las enfermedades: tiene pues derecho al descanso legítimo y á evitarse una vejez prematura, noche tristísima en que no le será dado trabajar, viéndose obligado á vivir de los ahorros de su juventud.” “Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 21 April 1901, 1.

German typographers and to give more attention to the matter in the future, which they did.

In May 1901, the Círculos complained of the “sordid interests that take priority in business establishments during these times of calamitous mercantilism, preventing the observance of the Sabbath.” *El Amigo* called out the rest of the press for publishing seven days a week and called for a boycott of them; the editors criticized *El Día*, *El Siglo*, and *La Tribuna Popular* (top-selling Uruguayan newspapers) for having first started publishing on Sundays, giving a bad example to their journalistic peers. In late 1901, *El Amigo* announced that as a result of its calls for *descanso* observance, fifteen storeowners had given notice to their customers that they would begin closing their doors on Sundays. Several days later, the Centro de Almacenes Minoristas (Grocery Store Owners Center), whose employees were reported to be part of “an extensive union,” pledged to close their doors at 1pm on Sundays. Likely trying to avoid damage to their businesses, the center also tried to influence other grocery store owners to follow suit. Twenty-nine owners of hat-making workshops issued a statement saying they would close on Sundays at noon but made their promise conditional on its observance by others.<sup>122</sup> The difficult nature of gaining individual or trade compliance with the *descanso* may have pushed the Círculos to think of legal solutions to the problem of overwork. A legislative campaign by the Buenos Aires Círculos—begun in October 1901 and successfully completed on August 31, 1905—may have also influenced a change in Uruguayan Catholic tactics.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> “...Sórdido interés, que parece primar en las empresas de estos tiempos calamitosos de mercantilismo.” “Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 5 May 1901, 2; “Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 24 November 1901, 2; “Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 5 December 1901, 2; “Descanso Dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 8 December 1901, 2.

<sup>123</sup> See: *El Tiempo* at <http://tiempo.elargentino.com/notas/descanso-dominical-ley-desde-1905>.

The legislative campaign for *descanso dominical* arose from the second labor conference of the Círculos Católicos, convened in October 1902. The following March, *El Amigo del Obrero* reported that the Supreme Council of the Círculos, in response to a proposal made at the gathering, would study how best to seek its social promulgation, “since it implies a great necessity for the worker and an aspiration for his material and spiritual well-being.” *El Amigo* argued that “industrial refinement and unparalleled ambition have obliged [workers] to give [themselves]...to a work that materializes them, stupefies them, isolates them from all social and divine practices; and what is even more sad, it hurls them on the road to vice as on the few days [they] get off [they] surrender [themselves] to all material joys and the most vile and degrading diversions.” The faithful had a duty, the editors said, to extract this right from governments and that it was an essential component of healthy individuals and families “and even the peace and prosperity of nations.” “The springs of the human machinery” could only be cared for “with the oil of rest... But tragically many forget that imperious necessity and before the alters of lucre they sacrifice all of the high and altruistic ideals and, ignoring the miserable being that struggles and suffers, they cast [him] into the whirlwind of ambition and,” paraphrasing Isaiah, “they have eyes and they do not see and do not hear or do not want to hear.” Every other culture (the druids, the Aztecs, “the blacks...on the African continent,” sun worshipers, and believers of the Bible) historically recognized the necessity of a weekly day of rest. Uruguay should be no different.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> “...Pues ella implica una gran necesidad para el obrero y una aspiración para su bienestar material y espiritual.” “...Y hasta de la paz y prosperidad de las naciones.” “El refinamiento industrial y la desmedida ambición, han obligado al obrero á entregarse...á un trabajo que los materializa, los embrutece, los aleja de todas las prácticas sociales y divinas; y lo que es más triste aun, les ha arrojado en la pendiente del vicio, pues en los pocos días de asunto, que consigue, se entrega con fruición á todos los goces materiales y á las diversiones más viles y denigrantes.” “...Los resortes de la máquina humana.” “...Con el

Two weeks later, the Supreme Council published a statement and a proposed law it had submitted to the Chamber of Deputies for consideration. Noting that a weekly day of rest was a global social norm, the statement referenced laws that mandated a *descanso* and movements to enforce them in Argentina, Austria, England, Norway, Paraguay, Russia, Switzerland, the United States, and even previously under Spanish colonial rule. “[Seeking to realize] a grand aspiration of the working class,” the council then introduced a bill of seventeen articles curtailing work on Sundays. At the time the only form of labor prohibited on Sundays in Uruguay was industrial work, then a small portion of the national economy. The bill expanded the prohibition from industrial to agricultural and commercial work. Among the exceptions: food dispensaries would remain open until noon; agricultural labor would be permitted during planting and harvest season or when bad weather threatened crops; transportation and lodging services could operate all day as could pharmacies and restaurants; theaters could open on Sunday nights; medical personnel and those employed in vital infrastructures could, of course, work throughout the day. Those in destitution would be allowed to work, though what types of labor they could engage in was not stipulated. Other small and specific exemptions were made. And a general exception was made for work necessary to the “public interest” or in cases of “extraordinary need.” Penalties could be stiff, ranging from 2 to 1000 pesos per infraction, which would be doubled, tripled, and quadrupled for repeat offenders. Failure to pay the fine would result in a jail sentence from 1 to 90 days. In order to encourage

---

aceite del descanso... Pero, desgraciadamente muchos se olvidan de esa imperiosa necesidad y ante los altares del lucro, sacrifican todos los ideales levantados y altruistas y haciendo caso omiso del infeliz que ruje y sufre, se precipitan en la vor[ág]ine de la ambición y tienen ojos y no ven ó no quieren ver y tienen oídos y no oyen ó no quieren oír.” “En vano el hombre se revela contra...” “...Los negros...del continente africano...” “Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 1 March 1903, 1; “Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 15 March 1903, 1.



fining (and prevent bribery), business inspectors would receive a 20% commission on all fines.<sup>125</sup>

Parliament's Legislative Committee refused to consider the bill; it claimed that any proposed law had to originate from either chamber of Parliament or from the president. The editors disputed this, citing article 142 of the Constitution, which allowed any "citizen or legally recognized organization" to petition for legislation. Salting the wound, the commission added in their rejection that "the idea of prohibiting work on particular days does not conform to any liberal spirit."<sup>126</sup>

According to the legislators' reading of the constitution (article 146), Uruguay was a "right-to-work" country, meaning that the private contract between employer and employee could not be regulated by the state unless it harmed "the public good." Working on Sundays "does not affect...more than the private interests of the parties [in question] and, in consequence, the state does not have the right to prohibit it." This objection would dog future passage of the bill. The Legislative Commission added that even if Sunday work could be prohibited, this would only increase misery since many worked on the Sabbath out of desperate need. There was also the issue of all those exceptions to the law, something that "would invite abuse and arbitrariness which the legislator should never favor but rather always avoid." And finally, the report brought up the standard dismissal of any labor legislation in Uruguay: "the workers in the republic

---

<sup>125</sup> "...Interpretar una grande aspiración de la clase obrera..." "...Esas clases desheredadas..." "...De fuerza mayor." "Descanso dominical," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 15 March 1903, 1; "Descanso dominical," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 2 April 1903, 1.

<sup>126</sup> "La idea de prohibir el trabajo en días determinados no puede ser simpático á ningún espíritu liberal." "El descanso dominical," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 17 May 1903, 1; "El descanso dominical," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 24 May 1903, 1.

are not in the same disadvantageous conditions as those in other countries.”<sup>127</sup> The response was stinging and difficult to refute, so it is no surprise that *El Amigo* left out so much of it. The Círculos needed time to rethink and regroup.

*El Industrial Uruguayo*—the businessman’s newspaper—waited for three months after the Círculos received their rejection letter to comment on the issue. At that point the newspaper could safely support the bill, rejecting the Legislative Commission’s narrow reading of it as addressing a religious instead of a “physiological” or “hygienic” issue. It even cited one professor’s studies on the damaging effects of ceaseless labor and argued that “the *descanso dominical*...coincides with the employer’s own interest as his rested workers will produce much more in the days that follow.” Crediting Judaism with the good sense of having such a commandment, they added that “these truths have been doubtlessly intuited by the Mosaic law whose clairvoyance with respect to hygiene astonished modern science.” Most interestingly, *El Industrial* described the Círculos Católicos de Obreros as “going back to the origins of Christianity, moves toward taking control of the socialist movement.” The newspaper’s “strict impartiality” allowed it to “[accept] the good, no matter who it comes from.”<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> “...El bien público...” “...Cuando esa prohibición ha de imponerse bajo las penas de multa...ó prisión” “...Pero lejos de patrocinarlo, vuestra Comisión lo rechaza decididamente...” “...No afecta, pues, más que el interés privado de las partes, y en consecuencia, el estado no tiene el derecho de prohibirlo.” “...Contrario á la más elemental justicia.” “...Daría lugar á abusos y arbitrariedades que el legislador no debe favorecer, sino evitar.” “...Los obreros en la república no están en las condiciones desfavorables de los de otros estados...” *Diario de sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tome 175, 3 May 1904, 354.

<sup>128</sup> “...El descanso dominical...consulta el propio interés de los patrones, pues sus obreros descansados producirán en los días siguientes mayor suma de trabajo.” “Esas verdades han sido indudablemente intuídas por la ley mosaica, cuya clarividencia en lo que respecta á la higiene asombra á la medicina moderna...” “...Remontándose á las fuentes del cristianismo, tiende á apoderarse del movimiento socialista.” “...[Aceptar] lo bueno, venga de quien venga.” “EL DESCANSO DOMINICAL,” *El Industrial Uruguayo*, 1 September 1903, 2.

Comparatively few labor newspapers existed in 1903 and 1904. Of those in operation, the anarchist papers were silent on *descanso dominical*<sup>129</sup> while socialists gave some support to the bill. The socialist newspaper *Resistencia Gremial* did not acknowledge the proposed law specifically but cited the benefits of *descanso dominical* for workers, families, and, ultimately, society.<sup>130</sup> Editors of *La Voz del Obrero*, responding to an article by *El Industrial Uruguayo*, said that “we are not in agreement with those that combat said project in the name of a badly informed liberalism, arguing that if the Catholics seek the *descanso dominical* for workers it is so they will attend the churches where [the clergy] will fanaticize them with their ceremonies and prayers.” Socialists associated with the newspaper were suspicious of the Círculos and conceded that “it is quite possible that the original motive they had in making this petition was not to secure a benefit for the workers but rather the religious convenience of the petitioners.” But, *La Voz* continued, this “is not sufficient reason to combat the project in question... If they want the *descanso dominical* to brutalize the consciences of the workers, we want it so they can rest from fatigue...; if they want the *descanso dominical* to lead workers in droves to their temples to inculcate superstitious ideas and passivity, for our part we will try to enlighten the consciences of our companions with the light of truth, progress, and science.”<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> For instance: *La Rebelión* (1902-1903), *El Obrero Panadero* (1901-1903), *El Obrero Sastre* (1903), *Resistencia Gremial* (1903), and *El Obrero* (1904).

<sup>130</sup> “PRO DESCANSO DOMINICAL,” *Resistencia Gremial*, 1 August 1903, 1-2.

<sup>131</sup> “No estamos de acuerdo con los que combaten dicho proyecto en nombre de un liberalismo mal entendido, argumentando que, si los católicos piden el *descanso dominical* para los obreros, es para que concurren á las Iglesias y fanatizarles con sus ceremonias y rezos.” “Es muy posible que el objeto principal que hayan tenido en vista al hacer esta petición no fuer[a] el conseguir una mejora para los obreros, sino la propia conveniencia religiosa de los peticionarios; pero no es motive suficiente para combatir el proyecto en cuestión... Si ellos quieren el *descanso dominical* para entenebrececer las conciencias de los trabajadores, nosotros lo queremos para que descansen de la fatiga originada por el trabajo continuado de los seis días anteriores; si ellos quieren el *descanso dominical* para conducir á los obreros en reb[a]ños á sus templos é

***Descanso Dominical—Second Attempt.*** A redoubling of efforts began almost immediately, this time with new tactics. First, *El Amigo del Obrero*, and to a lesser extent *El Bien*, published extensively on the subject; the former often included at least one column in its twice-weekly publication for months at a time. Second, the Círculos initiated a nation-wide petition drive that had no precedent in Uruguayan history. Third, they enlisted an official sponsor within Parliament, the backing of other prominent figures, and the solidarity of other organizations large and small.

The rhetoric of *El Amigo* continued to radicalize—particularly its conviction that workers had divinely mandated rights to dignity, a just remuneration for their labors, fair working conditions (including reasonable workdays and hours), and decent shelter. In mid-1903, the paper still grumbled about the Círculos’ poor treatment at the hands of the Legislative Commission. “Our workers deserve a little more respect since they are the life of the community,” the editors reminded. And, drawing a startling connection between the material and the divine, they added that “God redeemed the worker and dignified him in a modest workshop of Nazareth. He made him equal to all other men and will make him great in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>132</sup> But unlike religious conservatives, these believers were not waiting for a just afterlife. They wanted a terrestrial application of moral-religious principle. To this end, the pages of *El Amigo* witnessed an explosion of other radical topics that occupied the minds of social Catholics, including subsidized

---

inculcarle ideas supersticiosas y de masedumbre, nosotros trataremos, por nuestra parte, de [e]limiar las conciencias de nuestros compañeros, con la luz de la verdad, de la razón, del progreso, de la ciencia. No les tememos.” “Con ‘El Industrial Uruguayo,’” *La Voz del Obrero*, First Sunday of October 1903, 1.

<sup>132</sup> “Nuestros obreros merecen un poco más de respeto, pues son la vida del pueblo...” “Dios redimió al obrero y lo dignificó en un pobre taller de Nazaret. Lo igualó a los demás hombres y los hará grande en el reino de los cielos.” “Nuestros Proyectos,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 7 June 1903, 1.

housing for workers, consumer cooperatives, a workers' bank, night schools, retirement pensions, and even the eight-hour workday.<sup>133</sup>

On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, they acquired a somewhat unlikely ally. *El Bien* reported that President Batlle had received a group of representatives from the Círculos Católicos at his residence who asked for his support with the *descanso* campaign—specifically, that he would add it to the agenda of one of the special sessions of Parliament at the tail-end of that legislative season. “Expressing all his sympathy inspired by any such initiative...to better the conditions of the working class,” he pledged to place the issue on the agenda. *El Bien* reported that the Círculos had gained “the prestige that emanates from the assistance of the Executive Branch”; however, no record exists of a parliamentary debate on *descanso dominical* in 1903.<sup>134</sup> Batlle appears to have stuck to his promise, for no criticism of him appeared in the Catholic press.

In April 1904, *El Amigo* announced that the Círculos had found an ally in Oriol Solé y Rodríguez, a representative from Minas, who adopted the bill and removed the procedural roadblock raised by the commission (that the Círculos were not a legitimate parliamentary petitioner). There would also be a change in rhetoric: in order to dodge the non-procedural obstacle (that this was a bill that compelled *religious* conformance), *El*

---

<sup>133</sup> For instance, see: “Escuela nocturna: Su inauguración,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 15 August 1903, 1. The article highlighted the Círculos commitment to struggling on behalf of workers on all of these fronts. In fact, the article announced the inauguration of a night school for workers at the Montevideo Parish of San Francisco.

<sup>134</sup> “Después de manifestar todas las simpatías que le inspira cualquier iniciativa...de mejorar la condición de la clase obrera” he pledged to place the measure on the agenda; *El Bien* added that the Círculos had gained “el prestigio que emana del concurso del Poder Ejecutivo, prestado en aquella forma.” *El Bien*, 22 July 1903 as quoted in “Descanso dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 23 July 1903, 3.

*Amigo* announced that in his exposition to his colleagues Solé y Rodríguez would dwell on “the economic and social point of view” of a weekly *descanso*.<sup>135</sup>

The Círculos had also learned another valuable lesson from their first attempt. Merely begging political authorities to do the right thing had proven to be ineffectual, especially when the plea came from an isolated organization. Appeals to other sympathizers, not just Catholics, began immediately after the Legislative Commission’s rebuke; at a meeting of the Montevideo Círculo, a petition garnered five hundred signatures in the course of an evening. The petition was made available for any potential ally to sign, not just Catholics.<sup>136</sup> In the following months, the Círculos expanded the petition drive to a previously unseen scale, collecting thousands of signatures and the official support of unions and social organizations. During the winter of 1903 *El Amigo* published the names of supporters in issue after issue. Most of the forty-one organizations in solidarity with the Círculos’ bill prepared written statements that were published in the newspaper and sometimes forwarded to Parliament. These associations included labor unions, mutual aid societies, foreign national organizations (such as the French Mutual Aid Society or the Patriotic League of Italy), newspapers, and of course the fifteen Círculos chapters spread across the country. Additionally, newspapers sympathetic to (but not official supporters of) the campaign published favorable stories and provided their own arguments for Sundays off. By early September 1903, the Círculos had received over 10,000 signatures, nearly 1% of the total population and perhaps as much as 3% of all adult men in the country. We cannot know how many workers would have

---

<sup>135</sup> “...El punto de vista económico y social...” The deputy had a personal relationship with the Círculos, having been the delegate from the Minas chapter of the Círculos (probably before his election to Parliament) to the October 1902 Congress that called for the *descanso* campaign in the first place. “El *descanso* dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 20 April 1904, 1.

<sup>136</sup> “El *descanso* dominical,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 24 May 1903, 1.

liked to sign the petition but feared repercussion from their employers (especially since their names would have been published in a widely read newspaper and appeared in a public document intended to be sent to Parliament). Since it appears that only men signed the petition, who knows how many working women might have appended their names to the document had they been given the opportunity? Many listed their occupation: bakers, barbers, carpenters, cobblers, dairy workers, farmers, tailors, and even a few soldiers. There was also some cross-class support as small business owners, doctors, “industrialists,” journalists, landlords, pharmacists, professors, teachers, and even a justice of the peace added their names.<sup>137</sup>

Eleven months to the day from when *El Amigo* announced the rejection of its first campaign, the *descanso* bill was reintroduced in Parliament by Solé y Rodríguez. As promised, he justified a weekly *descanso* mostly on public, economic, and “medical” grounds, hoping to steer debate away from religion. The bill received some support but detractors in Parliament brought the discussion back to religion. They complained that given the country’s state of civil war, now was not the time to entertain further divisive bills.<sup>138</sup>

One detractor’s speech stands out. Representative Álvaro Guillot began expressing his opposition much like his colleagues. He insisted that religion came attached to the bill regardless of its sponsor’s denials. State interference with the

---

<sup>137</sup> Information on the petition taken from the following days (during 1903) of *El Amigo del Obrero* (always on the first and/or second page, usually under the column “Descanso dominical”): 28, 31 May; 4, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21, 25, 28 June; 2, 5, 9, 12, 19 July; 15, 20, 23, 27, 30 August; and 3 September. Counting the names yielded only a little over 5200 out of the 10,000 total names that made it onto the petition. “El final de una jornada,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 1 June 1904, 1. By December 31, 1903 the Uruguayan population stood at 1,018,965 people. Population statistics appear in: *Anuario estadístico de la República Oriental del Uruguay* (Montevideo: Imprenta Artística y Encuadernación, de Dornaleche y Reyes, 1907), 1904-1906, Tomo I, 33.

<sup>138</sup> *Diario de sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tome 175, 3 May 1904, 356-359.

sacrosanct worker-employer labor contract was extreme and national work conditions did not merit such an extraordinary response. He claimed that the disposition of workers and the petition brought to the floor corroborated his assertion. “One must remember that this project was presented by the *Círculo Católico de Obreros* more than a year ago. It is true that since then many labor unions have expressed support for it. But these backings do not have the same importance that they would have if they had been spontaneous.

Workers’ assemblies have not been seen treating this issue; strikes have not been produced to take up this issue [of Sunday work].” (This statement was utterly false. A weekly day off had been and would continue to be the goal of many strikes.) Besides, ten thousand signatures only represented a fraction of workers. Many colleagues applauded his speech.<sup>139</sup> The passive and orderly methods of the *Círculos*, that eschewed class conflict and minimized direct action, were no threat to Guillot or Parliament that year.

The bill received many lengthy hearings but was ultimately sent to committee from where it would never reemerge for a vote. By suggestion, only strikes—ones that threatened Parliament—and “spontaneous,” unbridled, unpredictable action would compel Guillot and his sympathizers to act. No wonder, then, that Parliament took up labor legislation the next year with more seriousness when a large port strike threatened the state’s main source of revenue (see Chapter Four).

Mainstream newspapers varied in their responses. *El Tiempo* struck a middle-of-the-road approach, opposing “state intervention” but agreeing that a day of rest should be

---

<sup>139</sup> “Hay que recordar que este proyecto vino presentado por el ‘*Círculo Católico de Obreros*’ hace más de un año, que entretanto, es cierto, se han adherido á él muchos gremios de obreros; pero estas adhesiones no tienen la misma importancia que tendrían si hubiesen sido espontáneas. No se ha visto que esta cuestión haya sido tratado en las asambleas obreras entre nosotros como una cuestión de vital importancia; no se han producido huelgas á propósito de este asunto...” *Diario de sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tome 175, 10 May 1904, 397-401.



a (voluntary) social norm. To set the example, the newspaper announced that it would publish only Monday through Saturday, “to our own material detriment.”<sup>140</sup> *El Atalaya* (Protestant and liberal) praised the *descanso* bill and lamented the “exaggerated *anti-Romanist* spirit” that presented an “obstacle” to the bill’s passage; “it has been seen as a religious question where only a social question exists.” What was at stake here was equity—“that the labor element has a right too to a universal rest every seven days as it is given to all the other social classes.” And then dramatically, “often the impediment to evolution is the dawn of bloody revolution.”<sup>141</sup>

*El Industrial Uruguayo* again chimed in on the debate, expressing “perfect accord with the program of the international labor movement and [our] complete harmony with the dictates of physiology.” The newspaper then moved to what had so far been the greatest challenge to the bill, “the original sin of being drafted by a *Círculo Católico*.” The paper scoffed at liberals’ insistence that article 146 of the Constitution—“Every inhabitant of the State may be dedicated to the work, cultivation, industry or commerce of their choice, so long as it is not opposed to the public good, or to the citizenry”—barred

---

<sup>140</sup> “Con perjuicio material.” Editors of *El Amigo* were puzzled by *El Tiempo*’s opposition to the bill. The only intelligible reason in their declaration (according to *El Amigo* editors) was that such a law would trample personal freedoms (that is, the rights of employers to demand a seven day workweek and employees to work the days they pleased). *El Amigo* replied that, from their point of view, employers were trampling workers’ rights by forcing them to work ceaselessly. The law “cannot exactly attack personal interests [of employers] but rather *limits* them to benefit collective interests” (“no puede propiamente dañar el interés individual, sino que lo *limita* en beneficio del interés colectivo”). Workers for their part were demanding a day off weekly, demonstrating that such a law would in no way trample their right to work. Finally, *El Tiempo* argued that labor conditions in Uruguay were nothing like Europe and so this bill was “exotic” at this time. What’s more, the editors of *El Amigo* pointed out that if some, but not all, employers adopted Sundays off as a social norm (as *El Tiempo* had) this would only benefit the businesses of obstinate employers. *El Tiempo*, summarized and quoted extensively in “Otra inconsecuencia,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 4 May 1904, 1.

<sup>141</sup> “...Exagerado espíritu de *anti-romanismo*...” “Pues se ha querido ver una cuestión religiosa donde no hay más que una cuestión social.” “...Que el elemento obrero tiene derecho también al universal descanso que cada siete días se dan [a] todas las demás clases sociales.” “Muchas veces el freno de una evolución es la aurora sangrienta de una revolución.” Emphasis in the original. “NOTAS EDITORIALES: Reformas sociales,” *El Atalaya*, 14 Mayo 1904, 1.

overt religious influence upon the laws of the land. The clause said nothing about separation of church and state. Rather, the article offered a challenge to the passage of *any* labor legislation, regardless of its provenance. *El Industrial* pointed out that if article 146 barred *all* regulation of industry, this would include the *descanso dominical* bill.

*The Montevideo Times*—a conservative newspaper serving the local British community and in later years notably unfriendly to labor legislation—professed sympathy for the movement. Its editors lamented the bill’s failure but thought it “foreseen” given the civil war. “Moreover, the law, though Good in principle, was not altogether perfect in its details”—likely a reference to the high number of exceptions the bill made to Sundays off. They added that, given “the defective composition of the Chamber,” this proposed law had been doomed from the beginning. The interesting suggestion appears to be that had more Blancos (many at the time ejected because of their support for the insurgent cause) been present, the bill might have had a better chance. This is quite possible given that a year later two Blanco representatives (one not yet elected) would propose a labor bill and an extensive revision (see below and the next chapter). The *Times* concluded that “it cannot be assumed that Uruguay will remain separated for much more time from the civilized world in refusing to protect the right of workers to a day of rest; later on the issue will again be put on the table with better results.”<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> “...Previsto...” “Además, la ley aunque Buena en principio, no era del todo perfecta en sus detalles” “...La composición defectuosa de la Cámara” “...Sin embargo, no es de suponerse que el Uruguay podrá permanecer separado por mucho tiempo del mundo civilizado rehusando proteger el derecho de los obreros á un día de descanso y más adelante el asunto deberá ser puesto sobre tablas otra vez con mejor resultados.” Note that mine is a translation of a translation from the English original. *The Montevideo Times*, 31 May 1904 quoted in “La opinión de un colega,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 1 June 1904, 1.

Partisanship was another element that ended up sapping the bill, something *El Amigo* pointed out afterward. The editors noted Colorado Deputy Areco’s “sectarian intransigence...during the course of the debate.” His motivation? On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, half-way through the discussions on the proposed *descanso* law, Areco introduced what even he admitted to be a shoddy labor bill (see below). Demonstrating an admirable anti-partisan spirit, *El Amigo*’s editors shook off any resentment they might (legitimately) have had of Areco and pledged to support his bill and offer “radical modifications” to some of its deficiencies. They added that “there is much to do in this vein [for the passage of labor law] and since there is no willingness to give us even the honor of having taken the initiative, let *them* do it, but do it already!” Given the “original sin” of the bill’s Catholic origins, perhaps it would be better if some other organization or party introduced labor legislation. And so, despite the loss, the editors of *El Amigo* attempted to inspire optimism as well as prod social Catholics to work harder. The real problem, they suggested, had been a lack of religious cohesion around the issue. “The Uruguayan Catholic element has sufficient *numbers*,” they explained, “to be able to decidedly steer the destinies of the country and construct a ponderous party. All that’s needed is *that every Catholic comply with their duty*; nothing more.” “This first campaign, then, has ended and we confess that it has not been sterile; a seed has been sown”—*queda sembrada una semilla*—“that will take root in perhaps a not so distant future.”<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> “...Intransigencia sectaria...en el curso del debate.” “...Hay mucho que hacer al respecto [de legislación laboral] y ya que no se nos quiere dispensar á nosotros, ni siquiera el honor de la iniciativa, háganlo *ellos*, pero háganlo al fin!” “*Número* tiene suficiente, el elemento católico uruguayo,” they explained, “para poder influir decisivamente en los destinos del país y constituir un partido poderoso. S[ó]lo se necesitaría *que cada católico cumpliera con su deber*; esto tan s[ó]lo.” “Ha terminado pues, esta primer jornada y confesemos que no ha sido estéril; queda sembrada una semilla que ha de fructificar en día acaso no lejano.” Emphasis in the original. “El final de una jornada,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 1 June 1904, 1; “No ha sido estéril,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 4 June 1904, 1.

For a time, the Círculos continued to work for a reintroduction of the *descanso* bill. In late 1905, members of the Christian Democratic League met with President Batlle and asked for his help in placing the bill back on the legislative agenda. He agreed, but *El Amigo* relegated the notice to second-page news, perhaps reflecting pessimism. The president again (like two years earlier) appears to have kept his word and put it on the agenda. However, no evidence of a discussion appears in the Parliamentary record. Clearly the movement was losing steam. *El Amigo* even began publishing statements in favor of the *descanso* from people the newspaper traditionally vilified: Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Rousseau, César Lombroso (“professor of Anthropology at the University of Turin, Jew, freethinker and materialist”), and P.J. Proudhon (“the freethinker” and first self-proclaimed anarchist).<sup>144</sup>

Then, beginning in mid-1905, a wave of strikes erupted over various grievances, including the lack of Sundays off. In the first issue following the defeat of the *descanso* bill, *El Amigo* noted that “our country has produced neither cacophonous strikes nor those explosions of disorder with which, in other countries, the labor element has lashed out to violently reclaim its rights.” This, of course, was not true. There had been many strikes, some specifically demanding a weekly *descanso*. Nonetheless, the newspaper asked rhetorically, “is it required that scandal and crime be produced to only then, *only then*, administer justice?”<sup>145</sup> Representative Guillot, as mentioned above, had answered in the

---

<sup>144</sup> *El Amigo del Obrero*, “Unión Democrática Cristiana,” 18 November 1905, 2; “Catedrático de Antropología criminal en la Universidad de Turín, judío, librepensador y materialista.” “...El librepensador.” “Puntos de fuego,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 2 December 1905, 1.

<sup>145</sup> “...No se han producido en nuestro país ni huelgas ruidosas ni esas explosiones de desorden con que, en otros países, el elemento obrero se ha lanzado á la reivindicación violenta de sus derechos.” “[¿]Se requiere que se produzca el escándalo y crimen para entonces, *recién entonces*, administrar justicia[?]” “El final de una jornada,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 1 June 1904, 1. Regarding strikes already

affirmative. By 1905, the question was no longer rhetorical and the Círculos were given a chance to make good on their leaders' veiled threats. *El Amigo* reported on the renewed militancy among workers who were now demanding better wages and in some cases the *descanso dominical*. The typographers, for instance, had created a new union to press for Sundays off across the industry, an effort rebuffed as "utopian" by some of the very newspapers that had earlier defended this right.<sup>146</sup>

But the Círculos had always been ambivalent about strikes, remaining a polyphonic voice throughout even their most radical period. Sometimes social Catholics supported strikes, especially if those involved female workers. At other times they were critical, particularly if these were led by socialists or anarchists. Sometimes they would question the efficacy or even fairness of strikes altogether. In 1904, *El Amigo* declared that "strikes, or violent or artificial means to obtain the laborer an increase in wages and a reduction in work hours, are, in the short term or the long term, counterproductive and cause the misery of the worker, the decline of commerce and the wealth of the country."<sup>147</sup> Christian democrats, on the other hand, worked hard from 1905 to 1909 to build unionism, supporting the strikes of grocery store workers, bakers, and employees of wholesale and importing firms, all pressing for (among other things) Sundays off.<sup>148</sup>

---

initiated for the *descanso*, see for instance, the newspaper vendors ("GACETILLA," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 29 November 1903, 2) though they were also protesting poor pay.

<sup>146</sup> "El descanso dominical," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 31 May 1905, 1.

<sup>147</sup> For examples of strikes the Círculos supported (at least in the beginning in the case of the cobblers) see: "GACETILLA," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 2 August 1903, 2; "La huelga de los zapateros," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 12 November 1903, 2. "Las huelgas, ó medios violentos, ó artificiales para conseguir el obrero aumento de jornal y reducción de horas de trabajo, son, á la corta ó á la larga, contraproducentes y causan la miseria del obrero, la disminución del tráfico y de la riqueza del país." "Crónica social: Las huelgas," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 11 February 1904, 1.

<sup>148</sup> "Unión Democrática Cristiana," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 16 August, 1905, 1; *El Demócrata*, "Los panaderos y el descanso dominical," 15 November 1906; "Un nuevo triunfo del descanso dominical," *El Demócrata*, 15 January 1907, 1.

Despite continued pressure, legislators refused to entertain *descanso* once again and even the president (now almost three-quarters through his term) could not force the issue. Had the Círculos thrown their full collective weight behind strikes for Sundays off, and had these been paired with Parliamentary debate and the petition drive, perhaps the bill would have passed. The Círculos and the Christian democrats continued to discuss the need for the *descanso*, and occasionally reported on strikes calling for its implementation. But by early 1907, progressive Catholics seemed to have accepted that the moment for this kind of labor legislation had passed.

**Tipping the Balance.** On 20 July 1903, Pope Leo XIII passed away. “Attuned” as they were “to the palpitation of the telegraph wire”<sup>149</sup> for notice of their beloved pope’s death, one can imagine left Catholics around the world holding their breath in anticipation of papal policy change. Would the new pontiff, Pope Pius X, temper or reverse his predecessor’s policy on the social question? Six months later they received their answer—surely a profound disappointment.

In early 1904, *El Amigo del Obrero* reprinted the new pope’s first official communication to the bishops of the church (it was not an encyclical, contrary to the newspaper’s claims). In it, Pope Pius X pledged support for *Rerum Novarum* but with some important provisos. He clarified that God had designed society to be unequal—it could not be a society otherwise, he said—and that all beings were equal only through the salvation of Jesus, who died for and would judge everyone. In this divinely mandated scheme, laborers were to work with “exactitude and fidelity” at occupations they had

---

<sup>149</sup> “...Pendientes de las palpitaciones del hilo telegráfico,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, “LE[Ó]N XIII,” 23 July 1903, 1.

entered into willingly, never destroy property or commit violence of any kind (including bodily harm to employers), “even when it involves a defense of their rights,” and never “cause riots.” Employers were to pay “equitable wages,” never rob the poor through “open or feigned usury,” “not to expose them to corrupting enticements,” “not to cheat them out of a family life for love of economy,” not to overwork or overburden them by assigning tasks inappropriate to their age and sex. Rich people were obliged to “succor” the poor per Jesus’ instructions, especially in Matthew chapter 25.<sup>150</sup> “This obligation is of such weighty importance that a special accounting shall be made of its compliance at the day of final judgment.” The poor were never to be ashamed of their poverty and should accept charity—after all, Jesus was poor and made that “noble,” giving poverty “an invaluable worth for the heavens.” But the pope gave no real mechanism to keep the rich in line; the poor would have to accept the varying degrees of compliance by the rich. Given such poor oversight, it was unlikely that justice would ever be done on earth.

The new pope had special instructions for Christian democrats. This group—now at the fringes of what the papacy considered legitimate Catholic social action—could help answer the social question by organizing labor unions, establishing mutual aid societies, orphanages, etc., and by “uniting the two classes” (rich and poor). However, they were not to become “political” or support political parties. They should assist the poor only

---

<sup>150</sup> The relevant verses from Matthew 25 are 31-46. Following a series of parables Jesus invokes an apocalyptic vision of his return (in the form of a King) to judge humankind, separating the good to his right from the evil to his left “as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” To the good he shall say “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” Astonished, the good would insist that they had done none of these things to which Jesus would reply “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” The evil would then be dismissed “into everlasting fire” since they had done nothing similar for their fellows in need.

according to “the laws of nature” and scripture. Finally, Christian democrats were to subject themselves to the local clergy since “there is no praiseworthy work, no enterprise that is pious and pleasing to God, that is not approved by the [local] pastor.”<sup>151</sup> This new papal policy was reinforced eight years later in Pius’ encyclical *Singulari Quadam*, indicating that some social Catholics had not been sufficiently tethered by his earlier communication to bishops.<sup>152</sup>

The partial papal about-face does not appear to have had an immediate impact on the Uruguayan Catholic church. However, it did set the stage for future conflicts within the Church over participation in labor and national politics. The new communication did address growing tensions in several countries. After all, social Catholicism at its most radical moments was acting beyond the limits set in the *Rerum Novarum* (to say nothing of Pope Pius’s declaration). Leaders of the Círculos attempted—and it appears, succeeded—to remain independent of clerical control, subverting the political program of the conservative clergy. They even maintained autonomy from Archbishop Soler (something he resented), the movement’s strongest patron until his death in 1908.<sup>153</sup>

**The Reaction.** Following the comprehensive repression of unions during President Williman’s administration (1907-1911) and after a failed railroad strike in

---

<sup>151</sup> “...Exactitude y fidelidad...” “...Aún cuando se trate de la defensa de sus derechos.” “...Hacer motines.” “...Usura abierta ó simulada.” “...No exponerlos á seducciones corruptoras.” “...No ena[j]enarlos á la vida de familia y al amor á la economía.” “Socorrer.” “Es tan grave esta obligación que el día del juicio final se pedirá cuenta especial por su cumplimiento...” “...Un mérito invalorable para el cielo.” “...Unir á las dos clases.” “No hay obra meritoria, ni empresa piadosa y agradable á Dios si no es aprobada por el pastor.” “La acción católica y la sociedad: Encíclica de Pío X,” *El Amigo del Obrero*, January 17, 1904, 1.

<sup>152</sup> For a full English translation of the *Singulari Quadam*, visit the Vatican website at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_x/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_24091912\\_singulari-quadam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_24091912_singulari-quadam_en.html).

<sup>153</sup> “Con ‘El Bien,’” *El Amigo del Obrero*, 25 January 1903, 1; Zubillaga, *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)*, 116-118.



1908, the labor movement generally went into abeyance, awaiting a more propitious moment to reorganize. Judging from the pages of *El Amigo del Obrero*, the Círculos awaited the return of renewed labor militancy with some anticipation. Perhaps in an effort to keep hope alive, they published extensively on labor movements in other countries: strikes, labor laws, labor parties, and the like.

When José Batlle returned to the presidency in 1911, the Círculos resumed their engagement with the social question. But it was an almost entirely new context. They found themselves with far less papal backing, without a local high patron (Archbishop Soler), and competing both against anarchist unions that had made great strides and against socialists who had elected their first representative to Parliament (Emilio Frugoni). Under these conditions, the Círculos had little room to maneuver and power within the religious community appears to have shifted to the right. New concerns afflicted Catholics, including the increasing secularization of the state as liberals pushed for its complete legal separation from the church. Divorce legislation in particular had begun to divert the Círculos' attention from labor matters. A petition drive in 1905 in protest of the divorce bill had garnered 80,000 signatures, far exceeding the 1904 drive for *descanso* legislation.<sup>154</sup> Divorce had a far greater cross-class component and involved all segments of the Catholic community, from conservative to progressive. As Christine Ehrick describes, conservative Catholics created the Women's League to combat, from a quasi-feminist position, liberal "attacks" on the family including bills proposing divorce, female suffrage, the equal legal standing of children born out of wedlock, the secularization of hospitals, and the nationalization/secularization of the education

---

<sup>154</sup> "Las firmas de protesta," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 20 September 1905, 1.

system.<sup>155</sup> All of this was part of a general shift, especially in the 1910s, toward Catholic reactionary politics in Uruguay.

When Archbishop Soler died, President Batlle refused to send recommendations to Rome for a successor (a requirement under Uruguay's constitution for filling the vacancy), and the position remained unfilled until 1918. Without papal or episcopal support, *El Amigo's* (and the *Círculos'*) vacillations between right and left began to drift rightward, becoming all but fully conservative and reactionary following the first general strike in May 1911. The specter of rejuvenated anarchism, combined with an increasingly anti-clerical president, appeared to be too much for the *Círculos'* leadership. The editors of *El Amigo* tested the political waters from time to time, only to retreat at the first sign of labor conflict. It would take the formal split between church and state—decreed by the Constitution of 1918—before the *Círculos* reemerged as somewhat of a progressive element, championing those left out of the newly-minted labor laws: agricultural and domestic workers.<sup>156</sup>

So where did the political energy of *Círculo* members go? After all, the *Círculos* Católicos continued to grow, adding new chapters and members.<sup>157</sup> During the time of abeyance, the organization carried on its functions as a mutual aid and religious society but dropped political action. Some of its members joined Catholic reactionary politics. In 1909, a group of Catholics organized the Unión Católica to compete as a national party, but in the 1910 election it only received 535 votes nationally. In 1911, the party changed

---

<sup>155</sup> Ehrick, *The Shield of the Weak*.

<sup>156</sup> See for instance: "Sindicato de Empleados de Comercio," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 28 July 1920, 1; "Por los agricultores," *El Amigo del Obrero*, 24 March 1920, 1.

<sup>157</sup>

its name to the Unión Cívica but this did not improve performance.<sup>158</sup> Instead, Christian democratic ideals, as well as more mainstream Catholic votes, seem to have been channeled into the two traditional political parties. In this new era of mass politics, progressive Catholics would have had some affinity with Colorados, despite the latter's liberal and secular character. Conservative Catholicism, on the other hand, seemed a good match for Blancos. But such choices were perhaps not so clear-cut, considering Blancos' early support of labor legislation, including sponsorship of the *Círculos' descanso* bill.

The efforts of social Catholicism to enact labor legislation in Uruguay left a complex legacy. In the first decade of the twentieth century, progressive Catholics drew inspiration and legitimacy from documents such as *Rerum Novarum*. Papal pronouncements functioned similarly to the holy books upon which Catholic Christianity was based—as malleable texts that could be (re)deployed to suit the particular political aims of a specific group at specific historical moments. But Catholic social action could also be inhibited by local and international dynamics within the Church. Once social Catholics largely lost papal and local support from the high clergy—coupled with a poor climate for labor action—the movement lost momentum. But even once labor militancy resumed nationally, the *Círculos* were held back by reservations. They could launch a massive nation-wide petition drive, organize rallies and even unions, and undertake tireless consciousness-raising on the issue of Sunday rest. What they could not do was fully back strikes or class conflict as an extractive political tool. Those affiliated with the Christian Democratic League did support such activities, and with some efficacy. But the

---

<sup>158</sup> Zubillaga, *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)*, 257-265.

League's attention to class conflict arrived too late (and too little) to influence legislative action.

In Parliament, social Catholics were unable to push through two *descanso dominical* bills, despite all their work, because legislators would not vote for the bill and did everything to impede its progress. Why? The climate under which the bill was introduced was hardly propitious; the civil war was obviously a national distraction and bipartisanship, as would have been needed, was unthinkable at a time of party war. The Círculos also picked the wrong party to approach for support. With only a few exceptions in Uruguayan history, Blancos had been and would be the opposition party. Moreover, labor legislation had extraordinarily high political stakes; if the state was going to do something for workers, both parties would struggle for credit. This is why, instead of getting Parliament to pass an ameliorative law, the Círculos provoked party competition. This rivalry would continue—with ups and downs that were highly responsive to labor militancy—until 1914, when the first labor law was finally passed (see Chapters Four and Five). State officials were capable of presenting ameliorative social bills, but only the edge of class struggle would force them to act—to fulfill the social Christian mandate to lift up the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. Parties jealously reserved for themselves the privileges of sponsorship, passage, and credit over such noble tasks. Very few today remember the initial work that social Catholics did to create Uruguay's modern welfare state. Yet social Catholicism deserves recognition for planting the seed—*sembrando la semilla*—that would eventually grow into labor law.

**The Other Seed: Labor Legislation Between 1904-1907.** It was during—not after, and certainly not before—the second attempt to pass a *descanso* bill that Colorados

responded and party competition for the hearts of workers began. In a desperate attempt to not be upstaged by Blancos, in May 1904 Representative Ricardo Areco introduced a hastily written labor bill. Moments before Areco presented his bill, a statement in favor of Representative Solé’s legislation was read on behalf of the Montevideo Center for Hairdressers. Areco actually engaged Representatives Solé y Rodríguez and Tiscornia in a heated debate during the fourth session of the *descanso* bill debate. The latter two argued that—given the market incentives for employees—*not* having a law prohibiting Sunday work was the same as having a law obliging it, which in turn prevented workers from attending to their religious obligations. Hence the law—in its omissions as much as in its mandates—curtailed workers’ religious freedoms.<sup>159</sup>

Areco would not admit to such distinctions, though a similar criticism could have been made of his competing bill, which proposed the ten-hour workday in the spring and summer and the eight-hour workday during the fall and winter. Areco began his speech by admitting that the social question had been “worrying” him. But it was “the circumstance of a bill on a weekly day of rest having been brought up for debate in this Honorable Chamber...[that] led me to speed up my work a little and to submit it for the consideration of my honorable colleagues.” He admitted that “I do not pretend...to have solved in a definite way, I do not pretend to have solved in a just, fair and legitimate manner this enormous problem that currently occupies the majority of parliaments in the world. The only thing that I attempt...is to provoke [*lanzar*]—to put it that way—the circulation of this idea.” He refrained from commenting on the social context of the bill “because it is a question debated publicly and that everyone is knowledgeable about to a

---

<sup>159</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 176, 14 May 1904, 21-23.

greater or lesser degree.”<sup>160</sup> Discussion of the social question was widespread and the pressure on parties was on. And so, more like a placeholder for his party than a viable bill, the Colorado Party proposed its first labor law.

In early 1905, Blancos responded with their own labor bill. The frame Representative Carlos Roxlo—one of two sponsors of the bill—used was explicitly religious, a “pronouncement of faith” as he put it.

The authors of this project...are partisans of the working classes; the majority of those that have signed on to the bill have found that love for the humble and those that cry out for relief in the history of peoples; they...after having studied it in sociological books and in the life of the country, have turned to the Galilean bible and have gone looking for it in that marvelous Sermon on the Mount which speaks, fellow representatives, of those that hunger and thirst for justice, of those that suffer and endure, of the poor in spirit and the meek in heart—that is to say, of the man that asks to be given what he has a right to, of the woman that asks that she be protected in her weakness, and of the children that have all of the

---

<sup>160</sup> Areco did mention that his “disability” (*invalidéz*) had prevented him from acquiring information to further develop the bill. Milton Vanger mentions that the representative “could not walk and his hands shook.” Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 190. “El patrón no tendrá la obligación de indemnizar, cuando el accidente fuese producido por fuerza mayor ó caso fortuito.” “Pero la circunstancia de haberse traído al debate de la H. Cámara el proyecto sobre descanso dominical...me he decidido á adelantar un poco mi trabajo y á someterlo á la consideración de mis honorables colegas” “Yo no pretendo...haber resuelto de una manera definitiva, no pretendo haber resuelto de una manera justa, equitativa y legítima este magno problema que preocupa actualmente á la mayor parte de los parlamentos del mundo. Lo único que pretendo...es lanzar—por decirlo así—á la circulación esta idea.” “...Porque es una cuestión debatida públicamente y que todos la dominan con mayor ó menor extensión...” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 175, 3 May 1904, 326-327.

gentleness of ones that cannot do harm and have all of the ignorance of  
innocence.<sup>161</sup>

This rhetoric bears remarkable similarity to the kinds of religious images and readings that social Catholics drew on to assert rights for laborers—a discourse that appeared to have seeped up from below, perhaps through fellow Blancos such as Solé y Rodríguez, whose term had ended four months earlier.

Referencing—as social Catholics had—Jesus’ parable of the sower of seeds,<sup>162</sup> Roxlo concluded that “Doctor Luis Alberto de Herrera [his co-sponsor for the bill] and I have cast a seed in hopes that it will bear fruit and show that, despite the distrust of the working classes, they, seeing how the State and the legislators worry about their fate, may repeat one day [José] Martí’s beautiful phrase: ‘the world is not evil: for every worm

---

<sup>161</sup> “Los autores de este proyecto [Representatives Borro, de Herrera, Ponce de León, and Roxlo]...somos partidarios de las clases obreras; la mayoría de los que firmamos el proyecto, ha buscado ese amor á los humildes y á los quejosos en la historia de los pueblos; lo ha buscado en las agitaciones del espíritu moderno, y lo ha buscado en el dramático espectáculo que diariamente nos ofrece la lucha de clases. Otros, después de haberlo estudiado en al sociología de los libros y en la vida del país, se han remontado á la bíblica Galilea y han ido á buscarlo en aquel maravilloso sermón de la Montaña, en que se habla, señores diputados, de los que tienen hambre y sed de justicia, de los que sufren y de los que padecen, de los pobres de espíritu y de los mansos de corazón, es decir, del adulto que pide que se le dé aquello á que tiene derecho, de la mujer que pide que se le proteja en su debilidad, y de los niños que tiene todas las mansedumbres de los que no pueden hacer daño y todas la ignorancias de la inocencia... Lo que queremos, con toda sinceridad, es ser útiles á las clases trabajadoras y ser útiles, también, al sosiego de nuestro país *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 182, 24 June 1905, 86-95.

<sup>162</sup> “Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold... Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” Matthew 13: 1-8, 18-23.

two roses spring.’”<sup>163</sup> Social Catholics had also believed that they were “sowing a seed.” But they were seeds of a different plant—the original seed had sprung up from among workers themselves, responding to their needs. Roxlo’s seed was a statist seed and responded to desires Roxlo shared with other colleagues in Parliament: an aspiration to keep up with modernity by passing progressive laws, a preoccupation with channeling and coopting labor discontent, and—in a top-down fashion—bettering the life of workers. These tendencies on the part of state officials will be explored in the following two chapters.

---

<sup>163</sup> “El doctor Luis Alberto de Herrera y yo hemos lanzado una semilla con la esperanza de que fructificará y de que, á pesar de las desconfianzas de la clase obrera, ésta, al ver cómo el Estado y los legisladores se preocupan de sus destinos, llegará á decir un día aquella hermosísima frase de Martí: ‘el mundo no es malo: por cada gusano, nacen dos rosas’. He dicho.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 23 February 1905, 81-89.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### From Anarchists to ‘Anarco-Batllistas’: Populism and Labor Legislation in Uruguay

In mid-1905, the Sociedad de Resistencia Obreros Sastres (Tailors’ Resistance Society) of Uruguay found itself embroiled in controversy. The anarchist labor union had just ended a twenty-one day strike aimed at forcing employers to honor a labor agreement won (also through strike) two years earlier. And though the 1905 strike also ended largely in success, the circumstances of the negotiations drew criticism. The anarchist newspaper *El Libertario* attacked the tailors’ union for allegedly using the “office of the [Montevideo] chief of police to meet with the bosses, [and] having [the chief] act as arbiter or judge over differences that emerged during the discussion.” The union had even invited the chief of police, Colonel Bernassa y Jerez, to the banquet celebrating the end of the strike!

The tailors adamantly denied the charges. According to them, “the union of the ‘Obreros Sastres’ never asked for the intervention of the Chief of Police.” Instead, “during the strike, we were invited to a ‘conversation’ by the mentioned Police Chief, who invited us, not in an official capacity, but as an ordinary citizen.” The tailors had accepted the arrangement and did indeed meet their employers at the local police station. And yes, the police chief had been in attendance at the banquet marking the end of the strike, but again, solely “as an ordinary individual” and only because he had invited himself; though anarchists, the tailors stated that it would have been rude and contrary to their principles to have asked him to leave. Colonel Bernassa later wrote them a note apologizing for having invited himself.<sup>164</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> “...Al despacho de polic[í]a, á conferenciar con los patrones, actuando aquel como árbitro ó juez en las diferencias que surgiere durante la discusión...” “...El gremio de ‘Obreros Sastres’ no pidió

The tailors' side of the story did little to soothe anarchist worries that one of their unions had been compromised by state intervention. In fact, the editors of *El Libertario* used the tailors as an egregious example of what they saw as a larger dangerous trend: that of "a complete misunderstanding of what is or ought to be the struggle between capital and labor amounting to fundamental errors which, unfortunately, are taking shape among many workers." What was that "complete misunderstanding?" Reformism. As further proof of creeping heterodoxy, *El Libertario* dressed down *El Obrero*—a fellow anarchist labor newspaper—for neutrally reporting the mediated end to the tailors' strike rather than joining in on the criticism.<sup>165</sup>

**Argument and Literature.** While a few labor histories have mentioned a peculiar anarchist faction—*anarco-batllismo*—that, in varying degrees, pragmatically supported Batlle during his second presidency,<sup>166</sup> no one has explored its roots. And no one has looked at it comparatively or placed it within the context of early twentieth century labor-state reforms (as I do below). This incident, described above, of police mediation in a strike highlights the change in relationship that workers would come to have with Uruguay's government. It points to the presence, early on, of an ideological flexibility among anarchist unions that appears to have grown over time. Specifically, *anarco-batllismo* offered avenues of rapport—particularly with the help of some former

---

nunca la intervenci[ó]n del Jefe de Polic[í]a..." "...Durante la huelga, fuimos invitados á una 'conversación', por el citado Jefe Político, el cual nos invitaba, no como tal, sino como simple ciudadano..." "...Como cualquier individuo..." "Polemizando," *Despertar*, July 1905, 7-8; "Conciencia de lucha, es lo que se necesita," *El Libertario*, 20 May 1905, 4; "A Pedido de los sastres," *El Libertario*, 10 July 1905, 2-3 (small portions of this column from are damaged and illegible); "Aclaraci[ó]n de conceptos," *El Libertario*, 14 July 1905, 2-3.

<sup>165</sup> "...Un desconocimiento completo de lo que es, ó debiera ser, la lucha entre capital y trabajo, incurriendo en errores fundamentales que, desgraciadamente, se va infiltrando, y tomando á la vez cuerpo en muchos obreros." "Conciencia de lucha, es lo que se necesita," *El Libertario*, 20 May 1905, 4; "La Huelga de los Sastres," *El Obrero*, 20 May 1905, 3.

<sup>166</sup> Lopez D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguay: Tomo II [Primera Parte]*, 105-113; Universindo Rodríguez Díaz, *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte* (Montevideo: TAE Editorial, 1994), 24-28; Suriano, *Paradoxes of Utopia*: 197-199.

anarchist luminaries—between state officials (especially Colorados) and those workers most hostile to mainstream politics. The rise of *anarco-batllismo* helps explain how workers began the twentieth century at odds with state officials but twenty years later had transitioned to voting, supporting candidates from the two traditional parties, and accepting state reforms and mediation (developments I look at further in chapter 5). Early populism in Uruguay, coupled with the domestic and foreign context of repression, pushed segments of anarchism (including some of its most respected figures) to pragmatically ally with the most progressive elements of the political elite. This experience in turn resonates with the histories of changing dynamics between state officials and anarchists in other parts of the world.

**Labor and Politics in Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Uruguay.** Anarchism traveled with Italian and Spanish immigrants to Uruguay during the late nineteenth century, took root, and flourished. By the early 1900s, it was the dominant ideology among workers, followed by Catholic unionism and then socialism. Influenced by anarcho-syndicalism, anarchist unions followed a particular model of organization known as resistance societies (of which the tailors' union was but one), patterned after the society they hoped to build following the revolution against state and capital. Resistance societies attempted to include all workers of a particular trade and empowered members to shape their association through direct democracy (though they often relied on representatives to manage the day-to-day affairs of the organization and serve as liaisons to larger labor associations). Explicit in their abhorrence of authoritarian institutions, resistance societies recognized no arbiter between themselves and employers. After decades of trial and error, Uruguayan anarchists in 1905 managed to establish an umbrella federation to coordinate

solidarity and struggle among resistance societies. Named the Uruguayan Regional Workers' Federation (Federación Obrera Regional Uruguay) or FORU, it had counterparts in Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay.<sup>167</sup>

The year 1905 was a pivotal one for anarchism, labor organization, and therefore for state responses, including the drafting of two labor bills. The year was a peak one for labor unrest in terms of the number, duration, and intensity of strikes; for the quantity of labor newspapers in operation; and, in general, for the anxiety of state officials who witnessed class conflict on a scale not before seen. To legislators, 1905 was a dramatic escalation of popular discontent from two years earlier when Catholic workers were figuratively beating on their chamber doors.

**Labor Legislation, 1903-1905.** As seen in the previous chapter, beginning in 1903 massive action on the part of Catholic workers brought a petition directly to Parliament for a national day of rest; it was the first labor bill to reach the legislature. The following year, this time with official support from Blanco representative Oriol Solé y Rodríguez, the proposed law was discussed at length but never came up for a vote. During the deliberations on *descanso dominical*, Representative Areco, a Colorado, presented a labor bill of his own—in effect bidding, on behalf of his party, for workers as a constituency. A year passed after both Areco's and Solé y Rodríguez's bills had been sent to committee. Then in 1905, Blancos presented a new labor bill, this one lengthy, well thought out, and comprehensive. It was proposed by Carlos Roxlo and Luis Alberto de Herrera. Both Montevideo representatives were then early in their political careers and would leave a large footprint on Uruguayan political history. De Herrera was in his early thirties and had fought in the party wars for the Blancos. He would become a senator,

---

<sup>167</sup> Zubillaga, *Pan y trabajo*, 37-38.

candidate for president, and would become known as a respected ideologue of conservative politics. Still, as Carlos Zubillaga notes, he would on several occasions support the rights of workers to unionize and strike. Roxlo was in his late thirties, would be elected Blanco representative several more times, and would go on to carve an ideological niche for “modern conservatism” which advocated, among other things, a strong state that protected workers.<sup>168</sup>

The bill had numerous exclusions. It sought to appease large landowners—many of them with strong ties to the Blanco Party—by excluding agricultural and livestock workers from any benefits. As a result, transportation and industrial workers were the principal potential beneficiaries of the Roxlo-de Herrera bill. The proposed law provided a range of protections and provisions, all of which matched and responded to almost every labor grievance expressed in the working-class press. Compliance with the law would be ensured by the police or by hygiene specialists with the power to inspect and fine. Of special interest, the legislation would have also created a “committee of social questions” comprised equally by industrialists and workers; labor representatives on the committee would be selected by unions registered with the state. This committee would enjoy the power of arbitration should all parties accept its intervention. It would also have the power to propose additional labor laws and have those considered speedily, even ahead of comparable ones proposed by parliamentarians or even the president. Such powers would have offered workers—through the filter of representatives and possible veto by their own employers—an indirect voice in the introduction of labor bills. In an

---

<sup>168</sup> Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 107, 162.

age when few workers even had the right to vote in Uruguay (or elsewhere), this form of enfranchisement could have been very seductive.

**Table 1. Roxlo and de Herrera Labor Bill (February 1905) (Blanco Party)**

*Exclusions*

- All agricultural and livestock workers
- Workshops with fewer than five employees or those with government contracts
- Domestic workers
- People working in the “putting-out system” (most of them women)

*Provisions/Regulations*

- Accident compensation
- Retirement pensions
- Workplace safety and hygiene standards
- Regulation of women’s work
- Regulation of children’s work (including a prohibition of child labor below 12 years of age)
- The eight-hour workday (nine at night) for industrial work only
- A day of rest per week (employers’ choice)
- Creation of a Committee on Social Questions (with power to arbitrate and propose labor laws)
- Union registration with the state

In his presentation to colleagues, Carlos Roxlo addressed a particular source of likely opposition to the bill: workers. He acknowledged deep distrust among workers but was confident that with time and the state’s favorable disposition toward them, they would eventually come around. As for his party, he denied that all conservatives were indifferent to the plight of workers. “There is a great error,” he said, “in the manner the proletarian classes reason: there is the error of believing that bills for labor reforms solely come from those truly close to workers such as liberals.” Labor law was an act of good

faith that would reconcile workers with their representatives both liberal and conservative.<sup>169</sup>

After three months of inaction, within the context of a peak year for labor unrest and during the prolonged port workers' strike, Luis Alberto de Herrera demanded immediate passage of his co-sponsored bill, still tied up in committee. He also broke Parliament's silence on strikes, referencing the recent wave afflicting the country. Right before his speech, it appears that a group of workers had entered Parliament and jeered the legislators, presumably for not having passed a labor law; they had to be forcibly removed before the session could continue.<sup>170</sup>

Three weeks later Roxlo and de Herrera introduced what they claimed was a revision of the old bill; in fact, it was an almost completely new one. Curiously, all the summary exclusions—including livestock and agricultural workers—were gone, but so were many provisions. The new bill said nothing about workplace safety standards, accident compensation, retirement pensions, or a weekly day of rest. And the eight-hour day was reserved for night work; everyone else (except domestic workers) would work ten hours. The Committee on Social Questions had also been removed. Instead, resistance societies were empowered to speak for workers collectively but regulation of them had also expanded. Some protections for workers had been added including safeguards on

---

<sup>169</sup> “Hay un error gravísimo, en el modo de razonar de las clases proletarias: hay el error de creer que solamente vienen de las personas verdaderamente sindicadas como liberales, los proyectos de reformas obreras.” “El doctor Luis Alberto de Herrera y yo hemos lanzado una semilla con la esperanza de que fructificará y de que, á pesar de las desconfianzas de la clase obrera, ésta, al ver cómo el Estado y los legisladores se preocupan de sus destinos, llegará á decir un día aquella hermosísima frase de Martí: ‘el mundo no es malo: por cada gusano, nacen dos rosas’” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 23 February 1905, 81-89.

<sup>170</sup> Barrán, *Los conservadores uruguayos (1870-1933)*, 101, footnote 49.

their wages and their civil/political autonomy. In short, the new bill protected workers less and circumscribed their actions more.<sup>171</sup>

**Table 2. Roxlo and de Herrera “Revised” Labor Bill (June 1905) (Blanco Party)**

*Provisions/Regulations*

- Married women could work with their husband’s permission (this was not required if they were separated)
- Prohibition of child labor under 12 years old; children over 12 could work with legal approval
- Work contracts could be verbal or written and protected under law so long as they lasted at least one year, specified work hours and pay, and included a job description
- Regulation of wages (including pay days, payment in kind versus in coin, and limitations on docked pay)
- Prohibition of forced consumption at employer-owned or preferred stores
- The ten-hour workday (eight hours for night work), domestic labor excluded
- Until a national arbitration board was established (via a different bill), local judges would serve as arbiters of labor disputes without court fees
- Workers’ civil and political rights would be protected from employer pressure/coercion
- “Resistance societies” that registered with the state would be recognized by the state to speak for workers of a trade in order to establish/enforce work contracts
- Leaders of resistance society must have resided in the country at least three years, be citizens, and gainfully employed in non-union work (failure to comply with this provision could result in a 50 peso fine for the first offense, 100 pesos for repeat offenses; the executive branch also had the power to dissolve a resistance society)
- Resistance societies that struck in breach of a work contract would be fined between 100 and 500 pesos for damages
- Resistance societies *through arbitration* could win suit against employers who broke a work contract; damages against employers would be between 100 and 500 pesos

Why the partial about-face? Historian Milton Vanger argues that after the prolonged port strike—with 11,000 participants it was “the largest strike in Uruguayan history” and struck directly at the country’s export economy—Roxlo’s and de Herrera’s “pro-labor sympathies wore thin” and their revisions reflect that shift in disposition.<sup>172</sup> It

<sup>171</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 182, 24 June 1905, 86-95.

<sup>172</sup> Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 207-208.



was a time of strikes and rumors of strikes. To them, in this new labor climate, perhaps any labor bill needed as much coercion as concession. Ultimately, this second bill by Roxlo and de Herrera suffered the same fate of so many others: the chamber sent it back to committee, never to re-emerge.

**Early Anarchist Reactions to Labor Law.** As seen in the last chapter, although the Catholic workers' *descanso dominical* campaign caused quite a stir in the mainstream press, anarchist newspapers were tight-lipped about it.<sup>173</sup> One can imagine why. Aside from their rivalry with the Catholic unions, anarchists despised labor legislation usually for one or more of the following reasons. First, it was seen as a Machiavellian and authoritarian imposition intended, under the pretense of neutrality, to rig (through state regulation) labor relations in favor of employers. Second, legislative reforms would lull workers into a state of complacency, leading them to surrender to state officials—no matter how well-meaning—any self-determination in matters regarding their own employment. The official newspaper of the FORU, echoing Peter Kropotkin, put it bluntly: “The emancipation of the workmen must be the act of the workmen themselves.”<sup>174</sup> Finally, labor reform was seen as a zero-sum game, since capitalist employers, merchants, and landlords—sometimes seen as consciously in league—would compensate for higher labor costs by either reducing working conditions, raising the costs

---

<sup>173</sup> The following anarchist newspapers known to be in operation were: *La Rebelión* (1902-1903), *El Obrero Panadero* (1901-1903), *El Obrero Sastre* (1903), *Resistencia Gremial* (1903). *El Obrero* was in existence since 1904 but only 1905 was available for viewing at the Biblioteca Nacional.

<sup>174</sup> “Que vuestra redención ha de ser obras de vosotros mismos.” *La Federación*, 15 June 1911, 1. Their translation of Kropotkin’s famous phrase incorporated a religious term: “Que vuestra *redención* ha de ser de vosotros mismos” (emphasis added). The socialist newspaper *La Voz del Obrero* also borrowed a different rendition of the quote for their masthead. The original comes from “Act For Yourself,” *Freedom*, January 1887 as quoted in Peter Kropotkin, *Act For Yourself: Articles From Freedom 1886-1907*, Nicolas Walter and Heiner Becker, eds. (London: Freedom Press, 1998), 32.

of goods or rents, or both.<sup>175</sup> In sum, any reform would fortify and prolong capitalism, not undermine it.

In 1905, when legislators from both political parties introduced labor bills, the anarchist press paid some attention. The editors of *El Obrero* were particularly dismissive of the proposed legislation. “How is it possible,” they asked, “that persons so removed from the people, who know nothing of their sufferings, their miseries and privations, should take so much interest in the proletarian mass? The people, dear legislators, do not need laws of any kind, they have enough [trouble] with the absurdity of supporting parasites.” They further warned of the danger inherent in having people who did not work regulating the workplaces of others.<sup>176</sup> *El Libertario* opined similarly, lamenting that “we men who every day leave a part of our body and our *soul* in the dungeons of industry, in the fields, see ourselves more persecuted by the ambitious idle who consume the product of our labor.” Among those “idlers” figured legislators (including Representatives Roxlo and de Herrera, both mentioned specifically), who were responsible for the recent civil war, a struggle for “ambition” and “the right to live as lay-abouts.” “If they want to speak on behalf of workers, they should stop collecting [their salaries]” and become workers themselves. “We want to rid ourselves of everything that is unjust, inhuman and anti-social: we want to get rid of all the indolent; we want to proclaim productive work as an exclusive virtue so we cannot countenance work laws fashioned by those who do not know that elemental virtue.”<sup>177</sup> If solutions to the myriad wrongs inherent in

---

<sup>175</sup> For some iterations of these positions see: “Criterio y criterio,” *La Acción Obrera*, 20 September 1908, 1; “Críticas ajenas,” *El Anarquista*, 16 April 1913, 1-2.

<sup>176</sup> “El pueblo, señores proyectistas, no necesita leyes de ninguna especie, bastante tiene con la absurda de mantener á zánganos...” “Ley del Trabajo!...,” *El Obrero*, 11 March 1905, 2.

<sup>177</sup> “Los hombres que dejamos todos los días una parte de nuestro cuerpo y de nuestra *alma* en las mazmorras de la industria, y en los campos agrícolas, nos vemos cada vez más perseguidos por los ambiciosos haraganes, que consumen el producto de nuestro trabajo.” “...El derecho de vivir de

industrialization were to be found, anarchists believed those solutions would originate with the victims themselves.

Others engaged with specific pieces of the proposed laws rather than dismissing them out of hand. *Despertar* denounced the bills but took pains to scrutinize them point by point. They did so in a seven-part series, covering both parties' proposals. Blancos, they said, would only cater to workers long enough to become the majority party and rearrange the political system to their benefit, at which time they would "toss the Labor Law to the ground and the worker will remain a slave." Colorados, on the other hand, had only proposed a bill of their own so as to prevent Blanco ascendancy, expecting to disregard the law thereafter.<sup>178</sup> However, the columnist's largest criticism was that the proposed regulations were rife with loopholes, contradictions, and inadequacies. Even if passed, the laws could not possibly be enforced. Better to constrain capital through workers' own efforts rather than put any hope in the magnanimity and competence of political elites.<sup>179</sup> Though the resistance society that published *Despertar* had recently informally accepted state arbitration, not even they were willing to accept formal state intervention. Nor were any other anarchists at the time.

**Police Matters.** If legislators at the turn of the twentieth century were experimenting with new kinds of state intervention, so too were the police. In fact, we should see police policy as a reflection of the coercive, co-optive, and conciliatory

---

haraganes." "Nosotros queremos despojarnos de todo cuanto sea injusto, inhumano y antisocial: queremos deshacernos de todos los haraganes; queremos proclamar como única virtud el trabajo productivo, pero no podemos admitir leyes de trabajo, hechas por quien no conoce esta virtud elemental." Emphasis in the original. "La ley del trabajo!..." *El Libertario*, 5 March 1905, 1.

<sup>178</sup> "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, August 1905, 3-4.

<sup>179</sup> "...Echaremos por tierra la Ley del Trabajo y el obrero continuará siendo el esclavo de siempre." "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, July 1905, 5-6; "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, August 1905, 3-4; "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, October 1905, 3-4; "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, February 1906, 5-6; "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, April and May, 1906, 9-10; "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, June 1906, 6-7; "La Ley del Trabajo," *Despertar*, August 1906, 3-4.

modernist project then being elaborated by Parliament and presidents—incentives and disincentives given to labor within a managed and populist reform process.

In 1904, police chief Colonel Bernassa y Jerez (introduced at the beginning of this chapter) sought to professionalize security forces by compiling a thick police manual full of laws and norms to be enforced; a smaller second volume appeared in 1906.<sup>180</sup> His occasional personal annotations are of special interest. Under “Instructions Concerning the Strike,” Bernassa y Jerez wrote that “the frequency of labor strikes produced, which occasion consequent social perturbations, requires the preferential attention of police authority, by nature of their institution charged with maintaining public order, liberty, property, and individual security.” Acknowledging the political power of radicalized workers, Bernassa y Jerez cast them as anti-democratic. Police were promised that if they followed his instructions they would “contribute to the maintenance of the free exercise of all rights within order, encouraging the spirit of workers with the deep conviction that they may fully exercise their faculties so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others; and to the producer and industrialist classes the full confidence that authority keeps vigil over their property, guaranteeing the functioning of their industry or commerce.” However, and above all else, precinct commanders were to remember “the fundamental principle of all good Police that ‘it is better to prevent than to repress’”—an important theme among state officials, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Previously, the choice had been clear for state officials ranging from presidents to police chiefs: repression. The colonel’s shift in tactics demonstrates the changing and

---

<sup>180</sup> *Departamento de Policía de la Capital: Prontuario Consultivo Policial*, Tomo I, Administración del Coronel Juan Bernassa y Jerez (Montevideo: Talleres A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1904); *Departamento de Policía de la Capital: Prontuario Consultivo Policial*, Tomo II, Administración del Coronel Juan Bernassa y Jerez (Montevideo: Talleres A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1906).

complex nature of labor conditions in Uruguay at the time, requiring a more varied and sophisticated toolbox on the part of police. It also reflects the tenor of Batlle's first administration: rhetorically progressive, experimental, but timid and tentative when it came to the practice of reform.

Bernassa y Jerez included arbitration and intelligence work among the new implements in this expanded toolbox. Good police preparation for a strike involved infiltration. The police chief recommended that "you should not neglect [labor] meetings because, even though the Law protects and regulates them, often from these emerge perturbing rumors that sow disquiet and anxiety." Because of this "your presence or that of your subordinates is indispensable at every meeting where the law permits...to prevent by all means possible that these degenerate into tumultuous assemblies."<sup>181</sup> As we saw, Bernassa y Jerez, like the president, also attempted to negotiate strikes—another subtle means of keeping class conflict within bounds without the need for outright repression. But if all else failed the police chief did not hesitate to repress.

Batlle himself, as head of the Executive, also demonstrated a range of dispositions toward labor during his first term in office. In a well-known case, the president interceded on behalf of an anarchist denied entry by the police at the port in Montevideo. No law

---

<sup>181</sup> "La frecuencia con que se producen las huelgas de obreros ocasionando las perturbaciones sociales consiguientes, reclama la atención preferente de la autoridad policial, encargada por la naturaleza de su instituto, de mantener el orden público, la libertad, la propiedad y la seguridad individual." "...Contribuirán á mantener el libre ejercicio, de todos los derechos dentro del orden, llevado al ánimo del obrero el profundo convencimiento de que puede ejercer ampliamente sus facultades, mientras no vulnere derechos ajenos, y á las clases productoras é industriales la plena confianza de que la autoridad vela por su propiedad, garantiendo el funcionamiento de su industria ó comercio." "...El principio fundamental de toda buena Policía, de que, 'más vale prevenir que reprimir...'" "No deben descuidarse las reuniones, pues aunque la Ley las ampara y las reglamenta, muchas veces surgen de su seno rumores perturbadores que siembran la intranquilidad y la zozobra." "Su presencia ó las de sus subordinados se hace indispensable en toda reunión, siempre que lo permita la ley...para evitar por todos los medios posibles que degeneren en asambleas tumultuosas..." *Departamento de Policía de la Capital: Prontuario Consultivo Policial*, Tomo I, Administración del Coronel Juan Bernassa y Jerez (Montevideo: Talleres A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1904), 358-364.

existed barring anarchists from the country—the Uruguayan police had just been colluding with counterparts in Buenos Aires. When Batlle heard about the expulsion, he immediately contacted the man and paid his fare back to the capital. As Milton Vanger put it, “this sort of legalism hardly endeared Batlle to employers but it reminded the unions, anarchist-led, that they had a friend at the top.”<sup>182</sup>

But Batlle could just as easily use switch as he did bait. During the port strike, he issued orders that the police give equal protection to strikers and strikebreakers; he claimed to only be enforcing the law but it may have given employers the edge they needed. In late June, the police opened fire on strikers as these moved to fight a group of strikebreakers. They wounded four and killed one by the name of Andrés Soto. The port strike ended in defeat.<sup>183</sup> Like Bernassa y Jerez, Batlle also attempted mediation. In early 1905, railroad workers went on strike; the president appointed his vice president and soon-to-be successor, Claudio Williman, to negotiate on behalf of workers. The government had more leverage here than in the port strike (the railroad had just petitioned to extend its railroad lines) and the strike was won.<sup>184</sup>

Negotiation was the most benign tool in the police chief’s repertoire but it was hardly his only one available. In October 1907, an open letter in the form of a pamphlet appeared in Montevideo detailing other police offenses. Entitled “*¡Yo Acuso!*,” the pamphlet self-consciously referenced Émile Zola’s 1898 open letter “*J’accuse*,” written to the president of France and charging government officials of wrongdoing in the Dreyfus Affair. In this instance, however, the writer was Leoncio Lasso de la Vega, famous

---

<sup>182</sup> Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 207.

<sup>183</sup> “Los Sucesos del Cerro: Más sangre,” *El Obrero*, 24 June 1905, 1; Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 207-211.

<sup>184</sup> Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 205-207, 210-211.

journalist and anarchist, and the letter was directed to Claudio Williman early in his presidential term. Lasso de la Vega accused the police chief Colonel West—Bernassa y Jerez’s successor—of a range of offenses. The most grievous of these charges involved a recent incident at the Centro Internacional de Estudios Sociales, an anarchist meeting place and think-tank of sorts. West had successfully infiltrated anarchist circles and planted several police agents, one a would-be assassin. This hit man discharged a revolver in an attempt to kill the famous anarchist poet Ángel Falco as he gave a speech; miraculously no one was injured.<sup>185</sup>

In early 1911, Emilio Frugoni took his place as Uruguay’s first Socialist representative. No sooner had the new Parliament been constituted that he began airing the state’s dirty laundry, holding several hearings on police misconduct. (He also appeared to be trying to prevent Colonel West’s imminent departure from Uruguay to Europe.) It was the first time a member of Parliament had exposed the country’s security apparatus.

Frugoni began to delineate the outgoing police chief’s crimes; he started with the 1908 railroad strike, during which West broke the law to prevent assembly by many unions (not just that of the railroad workers). The police chief also denied entry at the port of Montevideo to several workers “because they brought the stigma of having preached anarchist ideas in Buenos Aires and having been exiled from there for that very reason.” Instead, West had sent them back to Buenos Aires, exposing them to “seven years of prison in the icy Tierra del Fuego for those who return to the country after

---

<sup>185</sup> Leoncio Lasso de la Vega, *¡Yo acuso!* (Montevideo: [Publisher Unknown], 1907), held in the Sala Uruguay of the Biblioteca Nacional.

having the Residence Law applied to them.”<sup>186</sup> The police had also rounded up Argentine émigrés who had sought refuge from persecution in Uruguay and sent them back to Argentina for punishment.

Over the years, the police had physically assaulted workers, infiltrated the labor movement, prevented peaceful assembly and free speech, sent agent provocateurs, carried out mass arrests, engaged in wrongful imprisonment, etc. Frugoni also mentioned the incident at the Centro Internacional that de la Vega had written about. (The representative noted that the purpose of the gathering at the center was, ironically, to protest against police repression.) He also accused West of receiving kickbacks while turning a blind eye to gambling houses, many built in total breach of the law during his tenure—“one of these established nowhere else than 18 de Julio Avenue,” the capital’s main thoroughfare. “All of these facts demonstrate that while we pretend to serve as an example to all the other South American Republics for the liberty and modernity of our laws, in practice we walk in the footsteps of the Argentine Republic.”<sup>187</sup>

**Anarco-Batllismo.** Issues of tactics had always fueled rivalries within the anarchist community. But at the end of 1910, an even greater polemic broke out with the appearance of a new and peculiar ideology we may call *anarco-batllismo*. Adherents of the faction looked to Batlle’s second presidency as a propitious moment to guide and radicalize expected labor reforms. In early 1910, toward the end of Williman’s

---

<sup>186</sup> The Residence Law (1902), reinforced by the Law of Social Defense (1910), allowed the Argentine police to deport anarchists, union organizers, and anyone else considered a threat to national security.

<sup>187</sup> “Porque traían el estigma de haber propagado en Buenos Aires ideas anárquicas y haber sido expulsados de allí por esa misma razón.” “...Se nos ha obligado á infringir la ley argentina que pena con seis años de prisión en la helada Tierra del Fuego á los que regresan á este país después de haberles sido aplicada la ley de residencia.” “Pues bien: todos estos datos demuestran que mientras pretendemos servir de ejemplo á las otras Repúblicas sudamericanas por la libertad y modernidad de nuestras leyes, en el terreno de los hechos seguimos las huellas de la República Argentina...” *Diario de sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tome 208, 18 February 1911, 39-48.



administration and Batlle's anticipated return from Europe to preside over the country a second time, whispers of disagreement over tactics within the anarchist community emerged. *La Nueva Senda's* first reaction was to issue a stinging critique of any notion that Batlle might be a different kind of politician or that supporting him could be tactically opportune. Their position was unequivocal: "Understand that even in the case of an immediate utilitarian idea, [supporting Batlle] can set a bad precedent (exploitable by any pretentious person with the vocation of shepherd of the proletarian masses), constitutes a weakness, an inconsistency, a supposition that what History and Science teach may not be true." This was unshakable faith in the tenets of anarchism.<sup>188</sup>

That same month (April 1910) the newspaper hosted a debate at the Centro Internacional on the subject of anarchist political participation. Two long-time anarchists—Leoncio Lasso de la Vega (the anarchist journalist who had written the pamphlet *¡Yo Acuso!* mentioned above) and Ángel Falco (survivor of the assassination attempt by the police agent)—took part in the event. There, de la Vega first openly declared his heterodoxy, stating his intent to support Batlle's candidacy. Falco vacillated and so de la Vega received the brunt of outrage, though both were heavily criticized.<sup>189</sup>

*Anarco-batllismo* emerged clearly as a political ideology in the pages of the newspaper *Salpicón*, edited by de la Vega. Appearing on 13 October 1910 to coincide with the first anniversary of Francisco Ferrer's execution, the short-lived newspaper embraced Batlle as the paladin of progressive forces in Uruguay. De la Vega explained

---

<sup>188</sup> "Téngase bien presente que ni aún en el caso de una idea utilitaria inmediata se pueden admitir condescendencias que á más de sentar un mal precedente, aprovechable por cualquier pretencioso con vocación de pastor de masas proletarias, constituye una debilidad, una inconsecuencia, una suposición de que lo que enseña la Historia y la Ciencia puede no ser verdad." "Los anarquistas ante la cuestión presidencial," *La Nueva Senda*, 8 April 1910, 1.

<sup>189</sup> López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Segunda Parte]*, 90-91; Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 115. This chapter owes much to Carlos Zubillaga's biographical sketches of hundreds of important radicals, most of them otherwise lost to history.

why, despite his hostility toward politicians, he was supporting Batlle. “I wished for divorce, and he provided it; I hoped for the abolition of the death penalty and his great heart made it happen without restrictions[;] I desire the divorce from the Church [by the government]—submissive within a truly popular State—and he is the only one that, today, deigns to consider the problem and solve it. This figure, whom I present to you, is not the *national politician*, but the *Man* that advocates solutions of a global character.”

“Whenever I hear [Batlle] being called an *anarchist* by his enemies, as if that were a terrible insult, I exclaim within: ‘I am glad; I wish he could be one through and through, but scientific anarchism—let us be clear here—that of Bakunin; that of Kropotkin; that of Reclus.’” To de la Vega, the lines were clearly demarcated: “In these moments, there should only be two parties clearly delineated in Uruguay: those that love progress, with Batlle; those that hate it, against Batlle. Choose your post: with the owls in shadow or with the eagles in the light of the sun, flying to lofty heights.”<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>190</sup> “Contra esa *Internacional negra*, viene organizándose, aunque lentamente, la *Internacional blanca*; el Socialismo neto, más ó menos avanzado, pero que prescinde de la Política, porque entorpece, empañeciéndolo, su ideal humanitario.” “Inspirado yo en ese socialismo,—y no en las menudencias políticas, asaltantes de un poder local, estricto y restringido,—dedico mis más ardientes simpatías al hombre que ha empezado á cumplir buena parte de mis aspiraciones, y promete continuar ese programa, más *humano* que *nacional*.” “Yo aspiraba al divorcio, y él lo realice; yo aspiraba á la abolición de la pena de muerte y su gran corazón lo consolidó sin restricciones: yo conde[n]o el atavismo caudillista—tenga el color que tenga—y él lo condena y lo combate: yo ambiciono el divorcio de la Iglesia sumisa, en un Estado realmente popular, y él es el único que, hoy por hoy, se atreve á plantear el problema y realizarlo. Este que os presento, no es el *patriota político*, sino el *Hombre* que aboga por soluciones de carácter mundial.” “Cuando le oigo llamar *anarquista* por sus enemigos, como un terrible dicterio, yo exclamo en mi interior: “[i] me alegro; ojalá pudiera serlo del todo; pero el anarquismo científico,—entiéndase bien—el de Bakunin; el de Kropotkin; el de Reclus.” “Cuando le oigo llamar *revolucionario*, *aplauzo*: porque esa palabra significa demoledor de instituciones decrépitas; edificador de monumentos de progreso; destructor de vicios ancestrales; el que en el campo de las ideas, destruye las carretas para implantar el ferrocarril y el aeroplano; del que abate la estatua de un San Bernardo para erigir la de un Newton; del que limpia el hogar social de cucarachas y ratones, y coloca en vez del crucifijo, al símbolo incorpóreo de la Humanidad. Porque la palabra *revolución* es sagrada.” “La revuelta actual contra Batlle, no es *revolución*, sino odio ancestral de la montonera y la clerecía, contra la antorcha brillante que flamea sobre nuestras cabezas desde el doble punto de vista civil y religioso.” “Todo lo demás, política, parlamentos, reparto de puestos públicos [the famous electoral spoils]...[sic] no importan. Son situaciones de paso. Aquellas otras son cuestiones fundamentales, que más tarde, ejercerán en las primeras una influencia saneadora. En estos momentos, no debe haber en el Uruguay más que dos partidos netamente marcados: Los que amen al progreso, con Batlle; los que lo odien, frente á Batlle. Elija cada cual su puesto: con los búhos en la sombra,

Following this article, cracks began to appear in anarchists' cohesion with regard to parliamentary politics. Orthodox anarchists reacted immediately. The newspaper *Tiempos Nuevos* became the first standard-bearer of anti-political anarchism against a tide of defections. Its first issue reminded Uruguayans to abstain from voting. It also announced FORU's upcoming third congress, crucial "in these moments in which the participation or abstinence in politics of a conscious labor element is under debate."<sup>191</sup>

A confluence of at least two events appears to have attracted some anarchists to electoral politics. The first was the worldwide movement in solidarity with Francisco Ferrer, imprisoned by Spanish authorities and executed in October of 1909. This event brought Uruguayan radicals and reformists together and pushed them into the streets, rekindling labor and radical action.<sup>192</sup> Second, and coinciding with that resurgence, a major reshuffling of electoral politics led some anarchists to view the political moment as exceptional and propitious to radical infiltration. In 1910, a failed Blanco uprising, aimed at preventing a second Batlle presidency, provoked the National Party's total abstention from the election. This led to a political scramble as *batllistas* attempted to extend their control over Parliament and Socialists and Liberals (running on a coalition ticket) saw their first viable opportunity to each gain a seat. Political elites were deeply divided, radical politics was on the rise; for some, the revolution could not be far behind.

*Tiempos Nuevos* sardonically reported that "the inhabitants of Uruguay are traversing a period worthy of study by the best psychologists in the world. For some time

---

ó con las águilas á la luz del sol, volando hacia las cumbres." "Si alguna vez estaría justificada la acción armada de parte de los obreros, para *acercarse* al triunfo de sus ideales, es ahora." Emphasis in the original. "Batlle y la política," *Salpicón*, 9 November 1910, 2-3.

<sup>191</sup> "...En estos momentos en que se debate la ingerencia ó abstinencia del elemento obrero consciente frente á la política..." "Pueblo, no votes," and "Movimiento obrero: Resultado de una reunión," *Tiempos Nuevos*, 10 December 1910, 1, 8.

<sup>192</sup> Lopez D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguay: Tomo II [Primera Parte]*, 30-42.

now, we have been noting great novelties among all individuals affiliated with the various political and philosophical ideas. Batlle, who will cure everything as his admirers say, has been the cause of all the mental disorder among said individuals; beginning with some priests, liberals, socialists, and even a few so-called anarchists, all have weakened in their convictions and have embraced the situation as a lifesaver. There was a bit of everything. One deputy that a few days earlier had resigned as a Blanco announced his candidacy as a liberal; a man of letters that up until yesterday had been an anarchist, seeing that deputy seats were up for grabs, said that he had ‘evolved’ and declared himself a liberal, presenting his candidacy.”<sup>193</sup>

The novelty of *anarco-batllismo* was such that *Tiempos Nuevos* republished a column from the Chilean newspaper *Luz Astral* that had heard of the development. It read in part: “ANARCHISTS—A telegram from Uruguay informs us that the anarchists of Montevideo have agreed to support the presidential candidacy of Batlle y Ordóñez.” The newspaper appeared incredulous, saying that they had also recently received an anarchist pamphlet by the libertarian group *Nuevos Rumbos* announcing the imminent end of “all the nobles and bourgeoisie, including the politicians.”<sup>194</sup> Ironically, *anarco-batllistas* were arguing precisely that they were supporting Batlle’s candidacy *because* it would spell the imminent end of the landed aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and (at some point

---

<sup>193</sup> “Los habitantes del Uruguay están atravesando por un periodo que se hace digno de ser estudiado por los mejores psicólogos del mundo. Desde hace un tiempo veníamos notando grandes novedades entre los individuos afiliados á todas las ideas políticas y filosóficas. Batlle, el que todo lo va á curar según el decir de sus admiradores, ha sido el causante de todos este trastorno cerebral entre dichos individuos; principiando por algunos curas, liberales, socialistas, y hasta algunos llamados anarquistas, todos han flaqueado de sus convicciones y se han aferrado á la situación como á una tabla salvadora. De todo hubo. Un diputado que días antes había renunciado como blanco, presentó su candidatura como liberal; un literato que hasta ayer había sido anarquista, viendo que las diputaciones eran tiradas á ‘la marchanta’ dijo: que había ‘evolucionado’ y se llamó también liberal, presentando su candidatura.” “Politiquerías,” *Tiempos Nuevos*, 23 December 1910, 3.

<sup>194</sup> “ANARQUISTAS—Un telegrama del Uruguay nos informa que los anarquistas de Montevideo acordaron apoyar la candidatura presidencial de Batlle y Ordóñez...” “...Todos los nobles y burgueses, incluso los políticos.” “Los anarquistas y la política,” *Tiempos Nuevos*, 15 January 1910, 5.

down the road) the politicians. Still, the internal conflicts of Uruguayan anarchism appeared to be raising some eyebrows abroad.

Ten days before the presidential election, *Salpicón* devoted its nineteenth and final issue entirely to Batlle, with laudatory articles, a poem, and a full-cover portrait of the Colorado leader. Contributors to the issue formed a *Who's Who of anarco-batllismo*. Alberto Lasplaces, author of “My Creed,” was a poet, educator, and journalist who had contributed to libertarian newspapers such as *La Acción Obrera* and *Solidaridad*. Living in Spain at the time of Francisco Ferrer’s arrest, Lasplaces had interviewed the Spanish political prisoner six days before his execution. Arrested shortly thereafter by Spanish authorities for allegedly inciting opposition to the government, he left for France as soon as charges were dropped.<sup>195</sup> Presumably his article, entitled “My Creed,” was written abroad and reflects a language very similar to that of de la Vega. “I have never had political convictions,” he began. “Politics, with its love of lies and hypocrisies, with its elevation of mediocrities; with its foundations based on violence and brutishness, causes me—simply put—revulsion. I cannot understand how certain people that claim to be honorable dedicate themselves to it.” But like de la Vega, Lasplaces saw Batlle as a different sort of politician. “And all of us partisans of those new horizons and promising futures should be with that man, all enemies of stagnation and stasis. We, the youth, that still have our eyes fixed on a marvelous ideal, should form a brilliant honor guard to

---

<sup>195</sup> In his interview with Ferrer, the soon-to-be martyr paid Uruguay this compliment: “It is a beautiful Republic. Its sons are very advanced in the social sciences [...]. It must be a great people.” Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 113-114.

surround Batlle—not with a ring of iron but with a circle of hearts and a crown of minds.”<sup>196</sup>

Ovido Fernández Ríos was another heterodox radical. Also a poet and journalist, Fernández Ríos mingled with anarchist intellectuals and, beginning in 1910, edited *La Semana*, a magazine dedicated to literary and cultural criticism. Several anarchist intellectuals (including Lasplaces and de la Vega) made a part of their living publishing in such bohemian and liberal (but not radical) publications. About the time he took up *La Semana*'s editorship, Fernández Ríos drifted toward *batllismo*. Enlisting in Batlle's camp proved to be financially beneficial. He became co-editor of *El Día* and later embarked on a long career in national politics; he served as secretary to President Feliciano Viera (Batlle's successor in 1915) and was elected several times to the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>197</sup>

Without necessarily imputing the personal motivations for their switch to *anarco-batllismo*, it is an inescapable conclusion that most high-profile defectors experienced career advancement and often upward economic mobility. Froilán Vásquez Ledesma, Jr., was, apparently, one of the only exceptions. He had a long history of journalistic endeavors in liberal, anti-clerical, and anarchist publications both in Montevideo and the countryside, including *La Reforma*, *El Baluarte*, *Despertar*, *La Acción Obrera*, *La Nueva Senda*, and *El Surco*. His journalism ran him afoul of the law twice (once sent him to

---

<sup>196</sup> “Jamás he tenido convicciones políticas...” “No he hecho más que mirar la lucha de los perros hambrientos, desde la barrera. La política, con su cortejo de falsedades é hipocresías, con el encumbramiento de las mediocridades; con sus puntales á base de violencia y embrutecimiento, me cause simplemente, asco. No comprendo como ciertas personas que se quieren decir honradas, se dedican á ella.” “Y con ese hombre debemos estar todos los partidarios de los nuevos horizontes y de los claros porvenires; todos los evolucionistas y revolucionarios; todos los enemigos del estancamiento y de la cristalización. Nosotros, la juventud, los que todavía tenemos estáticas las pupilas en un ensueño maravilloso, debemos formar una guardia de honor brillante, para rodear á Batlle, no de un círculo de hierro, sino de un círculo de corazones y de una corona de cerebros.” “Mi credo,” *Salpicón*, 19 February 1911, 4.

<sup>197</sup> “Y esto le acontece á los hombres Fuertes qué, llevando la verdad en los labios y el entusiasmo en el corazón, no pueden aplaudir ni defender á Batlle, sin que le zumben al oído los dardos del dicterio y el murmullo colérico de las almas harapientas é impotentes!” “¡Una limosna!” *Salpicón*, 19 February 1911, 4; Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 87.

prison), both times for possibly libelous accusations of priestly sexual misconduct.

Vásquez Ledesma contributed to the *Salpicón* issue verses welcoming Batlle's return from Europe and his (expected) second presidency: "Because if yesterday you knew how to expand your fame/ As sincere warrior, the people today beg / For liberation that motivates and exalts you!"<sup>198</sup>

The final and most distinguished contributor was, of course, Leoncio Lasso de la Vega. At the time of this controversy he was in his late forties, a veteran of radical intellectual circles in Europe, Argentina, and Uruguay. He was a famous writer, poet, and journalist, contributor to several important literary, anti-clerical, and political newspapers and magazines. *Anarco-batllismo* would be his final political adventure; he passed away in 1915 just prior to passage of the eight-hour law.<sup>199</sup>

In most cases, *anarco-batllistas* were highly visible and respected anarchists, which made their defection all the more painful and surely attracted others to the new faction. De la Vega certainly falls in this category. So too did Ángel Falco, a celebrated poet and orator and a prominent propagandist for the libertarian cause, whose efforts earned him the title "paladin of anarchism." He pledged his support for Batlle's presidency during the 1910 electoral campaign. Other defectors included Edmundo Bianchi, a poet and prolific journalist. Even Adrián Troitiño, a long-time anarchist militant in both Uruguay and Argentina, while not entirely won over to *anarco-batllismo*, departed the libertarian ranks in 1913 by advocating that workers enter the electoral arena to support the most progressive politicians; he published these opinions in Batlle's

---

<sup>198</sup> "Porque si ayer supiste engrandecer tu fama/ De luchador sincero, el pueblo es hoy conjuro/ De afanes libertarios que te impulsa y aclama!" "José Batlle y Ordóñez," *Salpicón*, 19 February 1911, 4; Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 189-190.

<sup>199</sup> Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 114-116.

privately owned newspaper, *El Día*. Troitiño eventually became a member of the Socialist Party. Even the prolific writer, orator, and respected activist Virginia Bolten—veteran of libertarian struggles in Uruguay and Argentina and perhaps the most famous anarcho-feminist in the Río de la Plata region—also expressed sympathy for *batllismo*, although she never abandoned radicalism.<sup>200</sup>

In terms of experience in and knowledge about labor politics, Francisco Corney Plana was arguably anarchism's greatest defector and a boon to Colorados and Uruguay's police apparatus. Corney had risen to prominence as the general secretary of the FORU in 1906. But his authoritarian behavior precipitated the formation of a committee in 1910 to circumvent his direction of the federation.<sup>201</sup> In 1915 or 1916, Corney began working for the notorious Montevideo chief of police, Virgilio Sampognaro, informing on individuals who had once been his comrades. He also used his influence to steer workers toward José Batlle and the Colorado Party. The first instance of such political shepherding took place during the 1911 general strike and is described below. Then in January 1917, Corney appears to have given a speech encouraging workers to give their support in the upcoming elections to President Feliciano Viera, the Colorado Party, and its head, José Batlle. A hand-written copy of the speech, signed by the author, wound up among Sampognaro's reports and letters from Corney. Other archival evidence suggests a high degree of coordination with the chief of police to infiltrate labor unions and guide workers over to *batllismo*. Overcome with guilt, Corney took his own life in 1921.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 45-49, 68-71, 177-180.

<sup>201</sup> Díaz, *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte*, 43-45.

<sup>202</sup> Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Virgilio Sampognaro, Caja 216, Carpeta 21. Hojas 1-7 are a copy of the speech; Zubillaga, *Perfiles en sombra*, 81-84.



Orthodox anarchists reacted initially through *Tiempos Nuevos* and, after that paper closed in 1911, through *Anarkos*. But the most strident anarchist response to *anarco-batllismo* was the newspaper *El Anarquista*, born in 1913. The paper was founded by Antonio Marzovillo and Juan Borobio, two anarchists who had been involved in the early polemics around political participation within the libertarian community. Nearly every single article in its surviving nine issues references the factional split within anarchism. The newspaper decried the flirtations of many anarchists with *batllismo* and even reported that some had wandered into the Blanco camp! The paper argued, with some hyperbole, that *anarco-batllismo* threatened to extinguish anarchism in Uruguay altogether. Columnists reported with alarm that those who had been “steadfast anarchists” now take part in “demonstrations in favor of the Constitutional Reform; anarchists are visible in political clubs; anarchists proclaim the advantages of legal reformism.”<sup>203</sup> Some were even gaining employment through their new political connections.<sup>204</sup> As for the issue of reform, the newspaper restated what had long been anarchist positions: politicians, including Batlle, were either incapable of or unwilling to seriously challenge capitalism. Even if labor protections passed, they would not be enforced; labor movements would demobilize in anticipation that progressive politicians would force compliance with the law, only to be chronically disappointed. Reformism was a chimera—a delusion and a monstrous distortion that threatened working-class organization.

**“Revolutionary Urgency.”** Why this sudden and dramatic split between orthodoxy and pragmatism? Certainly there had been incentives and early signs of

---

<sup>203</sup> “...En pró de la reforma de la Constitución; anarquistas vocean las ventajas del reformismo legalitario...” “El anarquista,” *El Anarquista*, 16 April 1913, 1.

<sup>204</sup> “La resaca del anarquismo,” *El Anarquista*, 16 April 1913, 3-4.

tension over anarchist cooperation with the state. A faction of state officials from both parties—under duress at times given the increasing acuteness of the social question—had for some years attempted to give substantial protections and improvements to workers. After comparative freedom of organization and struggle during the first Batlle administration, President Williman and Colonel West had, at least for a few years, quashed the labor movement. The extraordinary constraints radicals faced in Argentina during 1910 may have also factored into the *anarco-batllistas*' calculus. Could Uruguay become another Argentina? Now Batlle was coming back for a second term and with him greater potential for militancy and activism. All of that might have been incentive enough. But given that examples exist of similar accommodations between anarchists and state officials—all within about thirty years of each other—from Europe to the Middle East to Latin America, perhaps something more was afoot.

During the Mexican Revolution, Mexico City anarchists associated with the Casa del Obrero Mundial made a critical alliance with Venustiano Carranza; in exchange for promises of a favorable post-revolutionary political environment (including some labor protections), anarchists joined, fought alongside, and, most importantly, held Mexico City for the *caudillo*. In fact, they organized “Red Battalions” and contributed over ten thousand troops to the Constitutionalist cause. Carranza kept his side of the bargain until he felt his position secure and no longer needed anarchist support. In late 1915, when anarchist unions went on strike in opposition to the Constitutionalist government's new restrictive and inadequate labor laws, Carranza responded with a heavy hand; he repressed anarchists and sponsored new government-friendly unions. Mexico's welfare

state, then, developed as the government stifled the more radical elements of the working classes.<sup>205</sup>

In Argentina, the scholarly literature provides two examples of an *anarco-batllista*-like faction. Historian Juan Suriano speaks of a “revolutionary urgency” among radicals that at times pulled some into mainstream politics. He also points to the larger problem of intellectuals defecting from anarchism in the early twentieth century, especially with the possibility of upward mobility through a government job, a post at a mainstream newspaper, or an academic appointment. Despite the prominence of intellectuals as orators, leaders, and the public face of anarchism, such defections created “an extremely weak link between intellectuals and the anarchist movement,” probably hurting the latter in the long run. There were similar disconnections in Uruguay at the time.<sup>206</sup>

In 1916, just as state reforms had begun to pass in Uruguay, newly enfranchised workers in Argentina propelled the Radical Party to power. Populist Hipólito Yrigoyen won the presidency and, like the traditional Uruguayan parties, sought to pacify labor conflicts and build a political base among workers by extending protective legislation. As Joel Horowitz discovered in Argentina, anarchist-influenced syndicalists became the faction Yrigoyen most preferred to negotiate with, since both the president and the syndicalists were pragmatic and preferred “informal relationships.” Moves toward a welfare state came to a halt when Yrigoyen found it politically difficult to continue supporting labor during the post-World War I strikes. He quickly turned to repression,

---

<sup>205</sup> Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860-1931*, 126-141, 150-152, 154-155.

<sup>206</sup> Suriano, *Paradoxes of Utopia*, 44, 86-89, 171.

which culminated during the *Semana Trágica* (or Tragic Week), when police and right-wing gangs killed hundreds of workers. In 1923, when Argentina's second Radical president, Marcelo Alvear, and his allies attempted to establish a pension system, most workers, including syndicalists, actually joined employers in opposing state-sponsored pensions and went on strike. The *Semana Trágica*, perhaps, had taught workers to be wary of government intervention; workers rejected a pension system using arguments very similar to those made by orthodox anarchists in Uruguay against labor reforms.<sup>207</sup>

In Palestine, the *kibbutz* movement of the First (and even the Second) Aliyah were heavily influenced by anarchism, especially by the writings of Gustav Landauer and Leo Tolstoy. Libertarian values have remained central to the internal organization of the *kibbutzim*. However, as historian James Horrox explains, while egalitarian and solidaristic values have persisted in *kibbutz* life, such communities did not extend this treatment to neighbors; members of the *kibbutzim* participated in the creation of the Israeli state with all the accompanying atrocities. It would be a stretch to say that anarchists participated in the creation of the Israeli state. But it is fitting to claim that the anarchist-influenced *kibbutz* movement colluded, at a moment of crisis, with a project of occupation—a tragic departure from libertarian socialist values.<sup>208</sup>

Far less controversial, one can see the alliance anarchists made with the Spanish Republic during the civil war against fascism as a pragmatic decision motivated by a moment of crisis. Given the examples above, we can conclude that, in Uruguay as in other countries, anarchism in the early to mid-twentieth century proved to be a malleable

---

<sup>207</sup> Horowitz, *Argentina's Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1916-1930*, 96-117, 128-129.

<sup>208</sup> James Horrox, *A Living Revolution: Anarchism and the Kibbutz Movement* (Edinburgh, Oakland, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2009).

ideology responsive to exigency, extraordinary need (revolution, resettlement), or opportunity (populism).

**Mediation and Intercession.** In late June 1910, *El Día* made the surprising announcement that the Labor Office had been charged with drafting a bill to create a pension system for all workers; the draft would be submitted to the Executive Branch and then to Parliament. Bureaucrats sought feedback on details such as how deductions would be made to workers' wages. And in order to address these important issues, "nothing has seemed more appropriate than to consult about the unknowns with union delegates who represent the interests of the working classes." The newspaper reported that the Labor Office had already held a preliminary meeting with the Construction Workers Resistance Society (Sociedad de Resistencia Obreros Albañiles). "These delegates proved to be decided supporters of the proposed law although they stated their opinion that [the bill] should not be written with the character of absolute obligation since they believe that the most ample liberty should be given on this matter, giving workers the freedom to take advantage of the benefits of this law if they [individually] consider it advantageous."<sup>209</sup>

A week later the Construction Workers Resistance Society, through *El Día*, invited all resistance societies to a summit to be held at their center to formulate a response to the Labor Office's request.<sup>210</sup> Following the meeting, the societies issued a statement saying that "considering that the Labor Office is a dependency of the State which in turn is a ramification of capital—fruit of the labor of the dispossessed and which in consequence eternally perpetuates the exploitation of man by man—[resistance

---

<sup>209</sup> "Mejoramiento obrero: PENSIONES Y RETIROS," *El Día*, 22 June 1910, 4.

<sup>210</sup> "Movimiento obrero: PENSIONES OBRERAS," *El Día*, 29 June 1910, 5.

societies] should not attend the gathering [with the Office] because it would imply intervening in the creation of laws that have no other object but to legalize the exploitation from which we want to emancipate ourselves.”<sup>211</sup> On its surface, there is nothing surprising about the declaration. But a second glance raises a question and reveals a powerful concern. One, what happened to the construction workers? They had eagerly (and unilaterally) answered the Labor Office’s call but after meeting with the other resistance societies decided not to break ranks. Two, aside from the orthodox anti-statist rhetoric, the societies assembled expressed a new concern: that they did not wish to “legalize exploitation.” In other words, at this historic moment when the state was extending its social duties, anarchists worried that new labor laws would give their own exploitation the additional force of law.

The issue quieted for two months. Then the Labor Office announced it would proceed with its original plan with one big adjustment. Officials drafted the bill without any input from labor representatives, resistance societies, other labor unions, or workers in general.<sup>212</sup> A valuable story in itself, the conflict over pensions illustrates yet another instance of state attempts to bring workers to the negotiating table. It was subtle, benevolent sounding, not pressured (meaning it did not come during a strike), and one resistance society took the bait. But just like in the 1908 railroad strike when mediation broke down, the state acted unilaterally. Later, *El Día* covered for the Labor Office by arguing the benefits of benevolent state tutelage, preparatory to more democracy.<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>211</sup> “Movimiento obrero: PENSIONES OBRERAS,” *El Día*, 2 July 1910, 6.

<sup>212</sup> “Las pensiones obreras: El proyecto de la Oficina del Trabajo: Contribuci[ó]n del Estado y de los obreros: Importancia social del gran asunto,” *El Día*, 8 September 1910, 4-5.

<sup>213</sup> “PENSIONES OBRERAS: EL SEGURO OBLIGATORIO,” *El Día*, 30 September 1910, 3.

By early May 1911, labor organization had finally recovered from its three years of stagnation. FORU celebrated its third labor conference around May Day, holding an enormous parade and demonstration. Meanwhile, discontent between workers and management at the British and German-owned streetcar system brewed, leading to a strike on May 12<sup>th</sup> that in turn provoked Uruguay's first general strike. All resistance societies within FORU immediately pledged support for the trolley workers and most initiated solidarity strikes. The result was a general paralysis of Montevideo with labor actions also taking place in the countryside. One day after FORU's third conference and eighteen days before the general strike, Batlle requested from Parliament a copy of his original labor bill introduced in the dusk of his first administration. He wanted to make some revisions before asking Parliament to reconsider it. He resubmitted it to the General Assembly on July 11<sup>th</sup>, following the largest labor action to date in Uruguay's history.<sup>214</sup>

The general strike of 1911 has received considerable attention from historians as a pivotal demonstration of labor's power. And it certainly was. Solidarity was at an all-time high and most resistance societies came to the aid of the trolley workers. The city was shut down for three days. As the press reported, there was an air of general awe felt by workers, city residents, and the government. Batlle expressed his support—within the bounds of law—for the strike, provoking a critical moment of rapprochement between president and workers, a moment facilitated by an *anarco-batllista*.<sup>215</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 207, 4 May 1911, 258; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 211, 4 July 1911, 2.

<sup>215</sup> Anton Rosenthal, "Streetcar Workers and the Transformation of Montevideo: The General Strike of May 1911," *The Americas*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Apr. 1995), 471-494; Rodríguez Díaz, *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte*; Milton I. Vanger, *The Model Country: José Batlle y Ordoñez of Uruguay, 1907-1915* (Hanover: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1980), 122-140.

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, after the 37 resistance societies that made up FORU formally declared the general strike, a large group of workers jubilantly marched through the city. A contingent of about one thousand people broke off and made their way to the presidential palace, chanting “Long live the general strike!” along with “Long live Batlle!” The president appeared on the balcony, receiving thunderous applause. It was at this moment that Ángel Falco climbed a tree near the palace and entreated Batlle on behalf of workers. “The people, who know you” he said, “expect that you will maintain your customary attitude during this emergency before the battle taking place between the strikers and the corporations; from you, who has led the country down the paths of liberty...you cannot remain indifferent to this movement. [FORU], genuine representative of workers..., has declared the general strike, not against the government and the authorities that have remained neutral as in other countries, but rather against the companies who have not respected agreements made with employees. And so this rally salutes you...shouting, Long live Batlle y Ordóñez!” The president responded diplomatically, illuminating the limits of labor struggle. “The laws and the order that I am obligated to maintain due to my position do not allow me to participate in your struggle. I am charged with safeguarding order and the rights of all citizens... And so, the Government will guarantee your rights so long as you stay within the confines of legality. Organize yourselves, unite and try to conquer the betterment of your economic conditions with the assurance that you will never have an enemy in the Government so long as you respect order and law.”<sup>216</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> “Viva la huelga general.” “Viva Batlle.” “El pueblo, que os conoce, espera de vos que sabréis mantener la actitud de siempre en esta emergencia, anta la batalla que se está librando entre los huelguistas y las empresas; de vos, que habéis guiado al país por sendas de libertad...vos no podéis permanecer extraño



Batlle's indication that he blessed the strike added the critical caveat that his support for it would end at the first sign of disorder—attacks on property, violence, etc. He mobilized three battalions of the military (one infantry, one cavalry, and one artillery), deployed at every major intersection of the city, especially along the main stretch—18 de Julio—fully armed and accompanied by machine guns. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, striking workers attacked with rocks one trolley operating in defiance of the strike. Police responded violently and wounded several in the scuffle. Though the resistance society gained important concessions (including the eight-hour workday and union recognition), the costs of the strike in the long run to trolley workers and solidarity strikers were enormous. Dozens of workers lost their jobs; 85 workers were jailed by police and faced legal prosecution. The managers of the trolley companies maintained a level of hostility that translated into constant maneuvering against workers, heightened surveillance, and punitive firings.

It was within these limitations that the state deployed mediators; the media also attempted to provide arbitration. Representative Héctor Gómez was the main negotiator during the strike. He was also the vice-president of the *Círculo de Prensa* (the Press Circle). FORU, seemingly uncritically, accepted the mediation, for which it was heavily criticized over after the strike ended. The stakes were very high and perhaps most were

---

a este movimiento... La Federación Obrera, representante genuina de los trabajadores..., ha decretado la huelga general, no como en otros países, contra el gobierno y las autoridades que han sabido mantener la neutralidad, sino contra las empresas que no han respetado las condiciones pactadas con los obreros. Así esta manifestación se despide de vos...gritando ¡Viva Batlle y Ordóñez!" "Las leyes y el orden que estoy obligado a mantener por deber a mi cargo, no me permiten tomar una participación activa en vuestra contienda. Soy el encargado de hacer cumplir el orden y los derechos de todos los ciudadanos... Y por lo tanto, el Gobierno garantizará vuestros derechos mientras os mantengáis dentro del terreno de la legalidad. Organizáos [sic], uníos y tratad de conquistar el mejoramiento de vuestras condiciones económicas, que podéis estar seguros que en el Gobierno no tendréis nunca un enemigo, mientras respetéis el orden y las leyes." "Otra vez en plena huelga. Lo que ocurrió ayer. El tráfico se restableció. Se interrumpe el tráfico. ¿La huelga general? Información completa," *El Siglo*, 23 May 1911 as quoted in Rodríguez Díaz, *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte*, 107-111.

willing to put principles aside for a major tactical victory.<sup>217</sup> Reformism within anarchist circles, which had first appeared in 1905, had taken firm root ideologically—among *anarco-batllistas*—and tactically—among resistance societies.

---

<sup>217</sup> Rodríguez Díaz, *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte*, 106, 114-115, 119-122.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *“Encauzando” “el principio de la solidaridad”*: Labor Law’s Discourse, Passage, and Practice

Previous chapters have examined the ethics, attitudes, and ideologies of workers at the turn of the twentieth century and how those translated into labor politics. This included the introduction of Uruguay’s first labor bill in 1904 and the ideological splits among anarchists over the possibility of pragmatic and short-term participation in state-building. This chapter is about the development of parliamentary (and therefore public) discourse(s) about state reform, pressures from below, and lofty goals developed locally and borrowed from abroad. It then examines the breach between discourse and practice, tying parliamentary ambitions to workers’ responses and the consequences of state action as these took effect. In essence, this is Chapter Two upside-down: it examines the (publicly stated) ethics, attitudes, and ideologies of state officials at the turn of the twentieth century and how those translated into labor policy and politics.

While all declarations made in Parliament or in the press by state officials were political theater (and, therefore, cannot be taken at face value), they also represented what was politically salient; they set the parameters of public debate, of what was politically possible. Even while discussing failed bills—of which there were many, given that the first did not pass until 1913—legislators developed justifications and specific proposals that future lawmakers could resurrect in future rounds of bill-making. In fact, almost every time a politician proposed a new law he would (often selectively) cite

antecedents—scrapped bills, parliamentary hearings, and committee reports.<sup>218</sup>

Institutional memory actually became a point of contention in some hearings when one faction or party schooled another on who had proposed a bill first (see below).

In Uruguay, parliamentarians passed social and labor laws in full consciousness of being the first country in the Americas to do so; among the first in the world; and at the cusp of what they saw as modernity, progress, and even inevitability. This is visible from the discourse surrounding the many failed and the few successful bills introduced between 1904 and 1916. Study of this discourse also establishes the presence of a deep anxiety among legislators of all stripes regarding the social question. Divided on how to address the increasing friction between workers and employers (and therefore between workers and the state), there was general agreement that Uruguay sooner or later would walk in Europe's footsteps, tracing the cycles of proletarianization, industrialization, and class warfare. If Uruguay's leaders did not act in advance and accurately on the lessons of Europe's recent history, the consequences could be catastrophic. Nevertheless, solutions legislators proposed to some of the most pressing labor problems turned out to be tardy, piecemeal, and at least in the case of the eight-hour workday, disastrous, leading to the almost completely unstudied strike wave of 1916. Still, negotiation and mediation by state officials (long and contingent affairs), and the dynamics of state recognition, accustomed workers over the period studied to appealing to political representatives for redress. And the credit for reform went to state reformers.

---

<sup>218</sup> The most dramatic example of this came in 1913 during debate of the eight-hour workday bill. Prior to any discussion, Representative Rodríguez asked that—in order to educate legislators on the subject—every labor bill, committee report, and statement received from the public to date (ranging from labor unions to employers) on the subject be compiled and published in the parliamentary record. It was 124 pages long. *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 1 March 1913, 143-279.

**Parliamentary Discourse: Fear and Channeling.** Expressions of fear were ubiquitous in parliamentary hearings—specifically, fear of the escalation of class conflict unless steps were taken to improve conditions in Uruguay. In 1904, Ricardo Areco urged his colleagues to address “this great dilemma, before events oblige us to resolve it with haste and without study.”<sup>219</sup> Two years later, in 1906, José Batlle argued that Uruguay’s economy was still rather simple, industrialization yet in its early stages, and the number and complexity of interests on the part of employers low. Better to pass advanced labor legislation early, “before the complication and magnitude of the affected interests makes that work more difficult.”<sup>220</sup> A year later, Carlos Roxlo presented a bill that both legalized strikes and constrained union action. He argued that Uruguay needed to “address social questions that agitate and compel the universe.” “It is not conceivable...that one wait for the tempest to thunder before adjusting the sails of the ship: what is natural is to prepare them in advance when the sky begins to cloud to resist the buffetings of the gale.” “Already, on more than one occasion, the Republic—above all the Capital—has been disturbed by social movements.” He pointed across the river to the appearance of “the latest revolutionary movement” in Buenos Aires. Time to adjust the sails.<sup>221</sup>

---

<sup>219</sup> “...Esta gran cuestión, antes que los sucesos nos obliguen á solucionarla con rapidez y la falta de estudio.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 3 May 1904, 326-327.

<sup>220</sup> “...Antes que la complicación y la magnitud de los intereses afectados haga más dificultosa esa tarea.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 1 March 1913, 147-150; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 189, 27 December 1906, 454.

<sup>221</sup> “[Empezar] á interesarse en las cuestiones sociales, que agitan y conmueven al universo.” “No se concibe...que se espere á que truene la tempestad para preparar el velamen del navío: lo natural es prepararlo con anticipación, para resistir las rachas del vendaval, cuando se nubla el cielo.” “Ya, en más de una ocasión, la República,—sobre todo la Capital,—han sido conmovidas por movimientos sociales.” “...El último movimiento revolucionario...” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 190, 9 March 1907, 90-91.

Amid the unprecedented wave of labor unrest during mid-1905 (referenced in the previous chapter), Representative Luis Alberto de Herrera lamented—possibly for the economic damage that it caused—“that workers have to leave the workshops to go out onto the streets, sacrificing [sustenance] for their homes to demand rights they do not possess.” The representative exhibited a high degree of awareness of workers’ plight: many lacked a weekly day of rest and suffered long work hours “that today in some industries reaches great extremes, from 15 to 16 hours, as happens with trolley overseers.” The labor bill he had co-sponsored would limit these outrageous workdays and hopefully avoid strikes altogether through a proposed Committee on Social Questions. “This not only benefits the working classes but also the Government whose interests we are obligated to serve.”<sup>222</sup>

Carlos Roxlo argued that one major impediment to labor-friendly governance was workers themselves: by and large organized under the black banner of anarchism, Uruguayan workers hated the government. Because of chronic victimization, including by “those who claimed to be partisans of their ideas,” workers were wary “of all those that do not belong to their unions and do not experience the same penuries and do not have the same hopes.” This led to a “great error in the manner the proletarian classes reason: the error of believing that bills for labor reforms solely come from those truly close to workers, such as liberals.” This was simply not true. After all, hadn’t Joseph

---

<sup>222</sup> “...Que los obreros tengan que abandonar los talleres para salir á la calle, sacrificando sus hogares para demandar derechos que no poseen.” “...Estallidos...” “...Pueden tener ó no razón,” de Herrera insisted that “hay una porción de lunares [*blemish*] que corregir en la organización gremial del país.” “...Que hoy en algunas industrias llega á extremos exorbitantes, de 15 á 16 horas, como pasa con los mayores de tranvías.” “Esto, no solamente en beneficio de las clases obreras, sino también en beneficio del Gobierno, cuyos intereses estamos obligados á server.” “...Una fuente irremplazable y preciosa.” “Para cubrir los servicios de la deuda exterior.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 30 May 1905, 367-375.

Chamberlain—who Roxlo claimed for the conservatives—been responsible for early labor legislation in England? Furthermore, it was in the state’s interest to react positively to workers’ demands. Roxlo cited a German government report in favor of passing a workers’ health insurance law. The report argued that “it is necessary that the State occupy itself very closely with these [labor] matters, not only for [the sake of] humanity, but also as a necessary postulate of its conservative politics, so that the penniless classes—which are the most numerous and the least educated—may realize that the State is a benign and a necessary institution.” In other words, states had yet to convince impoverished people of their necessity and potential goodness; it was part of conservative government policy that they be so persuaded. It should also be noted that this conception of the state—as social benefactor—was in stark contrast to older conservative notions of authority that justified the state through the premises of obligation and social order<sup>223</sup>; this *nouveau* conservatism vindicated states that guaranteed social order *because* of their benevolence, not the other way around.<sup>224</sup>

The basic causes of strikes were known to legislators. Carlos Prado mentioned the “three eights,” explicitly referring to the international labor’s rallying cry: *8 hours for work, 8 hours for rest, and 8 hours for what we will*. He called the eight-hour day “the most intractable demand of the proletariat classes, which grew intense in the mid-

---

<sup>223</sup> For a lengthy discussion regarding old and new conservative defenses of the state in Uruguay, see: Barrán, *Los conservadores uruguayos*.

<sup>224</sup> “Los que se decían partidarios de sus ideas” workers were wary “de todos aquellos que no pertenecen á sus gremios, y no pasan sus mismas penurias y no tiene sus mismos afanes.” “Hay un error gravísimo, en el modo de razonar de las clases proletarias: hay el error de creer que solamente vienen de las personas verdaderamente sindicadas como liberales, los proyectos de reformas obreras.” “Es necesario que el Estado se preocupe muy esencialmente de estas cuestiones [obreras], no solo por humanidad, sino también como un postulado necesario de su política conservadora, á fin de que las clases sin fortuna, que son las más numerosas y las menos instru[i]das, se den cuenta de que el Estado es una institución benéfica y es una institución necesaria.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 23 February 1905, 81-89.

nineteenth century.”<sup>225</sup> José Batlle agreed that, “among the diverse exigencies that lead to the strikes produced in this country are those that, almost without exception, try to establish the [eight hour] workday for the laborer and receipt of one full day of rest per week.” The president repeated almost verbatim the arguments of workers and their unions. Workers in “civilized society” deserved “a life of sentiments, of affections, of family, of society, and therefore, a right to have the time indispensable to participate in such things.” “When they have provided for the nourishing and rest of their organism, they should also be able to talk to their friends, to harmonize ideas with their wives, to caress their children and to broaden their moral and intellectual culture.” Life should not be all toil; everyone deserved a full and rich life: the Three Eights.<sup>226</sup>

If states did not protect worker rights and meet worker demands, they faced potential irrelevance. Perhaps the clearest statement along those lines came from Representative Muró. In mid-1905 he decried the recent strikes as threatening to “completely upset the commercial and economic flows of the entire Republic.” He reminded the chamber of Europe’s history of labor conflicts. At first, strikes were small, but as governments ignored workers’ demands they became violent, massacres ensued and, most threatening to social order, “the soldiers of the line did not want to open fire on the people.” While Uruguayan workers, he claimed, did not suffer materially or in work

---

<sup>225</sup> “...La reivindicación más porfiada de las clases proletarias, que tomó gran intensidad á mediados del siglo XIX.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 4 March 1913, 290-306.

<sup>226</sup> “Entre las diversas exigencias que formulan las huelgas que se producen en el país, figura casi sin excepción la de que se produzca el trabajo diario del obrero y se le conceda un día entero de descanso por semana.” “...La vida del sentimiento, de las afecciones, de la familia, de la sociedad y, por lo tanto, el derecho de disponer del tiempo indispensable para participar de esos bienes.” “Cuando hayan destinado á la alimentación y al reposo de su organismo el tiempo necesario, todavía deben disponer de alguno más para hablar con sus amigos, para armonizar ideas con sus esposas, para conocer y acariciar á sus hijos y para extender su cultura moral é intelectual.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 1 March 1913, 147-150; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 189, 27 December 1906, 454.



regimes similar to their European counterparts, the country's labor movement had matured. Small strikes had occurred, the number of unions had grown, and now solidarity strikes were common. Indeed, Muró appeared most worried that workers had achieved "the principle of solidarity." By insinuation, European-style movements could not be far away. In order to avert this trajectory, "it is necessary to anticipate so as not to repress."

This "principle of solidarity" merits discussion. Worker solidarity—horizontal, reciprocal, extensive—was in direct competition with state provisioning, a mechanism being passed around the globe from one modern innovative state official to another.<sup>227</sup> This was a kind of aid that was vertical, extractive in the act of providing, and bounded (by gender, citizenship, occupation, ability to resist, etc.). In a quickly transforming world, the two types of aid paralleled one another, vying for ascendance through quickly expanding networks fashioned by workers and activists, police and parliamentarians, crisscrossing the globe; the agents of order sought new sustenance for their political edifice, subalterns the means of survival and resistance. Muró's two options—of state provisioning and repression—were the endpoints of a range of options available to states in a fast-changing world. To the degree that state officials were able to build vertical systems of provisioning and protection, it would be possible to "anticipate so as not to repress."

President Williman in 1909 also addressed the issue of solidarity, state inadequacy, and the need for a positive response to social demand. When arguing for an accident insurance bill, he stated that times were different and law needed "all the necessary plasticity to translate at a given moment the shifting formula of necessities and

---

<sup>227</sup> Drinot, *The Allure of Labor*.

popular demands.” Technology and its relationship to work had transformed the older notions of individual responsibility on which the old laws had been based, making blame for accidents no longer clear-cut. Given that uncertainty, it was unjust to place the full burden of mishap and attendant misery or death directly on workers and their dependents. Moreover, since workers had become appendages to the workplace, replaceable just as machinery was replaceable, and since the cost of replacing machinery was always passed on to consumers, so too should consumers ultimately pay for workplace accidents by paying for accident insurance premiums. “This [bill], in summary, represents a new manifestation of that beautiful and fecund principal of human solidarity, that to the honor of man every day takes deeper root in the soul of peoples and demonstrates with vibrant traits the moral progress of humanity.” As with Representative Muró, there is a similar undercurrent of trepidation in Williman’s positive statements. It was a fear that while people had developed a “beautiful and fecund principal of human solidarity,” the old state form was ill-equipped to accommodate (or, cynically, to channel/manage) these aspirations.<sup>228</sup>

Perhaps the most important crossbeam for the modern reformed state was the notion that labor and capital need not be enemies. As Representative Paullier put it, the state “is interested in the harmonic functioning of these two opposing but not contradictory forces.” Paullier proposed an autonomous role for the state as a

---

<sup>228</sup> “...Toda la plasticidad suficiente para traducir en un momento determinado la fórmula cambiante de las necesidades y de las exigencias populares que no constituyen en definitiva más que el reflejo del progreso científico, cuyo avasallador empuje va marcando las tapas seculares de la civilización universal.” “...Ahora que la acción aislada é individual se convierte en una acción conjunta y colectiva.” “Ella representa, en suma, una manifestación nueva de ese principio hermoso y fecundo de la solidaridad humana, que para honor del hombre cada día arraiga más hondo en el alma de los pueblos y señala con rasgos vibrantes el progreso moral de la humanidad.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 199, 11 May 1909, 69-122.

technocratic arbiter of social forces. “It is necessary to proceed with calm energy, to study the symptoms, to investigate, to go to the workshops, to listen to the workers, to go to the great business establishments and to listen to the capitalists; to try to weigh the arguments of each side, and then, with a full understanding of the symptom...the State will be able to channel—*encauzar*—this wave that threatens to invade everything and sweep away everything!” Paullier was informed and sympathetic, representing the progressive side of the reformist faction. He dismissed popular wisdom that “in our country the social question does not exist—this is an error,” or the oft stated fallacy that here “the working class enjoys a certain comfort, living in a relatively easy way.” He had actually crossed the railroad tracks and seen the desperation and want with which Uruguayan workers lived. And these miseries “are surely not children of vice, but rather progeny of the economic disequilibrium in which we live.”<sup>229</sup>

Following his own trip across the tracks as part of an investigatory committee, Roxlo said that he “wanted the worker to become convinced that the country, the nation, the Legislative Body, were interested in his well-being.” He demonstrated a knowledge of details and examples about the plight of workers acquired during the committee’s foray into the workshops and tenements. “We wanted the construction worker, who

---

<sup>229</sup> “...Felizmente, el orden no puede haber sido más perfecto: hay respeto mutuo entre patrones y obreros, y un verdadero acatamiento á las autoridades constituidas...” “...Son de tanta trascendencia que trastornan por complete el movimiento comercial y económico de toda la República.” “...Las fuerzas de línea no querían hacer fuego sobre el pueblo.” “...El principio de la solidaridad.” “Es necesario prever para no reprimir...” “...Está interesado en el funcionamiento armónico de esas dos fuerzas opuestas, pero no contradictorias.” “Es necesario proceder con ánimo tranquilo, estudiar las causas, investigar, ir á los talleres, oír á los obreros, ir á las grandes empresas y oír á los capitalistas; tratar de pesar los argumentos de unos y de otros; y entonces, con pleno conocimiento de la causa, con muy pocas leyes..., con muy pocas medidas, el Estado podrá encauzar esta ola que amenaza invadirlo todo y arrastrarlo todo!” “...En nuestro país la cuestión social no existe; es un error” or the oft stated fallacy that here “la clase obrera goza de cierta holgura, vive de una manera relativamente fácil.” “...No son por cierto hijas del vicio, sino hijas del desequilibrio económico en que vivimos.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 30 May 1905, 367-375.

works on the scaffolding, to know that we are aware of the anguish he experiences when he considers that, if that fragile board that holds him up were to break and the culpability of the employer could not be proved, his widow and orphans would be at the mercy of charity.” He had further examples of possible disasters awaiting fishermen, the aged, and industrial workers as they attempted to survive and provide for their families.

His worries then turned to strikes. The committee’s mid-1905 report avoided their regulation “because the right to strike is a licit one accepted in all free countries [in another place he says ‘civilized nations’] be they republican or monarchical,” as long as “the strikers do not resort to violence, always that strikers do not thwart the freedom of labor.” Besides, Roxlo said, strikes were a symptom and not a disease. “Just as in medical issues so too in social ones,” so long as the affliction remains untreated “sooner or later the illness will become acute and the cure radical.”

Perhaps, then, unions themselves needed to be regulated. “If labor unions are not channeled [*no se encauzasen*—there was that word again] through legal channels [*cauze*] they shall become a real threat to public order, to the health of the country.” His bill mandated that all unions be required to have legal standing by registering with the state. In line with the prevalent worry that newly arrived immigrants were the most radical of workers, the bill mandated that unions could only be led by citizens with three years of residence and who were employed. Properly constituted, unions could be of great benefit to workers without being a threat to order.<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> “Queríamos que el obrero se convenciera de que el país, la nación, el Cuerpo Legislativo, estaban interesados en su ventura.” “Queríamos que el albañil, que trabaja sobre el andamio, supiera que nosotros nos damos cuenta de la angustia que experimenta al pensar que, si se rompe la frágil tabla que lo sostiene y no puede probarse la culpabilidad del patrón, su viuda y sus huérfanos quedan entregados á la

Several other attempts were made to control unions and limit strikes. In 1907, Roxlo presented legislation that claimed to legalize strikes—they were not illegal but their treatment by the authorities varied widely by president and moment—when in fact it merely regulated them. Consistent with his rhetorical concern for workers and also his apparently very real worry about disorderly ones, the bill protected strikes so long as they did not “employ violence or threats,” shut down electricity, water, transportation, or port services without at least eight days’ notice, or impeded “freedom of work.”<sup>231</sup> The bill did not pass.

The next year, during the country’s largest railroad strike up to that time, Representative Javier Mendivil presented an arbitration bill to his colleagues. The legislation made arbitration mandatory—by request of either party or by the president—for any strike involving a vital public service, whether privately or publicly owned, such as ports, railroads, telegraphs, telephones, trolleys, and water works. For the duration of the arbitration process, dismissals (barring egregious misconduct by an employee) and strikes or boycotts were prohibited. Arbitration would be binding for one year. The bill also proposed a National Labor Department that would promote workplace harmony and recommend labor laws.

In 1914, Representatives Buero and Miranda proposed that workers in every trade create their own government-registered unions, subjecting them to a council for the

---

caridad.” “...Porque el derecho á la huelga es un derecho lícito y aceptado en todos los países libres [in another place he said “países cultos”], sean repúblicas ó monarquías,” as long as “los huelguistas no apelen á la amenaza ó la violencia, siempre que los huelguistas no contraríen la libertad de la labor.” “Y tanto en materia social como en materia médica...más ó menos tarde la enfermedad hará su explosión y la cura será radical.” “...Es el ansia legítima del obrero de mejorar su situación social.” “Si los sindicatos obreros no se encauzasen en un cauce legal, se convertirían en un verdadero peligro para el orden público, para la salud del país.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 182, 24 June 1905, 86-95.

<sup>231</sup> “...Libertad de trabajo...” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 190, 9 March 1907, 90-91.

purposes of a compulsory arbitration system and the drafting of binding work contracts. The bill managed to all but empty the value of unions; strikes would be completely illegal and the services that many unions and other organizations tried to provide for their members through mutuality (health care, funeral services, and disability insurance) would have become a state function. Unions would have existed as shell societies, “channeled” as Representatives Roxlo and Paullier had called for, and barren of that “principle of solidarity” that so unnerved Muró.<sup>232</sup>

**Parliamentary Discourse: Party Competition and Two Doctrines.** As seen in Chapter Three, the *descanso dominical* movement was the first to introduce a labor bill. The act of proposing such a bill immediately ignited party competition; recall Colorado Representative Ricardo Areco’s bill introduced in the middle of the *descanso* hearings. Social Catholics fueled that competition by appealing to both political parties. First they enlisted a Blanco (Representative Oriol Solé Rodríguez) to sponsor the bill and then they secured President Batlle’s support for it on two occasions. In 1905, when Blancos presented a new labor bill—this one by their own initiative—Carlos Roxlo offered to share credit with the majoritarian Colorados for its passage. After all, “the sanction and execution of the law would be the work of the Colorado Party.” “Once the law is sanctioned—whoever their authors may be—that law becomes national law, without emblem and without war colors”—a reference to the white and red handkerchiefs worn by Blancos and Colorados during the civil wars of the not so distant past.<sup>233</sup>

---

<sup>232</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 233, 7 July 1914, 332-336.

<sup>233</sup> “...La sanción y la ejecución de la ley sería la obra del partido Colorado.” “Una vez sancionada la ley—sean cuales fueren sus autores—esa ley se convierte en ley nacional, sin divisa, y sin color guerrero.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 182, 24 June 1905, 86-95.

José Batlle's labor bill, sent to Parliament in late 1906 (three months before the end of his first term), should be seen as a response to the Blancos' 1905 bill. By now there had been four bills that had alternated evenly between the two parties, and Batlle's bill was derivative of both parties' earlier attempts.<sup>234</sup> Scorekeeping surely remained part of every parliamentary calculation and was expressed publicly from time to time. For instance, in 1909 during the hearings on President Williman's workplace accident law, Representative Ponce de León claimed that the administration "suffered from forgetfulness," as did the labor committee, in calling the proposed law a first of its kind. He pointed out that the section of the bill dealing with workplace accidents "was similar or almost identical" to that of the Roxlo-de Herrera bill of 1905. Colorados had again attempted to take something Blancos had first introduced (even if it had originally been plagiarized from European sources) and call it novel.<sup>235</sup>

Impediments to passing labor law would not only be a question of conflicts between parties. As Carlos Roxlo put it, "two doctrines, two schools will battle in this debate" over reform or status quo. But also "this bill will face a double opposition; opposition from capital that will believe to see in it an attack against its privileges,

---

<sup>234</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 1 March 1913, 147-150; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 189, 27 December 1906, 454.

<sup>235</sup> "...Padecen del olvido..." "...Parecido ó casi igual al proyecto que entra en discusión en este momento." *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 199, 11 May 1909, 69-122; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 199 5 June 1909, 340; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 200, 5 July 1909, 189-190 *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 201, 14 September 1909, 225-226; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 201, 16 September 1909, 247-271; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 201, 18 September 1909, 274-295; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 201, 21 September 1909, 300-327; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 201, 23 September 1909, 336-350; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 201, 25 September 1909, 352-377; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 201, 28 September 1909, 380-399.

against what it considers its inherited right,” and opposition among workers.<sup>236</sup> The question of whether the state had a right to interfere with the free market had been the one enduring criticism of the *descanso dominical* bill and it remained the dividing line between the two doctrines. Roxlo’s reply to that question was that the state had always been in the business of regulating the market. It now “regulated the constitutive elements of contracts. It regulates them in the civil sphere and regulates them in the commercial sphere.” The state also hired police to protect private property and enforced laws pertaining to private transactions; established weights and measures; maintained road, rail, and port facilities; provided a judiciary to adjudicate contracts, settle law suits, and punish legal infractions; and printed money, the very means of commercial exchange. “Why,” then, “can it not regulate [contracts] in the labor sphere, in the social sphere?”<sup>237</sup>

In Parliament in 1905, the split was not conservative versus liberal. Rather, reform legislation from Blancos came from among the youngest members of Parliament (at least the youngest in office). Similarly, young Colorado legislators were the most vocal supporters, and in the case of Areco, initiators of labor legislation.<sup>238</sup> Roxlo’s two camps, then, involved a generational split as well as an ideological one, in this case, reform-minded conservatives/liberals against orthodox liberals/conservatives—those

---

<sup>236</sup> “...En este debate van á luchar dos doctrinas, dos escuelas...” “Este proyecto encontrará una doble oposición; oposición en el capital, que creará ver en sus tendencias un atentado contra sus privilegios, contra lo que él considera su derecho adquirido.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 23 February 1905, 81-89.

<sup>237</sup> “...Reglamentado los elementos constitutivos de los contratos. Los reglamenta en material civil y los reglamenta en material comercial.” “¿Por qué, no ha de poder reglamentarlos también en material obrera, en material social...?” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 182, 24 June 1905, 86-95.

<sup>238</sup> Carlos Roxlo had accepted his post in September 1901. Luis Alberto de Herrera had been elected to the Chamber of Representatives on 15 February 1905 and had, apparently, wasted no time at all in co-sponsoring reforms—a week in fact. Ricardo Areco and Oriel Solé y Rodríguez had joined the body in February of 1902. *Tablas Cronológicas, 1830-1971* (Montevideo: [Publisher unknown], 1971), 69-81.



who, either motivated by principles of order and privilege or by faith in the free market, favored the status quo.

This split remained constant and was well articulated by Representative Carlos Prado in 1913 on the first full day of debate over the eight-hour workday law. He returned to the question: did the state have the authority—and if so, should it begin—to arbitrate the relationship between labor and capital? Some (though not Prado himself) saw both right and obligation in the state’s expanded role to “intervene as a prescient and prudent tutor, organizing and sheltering the rights and interests that without its intervention ran the risk of perishing.” “The rigid [Herbert] Spencerian formula,” of national defense and domestic order, “gives way in the present hour, obliged by the circumstances and necessities created by the imperfections of social organisms.” In other words, the very system of economic and political rights and interests—capitalism and statism—ran the risk of implosion unless the state form adapted to the times. Unless the state began to protect women, children, workers in general, the disabled, and the elderly, instead leaving them to “individual initiative,” legislators ran “the serious risk of sowing disastrous ills and complications in the social order.”

While admitting that Spencer’s model of society was under attack, Prado was still a “disciple” of it. But if his colleagues could not accept Spencer perhaps they would accept pragmatics. Imposing a uniform workday on workers would be to “conspire against their well-being.” Each wage earner had different needs and desires. Some wanted extra work to climb socially and others needed it merely to survive. Moreover, it was impossible to accurately, technocratically, establish uniformity in work hours that corresponded to physiology. “How could we arrive at uniformity in work hours when in

many cases the eight hour workday is fatiguing and in others excessively light?" It was best to leave such judgments to workers and unions. Statistics (including those compiled by the Labor Office for Uruguay) demonstrated a worldwide tendency toward acceptable work hours, which Prado pegged at between 8 and 11 daily. This was a "conquest of labor unions" and corresponded to the intensity of the job performed. "Why then establish [an acceptable work regime] with the law when the very employees were conquering it on their own...when they are the only ones authorized to judge the advantages given them by working eight, nine or ten hours?"

When asked about un-unionized workplaces where employees endured difficult workloads and long hours, Prado suggested that conditions there must not be bad enough to merit organization and direct action. Passing a uniform workday would be to act on a "false liberty" which "the workers themselves resist in establishing." Workers were very powerful nationally and employers conceded when they were forced to. In "attacking this bill," Prado claimed to "defend the true cause of the proletariat" to individually (or perhaps within unions?) decide their conditions of work—pace, duration, pay, etc. In other words, if Prado could not live in a world where humans individually fought for the means of survival, perhaps the Social Darwinian conflict could take place between conglomerations of people, in this case by unions and employers. As a result of this conflict, peak efficiencies, acceptable work routines, prices, and so forth could be naturally established. The state could then maintain its traditional role as guarantor of

order, nothing less and certainly nothing more.<sup>239</sup> With polar opposite social aspirations, Uruguayan anarchists would have agreed with Prado.

**Parliamentary Discourse: Progress.** Whenever legislators spoke of labor law, lofty ambitions were as ubiquitous as fear. Averting social revolution was the negative reason for modernizing the state, hopes of progress the positive one. In addition to preventing social revolution, reformers expressed their desire to remake labor and protect it as a national resource by fashioning a modern welfare state. These hopes could easily become hyperbolic. As Carlos Roxlo put it, advanced labor legislation would make Uruguayan laws the “envy” of “all of the South American legislatures.” He argued that labor law in other countries functioned like “those marvelously built pocket watches which operate year after year with only a little oil once in a while to moisten their gears.” A well composed society, like machinery, only required small technical interventions.<sup>240</sup> As José Batlle put it, by discarding the old state form with a refurbished one, Uruguay could “prepare itself to occupy a distinguished post among the civilized nations, not by the preponderance of force—something that it should not and could not aspire to given

---

<sup>239</sup> “...La reivindicación más porfiada de las clases proletarias, que tomó gran intensidad á mediados del siglo XIX. Pero si es la reivindicación más porfiada, es el problema social, en mi concepto, más fácil de resolver.” “...Intervenir, como un tutor previsor y prudente, organizando y amparando los derechos é intereses, que sin su intervención corren el peligro de perecer.” “La rígida fórmula spenceriana cede su paso, en la hora presente, obligado por las circunstancias y las necesidades creadas por las imperfecciones de los organismos sociales...” “...Iniciativa particular...” “...El grave riesgo de sembrar funestos males y complicaciones en el orden social.” “...Conspirar contra su propio bienestar.” “...¿Cómo podemos llegar á la uniformidad del horario cuando en muchos casos el horario de ocho horas será fatigante y en otros será excesivamente descansado?” “...Conquista de los sindicatos obreros...” “¿Por qué, entonces, establecerlo por la ley, cuando los mismos operarios de por sí lo van conquistando...cuando son ellos los únicos autorizados para apreciar las ventajas que les reporta el trabajo de ocho, nueve ó diez horas?” “...Los obreros se resisten á establecer por la naturaleza propia de las cosas.” “...Atacando este proyecto, defiendiendo la verdadera causa de los proletarios.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 4 March 1913, 290-306 .

<sup>240</sup> “...Todas las legislaciones sudamericanas.” “...Aquellos relojes ginebrinos de tan maravillosa confección, que perduraban años y años enteros con solo, de vez en cuando, humedecer, con un poquito de aceite, su rodajes.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 182, 24 June 1905, 86-95.

the smallness of its territory—but rather because of how rational and advanced are its laws, its ample spirit of justice, and by the moral and intellectual vigor of its sons.” These were grand visions indeed.<sup>241</sup>

In fashioning advanced labor laws, Eurocentrism abounded. Why? First, given the racial and imperial underpinnings of progress as a positivist term, having a legal, political, economic, and cultural affinity with Europe carried the possibility of sharing in the privileges of global Western dominance. To move Uruguay closer to Europe was to validate with positivist criteria the nation/state, and by extension, the politicians who presided over it. Second, based on the assumption that progress was unidirectional and the West exhibited its greatest manifestation, looking at European laws and history was to see Uruguay’s future. This is why legislators constantly referenced Europe’s past and present and demonstrated pride rather than embarrassment in having constantly lifted from the labor laws of Western countries.

The Roxlo-de Herrera bill of 1905 is a case in point. In his lengthy discussion, Roxlo traced for his colleagues a trajectory of the social question, which had first appeared (he claimed) in England in 1802. From there the issue had jumped to France, where it was currently “the question of the day” and had been “especially since the revolution of 1848, thanks to that humanitarian school.” And from there on to Austria, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, Spain, and Switzerland. “Even Russia,” then in the midst of war with Japan, “has labor legislation worthy of applause and merits

---

<sup>241</sup> “...Prepararse para ocupar un puesto distinguido entre las naciones civilizadas, no por la prepotencia de la fuerza, á la que no debe ni tampoco podría aspirar por la pequeñez de su territorio, sino por lo racional y avanzado de sus leyes, por su amplio espíritu de justicia, y por el vigor físico moral é intelectual de sus hijos.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 189, 27 December 1906, 454.

study, above all in what it says about...domestic labor.” Roxlo and colleagues had sought inspiration for their revisions from the “infinitely liberal” Belgian, English, and Swiss labor laws.<sup>242</sup> In another session, Roxlo argued that reform was the rule and, by implication, the destiny of all modernizing countries. “Our work will rise to the pinnacle of what modern times demand.” He and his co-sponsor “do not bring anything new before the Chamber; everything found in the legislation, all of it is taken from labor laws in Europe.”<sup>243</sup>

In May 1909 President Williman prefaced his accident insurance bill by saying that Uruguay’s laws “are not in harmony with the evolution in the field of juridical doctrines, nor do they respond to the modern conceptions of rights.” This bill was intended to “to place our legislation on the path followed by all contemporary legislation relating to this subject.” Should Uruguay succeed in “modernizing,” it would be ahead of its Latin American peers. He referenced the recent “glowing accolades of which Uruguay has been the object in all the European legislatures,” probably referring to the interest and praise José Batlle had received on behalf of the country while living in Europe between his two terms. “Our country,” then, “that in so many other ways continues in step with the development of modern ideas, cannot remain stationary on this crucial problem of social economy.” The country’s past successes, and the example set by industrialized

---

<sup>242</sup> “...La cuestión del día” and had been “especialmente desde la revolución de 1848, gracias á aquella escuela humanitarian.” “Hasta Rusia,” then in midst of war with Japan, “tiene una legislación del trabajo digno de aplauso y digna de ser estudiada, sobre todo en lo que se refiere al contrato de locación del servicio doméstico.” “...Esta revolución experimentada por la consciencia y por el cerebro de los pueblos modernos.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 182, 24 June 1905, 86-95.

<sup>243</sup> “Nuestra obra se pondrá á la altura de lo que reclaman los tiempos modernos.” “No traemos nada nuevo á la Cámara; todo lo que se halla en la ley, todo está sacado de las legislaciones obreras de Europa...” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 180, 23 February 1905, 81-89.

countries—who had established labor laws to their developmental benefit, not detriment—meant Uruguay could and should be bold too.<sup>244</sup>

The last labor law introduced into Parliament before the eight-hour workday went into effect dealt with rural workers. It is interesting as a microcosm, an intersection of all the political discourses analyzed thus far: fear of unchanneled labor, party competition, a social role for the state, and the legislature's thirst for modernity. In April 1915, Representative Martínez Thedy—author of the accident law passed almost a year earlier—introduced a bill for “hygienic” housing in the countryside. Thedy cited Parliament's blind spot when it came to rural workers, “whose collective fate has not received the attention of the Public powers.” He lamented that “nothing has been done for them because, disintegrated and without solidaristic organization, they have not known how to constitute themselves with enough power to be, like their brothers in the cities, owners of their social destiny and conscious defenders of their class rights.” Thedy argued for parity: “while all labor legislation has evolved favorable to the working classes—successfully defining a new concept of social justice in the relations between labor and capital—on the other hand the conditions of life for the rural worker have not been transformed, nor have the benefits of law or of government intervention arrived to him in the form of the regulation of work hours, wages, work hygiene, living conditions, professional culture, etc.” If these disparities between rural and urban workers persisted

---

<sup>244</sup> “...No están en armonía con la evolución que se ha operado en el campo de las doctrinas jurídicas, ni responden á las concepciones modernas del derecho.” “...Colocar á nuestra legislación en la vía en que se orientan todas las legislaciones contemporáneas sobre esa importante materia.” “...Ensayo feliz de que ha sido [el Uruguay] objeto en todas las legislaciones europeas.” “Nuestro país,” then, “que bajo tantos otros conceptos sigue paso á paso el desenvolvimiento de las ideas modernas, no puede permanecer estacionario en este importantísimo problema de economía social.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 199, 11 May 1909, 69-122.

(or increased), migration from the countryside to the city would continue, accentuating unemployment, low wages, and scarcity.

He rearticulated the new direction of modernizing states and the “sympathies” of at least one of its new caretakers: “Tenacious partisan of the new legislative orientations intended to limit the pain and want of the poor classes, I have thought with sympathy on the workers of the field, considering the organization they lack and the carelessness or culpable indifference of those who, utilizing them in diverse services, neither help them nor raise their standard of living.” They were concerned that rural workers could never constitute a social force capable of pushing for the state’s attention and that all citizen-subjects should fall under the same state regulation, behave the same (“professional culture”), and live the same way (hygienically and in their work patterns). Decent housing accompanied morality because rootedness was moral—it was what made humanity, what facilitated social relations and organization. It constituted civilization. “The worker of the field continues to live the primitive and nomadic life... Today he is, in the rusticity of the prairies, a kind of ‘ex man’ without personality and without spirit, who wanders without a notion of himself and without knowing his worth, settling down here and departing there with the sad and unhealthy tent, under which all of the strong features of his race become erased.”

While methods of production in the countryside had modernized (a constant worry of economists and state officials), the plight and “culture” of workers was the only stagnant element of rural life that had absolutely not changed since “pastoral times.” “The worker of the field must be something more for the country than the theme of our literature... He should be a utilizable social force since it is from him that spring the

meritorious but anonymous legion of the suffering creators of wealth.” As with a natural resource, rural workers needed to be protected and nationalized. Moreover, defenseless unimproved workers were susceptible to—and therefore posed a national threat of spreading—disease given their unhygienic living conditions. They made the obligatory references to science, to European laws governing rural workers’ housing, and even to some regional legislative experiments in the Argentine provinces of Mendoza and Tucumán and in Brazil’s São Paulo and Minas Gerais.

The unstated political goal that Theydy was doubtless pursuing was to expand the Colorado Party’s electorate in the countryside. One of the “diverse services” for which unnamed and “culpably indifferent” people used rural workers was as Blanco cannon fodder in their civil wars against Colorados. Yet Theydy’s paternalism toward backward unorganized rural workers was misplaced. Rural workers were arguably the first workers in Uruguay to organize and press for a better standard of living, even if under the banner of often opportunistic *caudillos*. Perhaps Theydy preferred to forget the radicalized independence movement led by José Artigas, which included in its ranks former slaves, *mestizos*, Afro-Uruguayans, indigenous peoples, and the landless. They had even expropriated and redistributed the lands of political opponents—acts which ultimately turned the rural and urban elite against the movement, against what was on the verge of becoming a social revolution (or as they preferred to call it, “anarchy”). And even though the nineteenth-century party wars were hardly revolutionary moments, rural workers were not necessarily the lackeys of partisan elites. Historian John Charles Chasteen has argued that *caudillos* were charismatic leaders who “personified” a community. The personalistic bond between *caudillo* and follower was dependent on a “collective



assessment—in essence, living up to certain community expectations but losing loyalty should he deviate from shared norms.”<sup>245</sup> Following a *caudillo* meant that rural workers would receive something in return. In any case, Theydy was explicitly acting on a worry about the countryside existing in a vacuum of state power and implicitly pointing party colleagues to a new untapped electorate.<sup>246</sup>

**Toward the Eight-Hour Workday, 1912-1915.** Beginning in 1912, financial crisis hit Uruguay, momentarily directing attention away from labor law. FORU found its success the previous year (in unionizing and securing the eight-hour day) at a stand-still as unemployment grew. But as Universindo Rodríguez Díaz points out, part of the decline in labor agitation was a consequence of so many unions having won the eight-hour workday the year before.<sup>247</sup> By 1913, labor militancy had recovered somewhat from its stagnation over the previous year and it was within this context that Parliament finally

---

<sup>245</sup> Benjamín Nahum, *Breve historia del Uruguay independiente* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2003), 14; Caetano and Rilla, *Historia contemporánea del Uruguay*, 33-43; John Charles Chasteen, *Heroes on Horseback: A Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 4-5.

<sup>246</sup> “...Cuya suerte colectiva no ha merecido todavía la atención de los Poderes públicos.” “Nada se ha hecho aún por ellos, acaso porque, desvinculados y sin organización solidaria, no han sabido constituirse en fuerza suficiente para ser, como sus hermanos de las ciudades, dueños de su destino social y defensores conscientes de sus derechos de clase.” “...Mientras ha evolucionado toda la legislación obrera en sentido favorable a las clases trabajadoras, definiendo con éxito un nuevo concepto de justicia social en las relaciones del capital y del trabajo, no se han transformado, en cambio, las condiciones de vida del peón rural, ni hasta él han llegado los bienes de la ley o la intervención gubernativa, en la forma de reglamentación de jornales, salarios, higiene del trabajo, habitación, cultura profesional, etc.” “Partidario tenaz de las nuevas orientaciones legislativas destinadas a limitar en lo posible el dolor y las necesidades de las clases pobres, he pensado con simpatía en los trabajadores de campo, sustituyéndome a la organización que les falta y aún a la desidia o indiferencia culpables de los que, utilizándolos en diversos servicios, ni los mejoran, ni les levantan su nivel de vida.” “...Cuestión de higiene, de salud, de moralidad, acaso también de dignificación.” “El trabajador del campo sigue viviendo la vida nómada y primitivo. ...Hoy es tan sólo, en la rusticidad de las praderas, una especie de ‘ex hombre’ sin personalidad y sin rebeldías, que peregrina sin noción de sí mismo y sin medida de su propio valer, instalando aquí y levantando allá la tienda desgraciada y malsana, debajo de la cual se van borrando todos los rasgos fuertes de su raza.” “El obrero del campo debe ser para el país algo más que un tema de literatura criolla... Deber ser también una fuerza social utilizable, ya que de él sale la legión anónima pero meritoria de los sufridos creadores de la riqueza.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 240, 24 April 1915, 182-184.

<sup>247</sup> Rodríguez Díaz, *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte*, 160.

passed two laws: José Batlle's resurrected eight-hour workday bill and a workplace accident law.

The debate on the eight-hour law was by far the lengthiest ever held on labor issues, spanning twenty-two contentious hearings between March 1 and June 14, 1913. (The second session had to be terminated early because of tumult among the representatives and the public assembled above the chamber.) Additional documents of all kinds were presented to help guide the deliberations. These included copies of all past labor bills that had included some reference to work hours, extensive research conducted by the Labor Office, the opinions of specialists (economists, hygienists, etc.), and the legislation of other countries. It also included numerous statements by companies whose objections sounded a common theme: should the bill pass, either the prices of goods would go up or companies would have to cut workers' pay.<sup>248</sup>

Most interestingly, the Labor Office had surveyed Montevideo labor unions and had concluded that out of some 42,200 organized workers, 15,294—over one-third—had already won the eight-hour workday. An additional 10,650 of the total had the nine- or ten-hour workday. Meaning that out of all organized workers, over one-third (16,256) worked more than ten hours on a given workday. The total number of Montevideo workers is unknown. FORU's records specified that there were 80,000 workers but this surely did not account for most women and children also working for wages. What is clear is that workers organized enough to have a union were very likely to work ten hours or less per workday. In other words, while clearly having a long road ahead even in 1913—a rough year for labor organization with some setbacks and reversals—

---

<sup>248</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 1 March 1913, 147-276.

Montevideo unions had, without the aid of law, managed to impose on some employers what had been historically the most pressing labor demand.

During the sessions, legislators proceeded with the same discourse developed over nine years of wide public debate and (failed) legislative proposals. This debate took place not at a peak year for labor organization but hardly at a trough. And in that regard, it followed the general pattern I have attempted to show in the last three chapters: that Parliament acted when pushed (see Appendix A). Workers were organized, strikes were frequent and often very disruptive (less than two years earlier a general one had paralyzed the capital's transportation grid and over the rest of the year many unions had agitated and won the eight-hour day), and there was every reason to believe things would get worse over time. By passing a law addressing what the continuum of political opinion—from conservatives like Prado to liberals like Batlle—agreed was the major cause of strikes (see above), legislators were hedging against what they perceived as a calamitous future.

Two historians—one of high politics and the other of labor—have suggested that the main reason state officials signed the eight-hour workweek into law was to address the country's unemployment problem.<sup>249</sup> I believe that this is only partially true. Full employment was presumed to be a collateral benefit of the law but it was not the main reason and was hardly mentioned in the hearings. Unemployment might have been the catalyst—the one *incidental* condition different from all the other times Parliament entertained labor reform—but it was not the *pervasive* condition legislators attempted to

---

<sup>249</sup> Vanger, *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordoñez*, 42. López D'Alesandro does also mention a "radicalized political climate" as another factor that forced passage of the bill. López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Segunda parte]*, 55.

address. Also, by this time, José Batlle had packed both chambers of Parliament with representatives beholden to him. This was one of his most controversial and important projects and he was running out of time. The process was excruciating but on June 14, 1913, the Chamber of Deputies passed the bill. While the Senate had far fewer sessions, the range of opinions over the bill reflected those of the lower chamber. They finally passed it on November 17, 1915; it took effect three months later.<sup>250</sup>

**The 1916 Strike Wave.** Scant attention has been paid to the wave of strikes that broke out immediately after passage of the eight-hour day. Milton Vanger, chronicler of high politics, made only brief mention of it, chalking it up to a victory for Batlle and the progressive elements of Parliament, not workers. Even Fernando López D'Alesandro, whose labor history covers the period in question, admitted that he could say little about the strike wave—that it was difficult for him to even know whether workers' grievances were legitimate or whether the law was effective. All he could establish was the “energy” [*ánimo*] of the historical moment. Historians such as Vanger and López D'Alesandro instead have emphasized the May 1911 general strike, remarking on its transcendence. Why this disparity? Historians have celebrated the 1911 strike, I believe, because it validates the Batlle mythos since president and protestors were—as seen in last chapter—largely united; Batlle mostly held the police at bay. Comparatively, 1911 is an uplifting case. The strike was brief, it was won by workers, and very little blood spilt. In 1916, the conflict was prolonged and excruciating for some, with one fatality and many injuries. And, contrary to national myth, Batlle and workers could not have been more at odds.<sup>251</sup>

---

<sup>250</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Senadores*, Tomo 108, 17 November 1915, 574-578.

<sup>251</sup> López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Segunda parte]*, 62-63; Vanger, *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordoñez*, 91-95.

As the day approached when the eight-hour law would go into effect, *El Día* tried to keep public attention on Batlle's alleged singular role. The editors reminded the public that Batlle had, during his two terms, presented labor bills—for the eight-hour workday and for maternity leave—each blocked by “an insignificant majority” until late 1915, after the end of his term. “It is redundant to point out that all the brave soldiers of work from this privileged country are full of jubilation and keep in their hearts always a sincere gratitude for Batlle y Ordoñez [sic]—soul of so wise and humane a law. For the enlightened legislators that have fought so hard for its speedy and definitive passage. And his excellency, the President of the Republic [Feliciano Viera], that with commendable speed has effectuated the first labor law of serious importance passed in our country which now gives all workers a little more time to look after their health, the cultivation and perfection of their mental faculties and on the sacred joys of family.” The paper added that yet more reforms were necessary to fully deal with the social question: “worker's insurance, the minimum wage, conflict between employers and employees, regulation of work done at home, the obligatory [day of] rest, women's work, children's work, night work, old age pensions, etc., etc., reforms that are now being considered in Parliament and others that the Executive is studying with patriotic enthusiasm in order to incorporate them into our positive legislation, in order to place our country at the vanguard of the South American republics!”<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>252</sup> “Inútil es significar que todos los bravos soldados del trabajo de este privilegiado país están rebosantes de júbilo y que conservarán siempre en sus corazones una sincera gratitud al señor Batlle y Ordoñez [sic]—alma de tan sabia y humana ley,— á los ilustrados legisladores que tanto han batallado por su pronta y definitiva sanción, y al excmo. Señor Presidente de la República, que con encomiable apresuramiento ha puesto el cúmplase á la primera ley obrera de verdadera importancia sancionada en nuestro país, ya que permitirá á todos los trabajadores disponer de un poco m[á]s de tiempo para emplearlo en el cuidado de su salud, en el cultivo y perfeccionamiento de sus facultades intelectuales y en los goces sagrados de la familia.” “...El seguro obrero, la fijación del salario, la lucha entre obreros y patrones, la

In the lead-up to the law's implementation, three separate concerns manifested themselves among workers: (a) that employers would peg pay to the hour, not the day, and wages would decrease as the workday did; (b) that employers would use loopholes in the law to create work regimes they preferred to the ones established by direct action on the part of workers; (c), that employers would ignore the law in letter or spirit. As I show below, in practice some of these concerns would overlap within a given workplace or occupation but usually they were separate, representing the uneven successes of Uruguayan labor at that moment in time. In fact, workers had been pointing out some of these flaws in the eight-hour bill since 1911.<sup>253</sup>

Some cracks in solidarity also manifested themselves. Before the law went into effect, the Minister of Industry requested that Parliament also extend the eight-hour day to domestic servants and waiters. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, the Cosmopolitan Union of Waiters sent a letter to the minister arguing that their work was far more deserving of the protections of law than that of domestic servants. Though the letter was silent on gender, it is quite likely that it was on everyone's mind; domestic servants were predominantly female, waiters by and large male.<sup>254</sup>

Labor actions also began early. A few days before the law's effective date, the Bakers Resistance Society unanimously issued a formal declaration. Published in *El Día*, the bakers threatened action (including a strike) if employers used the eight-hour

---

reglamentación del trabajo á domicilio, el descanso obligatorio, el trabajo de la mujer, el trabajo de los menores, el trabajo nocturno, las pensiones á la vejez, etc., etc., reformas que ya están á consideración del Parlamento y otras que el Ejecutivo está estudiando con patriótico entusiasmo para incorporarlas á nuestro legislación positiva, á fin de colocar á nuestro país á la vanguardia de las repúblicas sud-americanas!" "Colaboraciones: La reglamentación del trabajo: LEYES PROTECTORAS," *El Día*, 17 January 1916, 6; Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay*, 255-258.

<sup>253</sup> Rodríguez Díaz, *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte*, 181-182.

<sup>254</sup> "La jornada de ocho horas," *El Día*, 20 January 1916, 4.

workday as an excuse to lower wages. They added that “even though our work is done at night—which in other occupations is compensated with double wages—we only receive the bare minimum to live.” Among so many other deficiencies, the eight-hour law said nothing about night work. Preempting the law by three days, tailors and store employees near the customs house in downtown Montevideo forced employers to close their doors at 5pm and began a boycott of one hold-out; if businesses were closed in the late afternoon, they could not work employees more than eight hours. Barbers, reportedly with immense popular support, forced 112 establishments in the capital to close on Sundays. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, reporters for *El Día* found dockworkers “over-excited;” they had learned of their employers’ decision to make deep pay cuts, eliminate a meal that firefighters on the docks received, and carry out some layoffs—all as the price of compliance with the eight-hour law. The reporters were able to confirm that employers would indeed cut wages if their great stipulation, which they had just sent to the Minister of the Treasury, went unheeded: they wanted to begin counting hours when their employees actually began work, subtracting any dead time (such as in between boats docking) from the workday. Of course, this kind of flexibility would likely have extended the workday past eight hours for dockworkers who had to wait around between loads. Meanwhile, “a numerous assembly of workers” at the International Center constituted a Worker Agitation Committee “whose object is to impede, through active propagandizing, the lowering of wages;” they announced an upcoming public gathering to publicize the danger.<sup>255</sup>

---

<sup>255</sup> “...Á pesar de que nuestras tareas se realizan de noche—que en otros trabajos se pagan con jornales dobles—apenas ganamos lo indispensable para vivir.” “Movimiento obrero: Obreros Panaderos,” *El Día*, 11 February 1916, 8; “Movimiento obrero: Los empleados de tienda,” *El Día*, 12 February 1916, 7.

Smaller strikes also began. On February 16<sup>th</sup>, textile workers at La Cooperativa sent police chief Virgilio Sampognaro a cordial letter. They gave notice of a unanimous vote to go on strike since their employers, because of the law, had reduced their daily wages by 20%. Their letter actually requested a meeting with Sampognaro, presumably to explain their side of the story in the hopes of gaining police neutrality.<sup>256</sup> And then, on February 18<sup>th</sup>, the greatest strike wave Uruguay had yet experienced to date commenced. It began with the port workers (all occupations), meat packers, and charcoal makers. Bakers were ready to go on strike. Violence began immediately with police deploying troops to the meatpacking plants and opening fire on striking workers. The port workers actually sent a delegation to former President Batlle to inform him of “their desire in favor of postponing the application of the eight hours law.” While Batlle did not receive this delegation, he appears to have responded to the workers through his editors at *El Día*. Patronizingly, they admitted that “it is likely that there are some workers who will come out against the eight hours [law]; but it is almost certain that those workers do not proceed with liberty or understanding, in the first place due to employers’ suggestion or by compulsion, and in the second by not comprehending their own interests and those of the working class.” While Batlle and the editors were appropriately cynical about employers’ tricks, they claimed to know workers’ interests better than workers themselves. The editors claimed due diligence, having heard rumors of opposition to the law. But after undertaking “a patient investigation,” they concluded that the rumor “has

---

“¿Huelga en el puerto?: Agitación entre los obreros: Defendiendo el salario,” *El Día*, 15 February 1916, 5; “En el Puerto: La temida huelga de obreros: Declaraciones patronales,” *El Día*, 16 February 1916, 5; “...Una numerosa asamblea obrera...” “...Cuyo objeto es el de impedir, por medio de una activa propaganda, que se rebajen los salarios.” “Movimiento obrero: Comité Obrera de Agitación,” *El Día*, 17 February 1916, 7; “El cierre de las peluquerías,” *El Día*, 17 January 1916, 5.

<sup>256</sup> Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Virgilio Sampognaro, Caja 219, Carpeta 4, Hoja 1.



turned out to be as baseless as it is absurd. Just as you would expect, no labor union is against the eight hours.”<sup>257</sup>

The editors were correct. Workers were not against the eight-hour *day* but many were against the *law* establishing work hours. The Worker Agitation Committee, comprised of all resistance societies, declared to the press that they (and most workers) were in favor of the eight-hour workday and would defend it while carefully sidestepping the issue of supporting the law as such.<sup>258</sup> Conservatives, including employers, attempted to discredit the eight-hour day by saying that workers were opposed to it and that had prompted the strikes. On February 20<sup>th</sup>, several resistance societies published in *El Día* official statements to the contrary. The cook and pastry workers’ union reminded the public that the eight-hour workday had been labor’s rallying cry since 1886. The waiters’ union went further in saying that “we have always been in agreement with the sanctioned law, being disposed to effectuate it in practice by all licit methods within our reach... If some of our waiters are disgruntled, it is not because of the drop in hours. It is because some employers in this line of work have cut wages up to five pesos without any justification for the reduction unless the object is [to make] the worker protest against the law.” In other words, employers and the reactionary press were baiting workers and attempting to pit them against the law.<sup>259</sup>

---

<sup>257</sup> “...El deseo de aquellos en favor del aplazamiento de la vigencia de la ley sobre las ocho horas.” “Es probable que haya obreros que se manifiesten contra las ocho horas; pero, es casi seguro que esos trabajadores no proceden con libertad ó con conocimiento de causa; en el primer caso por la sugestión patronal ó mismo por la coerción, y en el segundo por la incomprensión de sus propios intereses y los de la clase obrera.” “...Una paciente investigación...” “...Ha resultado tan infundada como absurdo. Como era de presumir, ningún gremio es contrario á las ocho horas.” “Entre patrones y obreros,” *El Día*, 18 February 1916, 5.

<sup>258</sup> “Entre patrones y obreros,” *El Día*, 18 February 1916, 5.

<sup>259</sup> “...Siempre hemos estado de acuerdo con la ley sancionada, estando dispuestos á llevarla á la práctica por todos los medios lícitos que estén á nuestro alcance... Si algunos de los mozos de café se

On top of the statements to newspapers, dozens of public meetings were held shortly before and after February 17<sup>th</sup> to organize against repercussions from the law. This included the countryside. Workers announced public meetings to be held in Durazno, Fray Bentos, Mercedes, Minas, Paysandú, and Trinidad.<sup>260</sup> The meetings took place in public parks, working class neighborhoods, and in front of major workplaces such as the port. For instance, on January 20<sup>th</sup> (almost a month before the strike wave) Socialists began putting together a public assembly “aimed at publicizing the favorable opinion of the working-class toward the eight-hour [day] and their desire for the implementation as soon as possible of the minimum wage.”<sup>261</sup>

Socialists were working overtime on damage control. By scheduling a public meeting so early, party leaders were perhaps trying to cover for the mistakes made by their representative in Parliament. Emilio Frugoni had presented an eight-hour workday bill of his own—an alternative to Batlle’s—which was less flexible to employers and with possibly fewer loopholes.<sup>262</sup> But, as historian Fernando López D’Alesandro points out, Frugoni had—just like every other legislator—shrugged off linking a minimum wage as a counterweight to the eight-hour law; he had been working on the same assumption that wages would auto-correct as consumer spending rose, Uruguay approached full employment, and labor became scarce. The Socialist leader had, in fact, dismissed the widespread worry by workers that the proposed law would depress wages. It was an

---

hallan descontentos, no es por la disminución de la jornada, sino porque algunos patrones de este ramo han rebajado hasta cinco pesos en los sueldos de cada empleado, sin que se pueda justificar tal rebaja, si no es con objeto de que el obrero proteste contra la nueva ley.” “En defensa del salario,” *El Día*, 20 January 1916, 3.

<sup>260</sup> “En defensa de los salarios,” *El Día*, 23 February 1916, 5.

<sup>261</sup> López D’Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Segunda parte]*, 50-51, 53-54; “...Destinado á exteriorizar la opinión favorable de la clase obrera por las ocho horas y el anhelo de que se implante cuanto antes el salario mínimo.” “En defensa del salario,” *El Día*, 20 January 1916, 3.

<sup>262</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 223, 1 March 1913, 188-189.

embarrassing reality that even the so-called workers' representative was so out of touch with the world of work; just like the rest of Parliament, he was directly responsible for the consequences, intended or not, of the law he had helped pass.<sup>263</sup>

*El Día* published another article defending the eight-hour law despite its short-term flaws. It reiterated the same sequence of events whereby wages would rise. Even if workers suffered an immediate decline in take-home pay as employers tied wages to hours (instead of days), this would not last long. As always, elite society placed the weight of economic adjustment on workers. With baffling ignorance, the article closed saying “the eight hours law has gone into effect without provoking any major difficulties. We hope that the small incident caused by its application will totally disappear, reestablishing complete normalcy in the relations between labor and capital.”<sup>264</sup>

Parliament had unwittingly disrupted a delicate labor ecosystem. Most of the strikes occurred because employers reduced wages. Some, however, occurred because the law worsened both pay and/or hours. Bakers, for instance, found a loophole in the law (which was confirmed at the very same time through a memo issued by the Port Administration). The law in fact did not uphold the eight-hour workday; instead it established the forty-eight hour workweek. Any combination of daily work hours could exist at any given workplace so long as they happened over the course of six days and did not exceed 48. So bakers feared that employers would make them work nine hours on five days and three on the sixth, a regime commonly known as the English Workweek.

---

<sup>263</sup> López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Segunda parte]*, 50-54.

<sup>264</sup> “La ley de las ocho horas ha entrado en vigencia sin suscitar mayores dificultades. Esperemos que las pequeñas incidencias que motivó su aplicación desaparecerán en absoluto, restableciéndose la normalidad completa en las relaciones entre el trabajo y el capital.” “Las ocho horas y los salarios,” *El Día*, 23 February 1916, 4.

The trouble was that bakers had previously fought and won the five day workweek and any spillover of work from the regular five days over to the sixth would effectively mean giving up a day off. The bakers union vowed to prevent their employers from attempting such a reversal.<sup>265</sup> Cobblers, on the other hand, went on strike twice to remedy an extension to their workweek. Like the bakers, proprietors of shoemaking shops also imposed the English Week where cobblers had previously only worked five days weekly. Forced to come in an extra day per week for three hours, cobblers complained that they would have only receive one third pay—an amount, it seemed, hardly worth the disruption to their rest. They were angry that employers had also coerced some workers into signing an agreement accepting the new hours. Even so, the resistance society made clear its support for the eight-hour day while saying nothing about the law.<sup>266</sup>

Anticipating the strikes by a day, legislator José Salgado brought a bill before the Chamber of Representatives that legally gave workers and employers the right to associate and strike so long as violence was not employed. Neither side could violently compel workers to strike or not strike or maintain businesses open or closed. The bill included penalties of fines up to twenty-five pesos or one to six months in prison with the proviso that leaders of any violence receive the maximum punishments. Salgado's bill placed further stipulations on jobs that affected public services. Employees of hospitals, railroads, and public utility companies could strike but only with eight days' notice to the authorities. Trolley workers or those employed in the production of "article[s] of general and necessary consumption" had to give five days' notice. Leaders of unions or groups of

---

<sup>265</sup> "En defensa del salario," *El Día*, 20 January 1916, 3.

<sup>266</sup> "La ley de la 8 horas," *El Día*, 21 February, 5; "Las ocho horas: Continúa la huelga del frigorífico," *El Día*, 22 February 1916, 5-6.

workers on strike that failed to give adequate notice would also receive maximum penalties. The only benefit to workers was that the bill established workers' right to assemble, something the Constitution—penned in the shadow of the French Revolution, he reminded—had not done. Either ignorant or in denial of the actual practice of class warfare (especially the extra-legal relationship between workers and police), Salgado said that no one as yet had denied workers (or employers) the right to assemble, but just in case, Parliament ought to make such a privilege clear. Feigning even-handedness, the bill also protected employers' right to assemble, as if it had ever been challenged.

Salgado began his defense of the bill by saying that strikes were the unfortunate but necessary byproduct of the country's economic organization, destined to disappear once "the spirit of social solidarity...has been amply developed." Given the tranquility in the world of labor in recent years (and he was correct that during 1913-1915 things had quieted some compared to 1911), "this moment, then, cannot be more propitious to legislate serenely and prudently over [conflicts]." All countries, he reminded the chamber, both conservative and "revolutionary," permitted strikes with regulation. In his discussion of violence, however, there was considerable slippage. He conceded that, as his favorite economist Gide had stated, the strike was "a violent means exerted by one party over the other to force them to modify the conditions of the [work] contract ... The strike is, then, an operation of war. And no matter how pacific it may be, no one denies the community the right to fight to defend its existence, its independence and honor." The strike was part of a broader "war of classes" and "the employers are powerfully armed for the conflict while, on the other side, the workers do not possess any other weapon but the strike." "It is necessary to recognize in law their right to use it—the right to strike—so as

not to turn them over without defense to their adversaries.”<sup>267</sup> The bill ultimately did not pass.

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, *El Día* announced that Salgado would also soon present a bill intended to “resolve in a just and peaceful form labor conflicts that take on the characteristics of violent altercations.” This would be done through compulsory arbitration if employers and workers were unable to settle their issues within a given period of time. There appears to have been outrage in the press at this announcement and Salgado, through *El Día*, clarified the intent of his upcoming bill. It would legally recognize strikes, including those by state workers. Salgado also established a difference between “conciliation” and “arbitration” and, when the bill finally came to the floor on the 26<sup>th</sup>, he argued that the former should be mandatory and the second optional. Conciliation meant that workers and/or employers would submit to a committee if there was a complaint. The committee would propose non-binding solutions and if these were unacceptable to either party the matter could, if they wished, proceed to an arbitration body. The intent of the bill, then, was light compulsion—a mechanism to get both sides to sit at the table with third-party intermediaries. Salgado had consulted a French law passed in 1886 and its repercussions. He found that while the law established compulsory arbitration, between 1893 and 1906 it failed to prevent more than 9,000 strikes; only 24% of parties in conflict even resorted to the arbitration law. Only 11% (or 1,001) of total

---

<sup>267</sup> “...Artículo[s] de consumo general y necesario.” “...Se haya desenvuelto ampliamente...el espíritu de solidaridad social.” “El momento, pues, no puede ser más propicio para legislar serena y prudentemente sobre los mismos.” “...Un medio de violencia ejercido por una de las partes sobre la otra para forzarla a modificar las condiciones del contrato.” “La huelga es, pues, una operación de guerra. Y así como por más pacifista que sea, nadie niega a un pueblo el derecho de guerra para defender su existencia, su independencia y su honor.” “...Los patrones, están poderosamente armados para la contienda, mientras para la otra parte, los obreros, no tienen más arma que la huelga, es necesario reconocer en la ley a estos últimos el derecho de usarla, el derecho de huelga, si no se quiere entregarlos sin defensa a merced de sus adversarios.” *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 247, 17 February 1916, 10-15.

strikes were resolved by mediation, and of those, only 77 were resolved by arbitration. The rest were resolved by the conciliation process—one that did not impose solutions.<sup>268</sup> In other words, Salgado’s law did not promise to resolve all or most conflicts. What he had found, however, is that states that lightly compelled, lightly channeled, succeeded in avoiding the most labor disputes. The bill went to committee but never re-emerged.

Meanwhile, outside of any law or formal process, state officials and others attempted to mediate the strikes. For example, Representative Andreoli, a Blanco legislator, attempted to arbitrate the strike at the Frigorífico Uruguay. He was, however, “frightened off” by the strikers apparently because he attempted to mediate with employers either without any authorization to do so or on terms not approved by the workers.<sup>269</sup> Next, the director of the Labor Office met with the *frigorífico* strike committee. While workers did not exactly reject his mediation, they made it clear that their demands—restitution of their old jobs at the same pay rate as before the law went into effect—were non-negotiable.<sup>270</sup>

Managers at the Frigorífico Uruguay attempted to bring strikebreakers from Argentina. Workers and activists immediately sought the solidarity of counterparts across the Río de la Plata. The Federación Obrera Regional Argentina held a special session to coordinate solidarity with Uruguayan workers.<sup>271</sup> The Socialist Party called on socialists

---

<sup>268</sup> “...Solucionar en forma equitativa y pacífica los conflictos obreros que traten de asumir los car[á]cteres de alteraciones violentas...” “Los conflictos obreros: Un nuevo proyecto,” *El Día*, 18 January 1916, 5. “...La legislación de uno de los países más adelantados de Europa...” “Sobre huelgas, paros y coaliciones: El proyecto del doctor Salgado,” *El Día*, 19 January 1916, 4; “Conciliación y arbitraje: Nuevo proyecto del Dr. Salgado,” *El Día*, 22 February, 1916, 5; *Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes*, Tomo 247, 26 February 1916, 94-99.

<sup>269</sup> “En defensa del salario,” *El Día*, 20 January 1916, 3.

<sup>270</sup> “La ley de la 8 horas,” *El Día*, 21 February 1916, 5; “Las ocho horas: Continúa la huelga del frigorífico,” *El Día*, 22 February 1916, 5-6.

<sup>271</sup> “Las ocho horas: Continúa la huelga del frigorífico,” *El Día*, 22 February 1916, 5-6.

in Argentina to prevent strikebreakers from crossing the river. The Labor Committee in Cerro also received information that soldiers guarding the *frigorífico* might be doing the work of regular employees. *El Día*, however, discounted the rumor and reported “complete” solidarity and “enthusiasm” among strikers, saying that only a few workers still went to the *frigorífico*.<sup>272</sup> Finally the strike ended through the mediation of “several merchants from the Villa del Cerro.” It was a partial victory for workers. They still received an hourly pay cut but not as steep as what had been threatened and many, though not all, strikers were rehired.<sup>273</sup>

How did the police behave? Despite President Viera’s pro-labor stance, the Montevideo police chief, Virgilio Sampognaro, proved his notoriety as a vicious lawman and master infiltrator. As was widely decried by workers, Sampognaro cooperated—often on his own initiative—with employers under siege. Wilson Company & Sons, for instance, sent him a private note praising the actions of police at the precincts in Bella Vista and Cerro. During the strike the police “has lent us priceless service, keeping the streets around our workshop free of angry workers.” They had intervened to keep “hostile” workers at bay and to protect strikebreakers and transit. In a reply, Sampognaro thanked the company for its letter, saying that “I have found it opportune to make the President of the Republic aware of your note because it reflects an honorable compliment to the Police Institution.”<sup>274</sup> In mid-April Sampognaro wrote to Mathew Robinson, manager of the Frigorífico Montevideo. He had found two former workers of the

---

<sup>272</sup> “En defensa del salario,” *El Día*, 20 January 1916, 3.

<sup>273</sup> “... Varios comerciantes de la Villa del Cerro.” “Las ocho horas,” *El Día*, 26 February 1916, 5.

<sup>274</sup> “... Nos ha prestado inestimables servicios manteniendo libre de obreros descontentos las calles que rodean nuestra Barraca.” “He creído oportuno hacer conocer la nota de Vd. al Sr. Presidente de la República, por reflejar ella un elogio honoroso para la Institución Policial.” Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Virgilio Sampognaro, Caja 219, Carpeta 4, Hoja 4, 6.



*frigorífico*, Domingo Izquierdo and Antonio Izquierdo (siblings perhaps?), “persons with my full confidence” who were willing to resume their prior employment and act as spies on the workers, something “which I believe to be equally useful for the Police and for the Company.”<sup>275</sup> The General Union of Quarry Workers Paso del Molino, a resistance society, complained to Sampognaro that the local police “observe a partial attitude in the strike” they were engaged in at “eight quarries in this area.” They called on him to respect “the right of workers to defend their interests as producers and creators of the national wealth.”<sup>276</sup> An undated flyer seized by the police warned workers that to give homage to Virgilio Sampognaro was to do so to “the tyrant of the workers.” “The most egregious acts of Mr. Sampognaro have been to **bash defenseless workers** just because they ask for bread and rest.”<sup>277</sup>

There were strikes and rumors of strikes. While most lasted a few days, some spilled over into the weeks after February 17<sup>th</sup>. In some workplaces strikes sprung up, were settled, and resurfaced some time later, often over fine points of the law. One of the most excruciating and long lasting strikes involved the Frigorífico Uruguay, which experienced multiple strikes, first over pay cuts, then for noncompliance with the law. It was here that the inefficacy of law and government action most clearly appear. In March (as reported several times in *El Día*), public inspectors attempted to publicly shame the

---

<sup>275</sup> “...Personas de mi entera confianza...” “...Lo que creo útil tanto para la Policía como para esa Empresa.” The letter appears to have been a draft for Sampognaro’s secretary to write a clean copy. “Útil” was written over “conveniente.” Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Virgilio Sampognaro, Caja 219, Carpeta 4, Hoja 5 and unknown.

<sup>276</sup> “...Observa una actitud parcial en la huelga...” “...Ocho canteras de esta localidad.” “...El derecho [de] los obreros en la defensa de sus intereses como productores y creadores de la riqueza nacional.” Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Virgilio Sampognaro, Caja 219, Carpeta 4, 8. Dated March 21, 1916. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>277</sup> “...Al tirano de los trabajadores” “Pues los actos más culminates del señor Sampognaro han sido **apalea a los indefensos trabajadores**, por el sólo hecho de pedirle pan y descanso.” Emphasis in the original. Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Virgilio Sampognaro, Caja 219, Carpeta 4, 66.

*frigorífico* into compliance by posting in the newspaper the hours that employees worked. When it and several other large workplaces defying the law refused to pay fines, the Labor Office also published their infractions and the amounts owed. That the office continued posting the fines in subsequent issues suggests that regulators were out of options, either legally or from a lack of political will. And employers could weather public ridicule.

It was during the *frigorífico* strike that police shot and killed Melanio Garos, one of the workers. Police had liberally doled out beatings and had even discharged their weapons at strikers but no one had died yet. By May, strikes provoked by disagreement over the eight-hour law subsided and a new routine of intermittent unrest and periods of calm resumed. However, the irony of the strike wave should not be lost: it was workers—not inspectors, not legislators, and most certainly not the police—who enforced the eight-hour workday law. During the strikes, workers became acclimated to invoking law in practice if not in letter. In this, and by accepting mediation, their efforts began to be channeled into mostly predictable patterns of ritualistic strikes and working with inspectors and state officials generally.

**Conclusion.** By mid-1916, state officials had achieved a partial rapprochement with labor. One reason for this, I argue, is labor's gradual acceptance of state mediation. Mediation is the most simple and subtle of statist tools. With it, state officials can feign impartiality and even benevolence toward workers. As seen in the strikes analyzed, mediators functioned as an incentive—the possibility of workers winning something—while the police stood by as a threat. Like a vise, police represented the fixed jaw (an immovable barricade against direct action), mediators as the adjustable jaw that tightened

with every compromise, and workers as the disciplined object conditioned into a far less conflictual mold. Negotiators get people working again regardless of full, partial, or negligible gains achieved through mediation and in spite of any remaining substantive criticisms of working conditions, compensation, or the very structure of work itself. We can also add a final, long-term, and perhaps inadvertent consequence of mediation. By offering a path of least resistance to a better work life, mediation encouraged and accentuated splits among workers already in disagreement about tactics and long-term objectives.

Chapter Four opened with the scandal over what was perhaps the first instance of a state-mediated end to a strike, informally brokered between police chief Bernassa y Jerez and the Tailors' Resistance Society. Frankly, the outrage is understandable given the crudeness of having the official responsible for repressing labor militancy mediating a bloodless end to the strike. Three years later, during the infamous railroad strike, state officials employed mediation again. This time even FORU tacitly accepted arbitration efforts. Ultimately, mediation broke down, the military brutally ended the strike, and police persecuted labor organizations in general. But the precedent of relying on state-sponsored intercession had been set.

Then came the general strike of May 1911, touted as a pivotal demonstration of labor's power. And it certainly was. Solidarity was at a peak and most resistance societies came to the aid of the trolley workers. The city was shut down for three days. As the press reported, there was an air of general awe felt by workers, city residents, and the government. But, as detailed in the previous chapter, the strike occurred under very constrained conditions. José Batlle blessed the strike but added the critical caveat that

police “neutrality” would end at the first sign of disorder. And in order to make that threat patent he militarized Montevideo with troops of the line. (Would Representative Muró’s premonition about the need to massacre workers finally occur?) It was within these limitations that state officials (and also the media) emerged as arbitrators. By 1916, even anarchists had become accustomed to the now ritual deployment of state negotiators. As mentioned above, several mediators stepped up, from both political parties and including some private individuals. Workers appealed to José Batlle to stall the implementation of his own bill. Blanco Representative Andreoli and then the head of the Labor Office stepped in to mediate the Frigorífico Uruguay strike, though it finally ended through the arbitration of private businessmen.

Parliamentary action also facilitated workers’ accommodation to what slowly grew into a welfare state. My argument here contests the well-established historiographic trope known as the *Alto de Viera* (Viera’s Halt). Responding to a *batllista* electoral setback on July 30, 1916 for delegates to the constitutional assembly in 1918, President Viera reacted by saying, “All right, gentlemen, let us advance no further on social and economic legislation; we should reconcile capital with the worker. We have done much very quickly; let us put a halt [*alto*] to the process.”<sup>278</sup> But scholars have mistaken political posturing for historical fact. This simplification, employed now by almost every historian who mentions the period of early state reform, posits that the pace of change slowed dramatically between the administrations of José Batlle and Feliciano Viera.<sup>279</sup>

---

<sup>278</sup> “Bien, señores, no avancemos más en materia de legislación social y económica: conciliemos el capital con el obrero. Hemos hecho bastante a prisa; hagamos un alto en la jornada.” Cited in Benjamín Nahum, *Manual de historia del Uruguay: 1903-1990: Tomo II* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1995), 80-82.

<sup>279</sup> See for instance: López D’Alessandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Segunda parte]*, 62-63; José Rilla, “La política impositiva. Asedio y bloque del batllismo” and Gerardo Caetano,

Especially in the wake of *batllismo*'s electoral defeat in June 1916, the most progressive elements of the Colorado Party lost their mandate; the pace both of socio-economic and of political change allegedly slowed. Implicit in this explanation is the presumption of Batlle's centrality to the reform process, something I hope to have by now discredited. The only major labor reforms prior to Viera were as follows: a) the creation of the Labor Office by the Williman administration; b) the 1914 workplace accident law drafted by Representative Martínez Thedy; and c) the partial passage into law of Batlle's eight-hour workday bill in 1913. Therefore, what historians can only be responding to following the *alto* was a change in rhetoric—an easing of the discourse of reform and not its actual implementation. Over the next several years, legislators entertained a wide range of new bills and passed a few (see Appendix B); they held out the promise that with probity and patience state officials would respond to workers' plight and legislate and mediate means to a better life.

Of that period of *Alto*, José Pedro Barrán explains that Uruguay “experienced an intense process of electoralization [sic] in its democratic life...and the standstill of radical *batllismo*. The last was expressed in few and very prudent changes in social and economic legislation, making it possible to call the new republic more democratic and more conservative compared to the one of the previous decade.” The *batllistas*, “although majoritarian in the Colorado Party, the other factions obliged it into continuous pacts unless it wanted to see at the head of the government their traditional adversary, the National Party.” Barrán is, as I see it, basically correct in his framing but with the

---

“Los caminos políticos de la reacción conservadora (1916-1933)” in Balbis, et. al., *El primer batllismo*, 94-100, 130-136; Vanger, *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordoñez*, 143-157; Caetano and Rilla, *Historia contemporánea del Uruguay*, 156, 159-160, 163-164.

important qualification that the pace of change had not been particularly brisk in the first place. Laws were passed gradually before and after as politicians adapted the state form to new roles and methods in order to remain relevant given changed economic, political, and social needs. Most importantly, labor militancy became channeled and responses to grievances predictable, legible, and to a great degree ritualistic. As Barrán argues, Uruguay achieved that stability so sought after by the moneyed conservative classes. And workers, for their pains, received a slow steady trickle of protections.<sup>280</sup>

One question remains: why did Uruguay's labor movement(s) never become aligned with either political party or go with a third for that matter? As Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier point out, this is a distinctive feature of Uruguayan history set in a region that most always—especially through populist conveyance—witnessed labor alliances with one party: the Justicialista Party in Argentina, the Partido Trabalhista in Brazil, APRA in Peru, the PRI in Mexico, etc.<sup>281</sup> Further research (into the 1920s and beyond) would be necessary to answer that question but there are several suggestions I will make, patterns which should already be obvious. One, the Colorado and Blanco Parties did not function with much ideological coherence. They were parties of tradition and, through most of the nineteenth century, of war. They were large tents encompassing in many cases conflictual understandings of the state, the economy, and society. Of the two, the Blanco Party was perhaps the more unified on a few issues (particularly the privilege of the ranching sector and a positive role for the Catholic Church in society).

---

<sup>280</sup> "...Conoció un proceso intenso de electoralización de su vida democrática...y al detenimiento del batllismo radical. Lo último se tradujo en escasos y muy prudentes cambios en la legislación social y económica, pudiéndose llamar a la nueva república tanto más democrática como más conservadora que la de la década anterior." "...Aunque mayoría del Partido Colorado, las otras fracciones de éste lo obligaron a continuos pactos si no quería ver a la cabeza del gobierno al adversario tradicional, el Partido Nacional." Barrán, *Los conservadores uruguayos (1870-1933)*, 119-120.

<sup>281</sup> Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, 453-456.

Rife as they were with factionalism, it was virtually impossible for broad swaths of workers in a formal way to align themselves with either party. Two, factions of both parties reached out to workers.<sup>282</sup> And three, I suggest that the legacy of anarchism and a militant socialism—always attempting to differentiate itself from *batllismo*<sup>283</sup>—kept workers wary of politicians who would claim to be their benefactors. Instead, short-term alliances became the norm. These last points are made as a lamentation and as an encouragement. After all, the interventionist state was in a real sense enabled by workers in 1916; this was in co-participation (though on unequal footing) with legislators, a few of whom took credit and loom today as national gods. Coercive and extractive forms were also made by their victims. And they can be unmade.



























---

<sup>282</sup> Barrán, *Los conservadores uruguayos (1870-1933)*, 103-117.

<sup>283</sup> See: López D'Alesandro, *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: [Primera Parte]*, 73-113.

## APPENDIX A

**Table 3. Uruguayan Labor Legislation: A Timeline, 1903-1916**

-  15 March 1903—Círculos Católicos directly introduce a *descanso dominical* bill
-  3 May 1904—*Descanso Dominical* bill reintroduced with Blanco sponsorship
-  3 May 1904—Colorado (competing) labor bill introduced
-  5-16 January 1905—Railroad strike
-  23 February 1905—Comprehensive labor bill introduced
-  23 May-July 1 1905—Port workers strike (at the time Uruguay’s largest strike)
-  24 June 1905—(Revised Roxlo-de Herrera) Comprehensive labor bill reintroduced
-  27 December 1906—Eight Hour Workday bill introduced
-  9 March 1907—Bill introduced to legalize passive strikes
-  7 February-5 April 1908—Railroad strike
-  31 March 1908—Strike arbitration bill introduced
-  11 May 1909—Accident insurance bill introduced
-  13, 17 November 1909—Pro-Ferrer strike and public demonstration; assault on the Spanish Embassy
-  11 October 1910—Pensions bill introduced
-  4 May 1911—FORU’s Third Labor Conference
-  12 May 1911—Trolley strike begins
-  23-25 May 1911—First General Strike
-  11 June 1911—Eight Hour Workday bill reintroduced
-  14 June 1913—Eight Hour Workday Law passed by the Chamber of Representatives
-  7 July 1914—All-encompassing labor bill introduced
-  24 April 1915—Bill introduced mandating hygienic housing for rural workers
-  17 November 1915—Eight Hour Workday Law passed by the Senate
-  17 February 1916—Bill introduced protecting workers’ right to assemble and passively strike
-  18 February 1916—Eight Hour Workday Law takes effect
-  18 February 1916—Largest strike wave in Uruguayan history up to then begins
-  26 February 1916—Bill introduced mandating conciliation if requested by workers or employers

 = Labor Action     = Parliamentary Action



## APPENDIX B

**Table 4. Labor Bills Introduced in the Chamber of Representatives, 1917-1919**

April 1917—Bill introduced for the “Ley de la Silla” (Law of the Chair) ensuring greater comfort for women so they would not have to continuously stand at work.

November 1917—The “Ley de Subsistencia” (Law of Subsistence) introduced to control food prices and prevent speculation.

December 1917—A bill regulated night work introduced.

April 1918—It is proposed that the Ministry of Labor have a special Children’s Protection Unit to guard against child labor.

April 1918—A bill is considered for the construction of working class housing and “regenerative” lodging for homeless people.

June 1918—Minimum wage bill introduced.

October 1918—Discussion begun on a law mandating a weekly day off.

February 1919—Retirement pensions given to all citizens (or foreigners with fifteen or more years of residency) at age seventy. Pensions also given to anyone totally disabled regardless of age.

October 1919—May 1<sup>st</sup> made a legal holiday as “Día de los Trabajadores” (Workers’ Day).

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Archival Sources**

#### **Newspapers:**

*Adelante!*

*Aurora*

*Crónicas Subversivas*

*Despertar*

*El Amigo del Obrero*

*El Amigo del Pueblo*

*El Anarquista*

*El Atalaya*

*El Bien*

*El Día*

*El Demócrata*

*El Ferrocarrilero*

*El Industrial Uruguayo*

*El Libertario*

*La Nueva Senda*

*El Libre Pensamiento*

*El Obrero*

*El Obrero Calzado*

*El Obrero Panadero*

*El Obrero Sastre*

*El Tirapié*

*El Trabajo*

*Guerra Social*

*L'agitatore*

*La Aurora*

*La Acción Obrera*

*La Emancipación*

*La Federación*

*La Guistizia*

*La Protesta*

*La Rebelión*

*La Tribuna Libertaria*

*La Voz del Obrero*

*Resistencia Gremial*

*Salpicón*

*Solidaridad*

*The Montevideo Times*

*Tiempos Nuevos*

**Other Archival Materials:**

*Almanaque de El Amigo de Obrero para 1900.* Montevideo: Imprenta Latina, 1899.

*Anuario estadístico de la República Oriental del Uruguay: 1904-1906, Tomo I.*  
Montevideo: Imprenta Artística y Encuadernación, de Dornaleche y Reyes, 1907.

*Anuario estadístico de la República Oriental del Uruguay, 1908.* Montevideo: Imprenta Artística y Encuadernación de Juan J. Dornaleche, 1911.

*Anuario Estadístico de la Nación: 1917.* Montevideo: Tipografía Moderna de Manuel Diego Arduino, 1919.

Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de Virgilio Sampognaro.

*Diario de Sesiones de la H. Asamblea General de la República Oriental del Uruguay.*

*Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Representantes.*

*Diario de Sesiones de la H. Cámara de Senadores.*

*Departamento de Policía de la Capital: Prontuario Consultivo Policial*, Tomo I.  
Administración del Coronel Juan Bernassa y Jerez. Montevideo: Talleres A.  
Barreiro y Ramos, 1904.

*Departamento de Policía de la Capital: Prontuario Consultivo Policial*, Tomo II.  
Administración del Coronel Juan Bernassa y Jerez. Montevideo: Talleres A.  
Barreiro y Ramos, 1906.

*Tablas Cronológicas, 1830-1971* (Montevideo: [Publisher unknown], 1971).

Leoncio Lasso de la Vega. *¡Yo acuso!* Montevideo: [Publisher Unknown], 1907.

### **Websites Cited:**

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html).

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_x/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_24091912\\_singulari-quadam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_24091912_singulari-quadam_en.html).

<http://tiempo.elargentino.com/notas/descanso-dominical-ley-desde-1905>.

### **Secondary Sources:**

Andreón, Roberto. *Humanismo batllista*. Montevideo: Arca, 1996.

Andrews, George Reid. *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay*.  
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Ardao, Arturo *Batlle y Ordóñez y el positivismo filosófico*. Montevideo: Número, 1951.

- Barrán, José Pedro. *Historia de la sensibilidad uruguaya: La cultura “bárbara” (1800-1860) and El disciplinamiento (1860-1920)*. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2009.
- Barrán, José Pedro. *Los conservadores uruguayos (1870-1933)*, Second Edition. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2004.
- Barrán, José and Benjamín Nahum. *Batlle, los estancieros y el Imperio Británico*. 8 Volumes. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1979-1987.
- Brown, Jonathan C., editor. *Workers’ Control in Latin America, 1930-1979*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Buscio, Jorge. *José Batlle y Ordóñez: Uruguay a la vanguardia del mundo: Pensamiento político y raíces ideológicas*. Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2004.
- Caetano, Gerardo. “Los caminos políticos de la reacción conservadora (1916-1933).” In Jorge Balbis, et. al. *El primer batllismo: Cinco enfoques polémicos*. Montevideo: Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana and Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1985.
- Caetano, Gerardo and José Rilla. *Historia contemporánea del Uruguay: De la colonia al siglo XXI*. Second Edition. Montevideo: CLAEH and Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2005.
- Caetano, Gerardo and Roger Geymonat. *La secularización uruguaya (1859-1919)*. Montevideo: Ediciones Santillana, S.A., 1997.
- Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan. *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Chasteen, John Charles. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011.

- Chasteen, John Charles. *Heroes on Horseback: A Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillos*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995.
- Claps, Manuel with the collaboration of Mario Daniel Lamas. *El batllismo como ideología*. Montevideo: Cal y Canto, 1999.
- Collier, Ruth Berins. *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Collier, Ruth Berins and David Collier. *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002.
- Craig, Robert H. *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.
- Day, Richard J. F. *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005.
- De la Torre, Carlos. *Populist Seduction in Latin America: The Ecuadorian Experience*. Athens: Ohio Center for International Studies, 2000.
- DeShazo, Peter. *Urban Workers and Labor Unions in Chile, 1902-1927*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- Donghi, Tulio Halperín. *The Contemporary History of Latin America*. Edited and translated by John Charles Chasteen. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Drinot, Paulo. *The Allure of Labor: Workers, Race, and the Makings of the Peruvian State*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

Ehrick, Christine. *The Shield of the Weak: Feminism and the State in Uruguay, 1903-1933*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.

Fabregat, Enrique Rodríguez. *Batlle y Ordóñez, el reformador*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Claridad, 1942.

Forster, Cindy. "Reforging National Revolution: Campesino Labor Struggles in Guatemala, 1944-1954." In Aviva Chomsky and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, editors. *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation-State: The Laboring Peoples of the Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998.

French, John D. *The Brazilian Workers' ABC: Class Conflict and Alliances in Modern São Paulo*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

French, John D. *Drowning in Laws: Labor Law and Brazilian Political Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Giudici, Roberto B. with the collaboration of Efraín González Conzi. *Batlle y el batllismo*. Montevideo: Imprenta Nacional Colorada, 1928.

Graham, Carol. *Peru's APRA: Parties, Politics, and the Elusive Quest for Democracy* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992.

Grompone, Antonio M. *La ideología de Batlle: Seguido por escritos de José Batlle y Ordóñez*. Montevideo: Arca, 1967.

Hart, John M. *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860-1931*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1978.

Healey, Mark. *In the Spirit of Batlle: Shaping the Political Arena and the Great Uruguayan Exception*, Working Paper #21. Durham: Duke University Press, August 1996.



- Hennock, E.P. *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850-1914: Social Policies Compared*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Hierro, Luis Alberto. *Batlle: Democracia y reforma del estado*. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1977.
- Higley, John and Richard Gunther, editors. *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Horowitz, Joel. *Argentina's Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1916-1930*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008.
- Horrox, James. *A Living Revolution: Anarchism and the Kibbutz Movement*. Edinburgh, Oakland, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2009.
- Hu, Aiqun and Patrick Manning. "The Global Social Insurance Movement Since the 1880s," *Journal of Global History*. Volume 5, Issue 1, (March 2010), 125-148.
- Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Kasza, Gregory J. *One World of Welfare: Japan in Comparative Perspective*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Kropotkin, Peter. *Act For Yourselves: Articles From Freedom 1886-1907*. Nicolas Walter and Heiner Becker, editors. London: Freedom Press, 1998.
- Lago, Julio. *José Batlle y Ordóñez: Ensayos sobre el periodo crítico de la República Oriental: 1903-1916*. La Paz: Tall Gráf. Vanguardia, 1982.

Liu, Tien-Lung. *The Chameleon State: Global Culture and Policy Shifts in Britain and Germany, 1914-1933*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999.

Linebaugh, Peter. *The Magna Carta Manifesto: The Struggle to Reclaim Liberties and Commons for All*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

López D'Alesandro, Fernando. *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Anarquistas y socialistas: 1838-1910*. Montevideo: Ediciones del Nuevo Mundo, 1988.

López D'Alesandro, Fernando. *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: 1911-1918: La izquierda durante el Batllismo [Primera parte]*. Montevideo: Ediciones del Nuevo Mundo, 1990.

Lopez D'Alesandro, Fernando. *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: Tomo II: 1911-1918: La izquierda durante el Batllismo [Segunda parte]*. Montevideo: Ediciones del Nuevo Mundo, 1992.

Lopez D'Alssandro, Fernando. *Historia de la izquierda uruguaya: La fundación del partido comunista y la división del anarquismo (1919-1923)*. Montevideo: Vintén Editor, 1992.

Louis, Julio A. *Batlle y Ordóñez: Apogeo y muerte de la democracia burguesa*. Montevideo: Nativa Libros, 1972.

Lowenthal, Abraham F. *Partners in Conflict: The United States and Latin America*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

McCrea, Heather. *Diseased Relations: Epidemics, Public Health, and State-Building in Yucatán, Mexico, 1847-1924*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010.

Muniz, Justino Závila. *Batlle: Héroe civil*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1945.

Nahum, Benjamín. *Breve historia del Uruguay independiente*. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2003.

Nahum, Benjamín. *Manual de historia del Uruguay: 1903-1990: Tomo II*. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1995.

Oliú, Estela Abal and Isabel Ezcurra Semblat. *De las lanzas a las leyes: El Partido Nacional y la cuestión social*. Second Edition. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Plaza, 2005.

Pinto, Julio and Verónica Valdivia. *¿Revolución proletaria o querida chusma?: Socialismo y Alessandrismo en la pugna por la politización pampina (1911-1932)*. Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2001.

Pintos, Francisco R. *Batlle y el proceso histórico del Uruguay*. Montevideo: Claudio García y Cía., 1938.

Pujol, Miguel J. *Batlle: El estado de bienestar en el Río de la Plata*. Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 1996.

Real de Azúa, Carlos. *Uruguay, ¿una sociedad amortiguadora?* Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1984.

Rilla, José. “La política impositiva: Asedio y bloque del batllismo.” In Jorge Balbis, et. al. *El primer batllismo: Cinco enfoques polémicos*. Montevideo: Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana and Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1985.

Rokkan, Stein. *Citizens, Elections, Parties: Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Processes of Development*. New York: McKay, 1970.

Romero, Inmaculada. *José Batlle*. Madrid: Historia 16: Ediciones Quorum: Sociedad para la Ejecución Programas del Quinto Centenario, 1987.

Rodgers, Daniel T. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Rodríguez, Universindo, Silvia Visconti, Jorge Chagas, and Gustavo Trullén. *El sindicalismo uruguayo: A 40 años del congreso de unificación*. Montevideo: Ediciones Santillana, 2006.

Rodríguez Díaz, Universindo. *Los sectores populares en el Uruguay del novecientos: Segunda Parte*. Montevideo: TAE Editorial, 1994.

Rosenthal, Anton. "Streetcar Workers and the Transformation of Montevideo: The General Strike of May 1911." *The Americas*. Vol. 51, No. 4 (Apr. 1995).

Staffes, Tracy L. *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern America, 1890-1940*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Suriano, Juan. *Paradoxes in Utopia: Anarchist Culture and Politics in Buenos Aires, 1890-1910*. Translated by Chuck Morse. Oakland: AK Press, 2010.

Turcato, Davide. "Collective Action, Opacity, and the 'Problem of Irrationality': Anarchism and the First of May, 1890-1892." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*. Vol. 5, No. 1, 2011, 1-32.

Vanger, Milton I. *José Batlle y Ordoñez of Uruguay: The Creator of His Times, 1902-1907*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Vanger, Milton I. *The Model Country: José Batlle y Ordoñez of Uruguay, 1907-1915*. Hanover: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1980.

Vanger, Milton I. *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordoñez: The Determined Visionary, 1915-1917*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.

- Whitney, Robert. *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Willrich, Michael. *Pox: An American History*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011.
- Zubillaga, Carlos. *Cristianos y cambio social en el Uruguay de la modernización (1896-1919)*. Montevideo: Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana and Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1988.
- Zubillaga, Carlos. “El batllismo: una experiencia populista.” In Jorge Balbis, et. al., *El primer batllismo: Cinco enfoques polémicos*. Montevideo: Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana and Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1985.
- Zubillaga, Carlos. *Cultura popular en el Uruguay de entresiglos (1870-1910)*. Montevideo: Librería Linardi y Risso, 2011.
- Zubillaga, Carlos. *Pan y trabajo: Organización sindical, estrategias de lucha y arbitraje estatal en Uruguay (1870-1905)*. Montevideo: Librería de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, 1996.
- Zubillaga, Carlos. *Perfiles en sombra: Aportes a un diccionario biográfico de los orígenes del movimiento sindical en Uruguay (1870-1910)*. Montevideo: Librería de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, 2008.
- Zubillaga, Carlos and Jorge Balbis. *Historia del movimiento sindical uruguayo*, vol. 1-4. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1985.