

Hernán Camarero: Tiempos rojos. El impacto de la Revolución rusa en la Argentina [Red Times. The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Argentina], Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2017. 335 pp. – ISBN 978-950-07-5980-9.

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In his previous essential work, *Towards the Conquest of the Working Class. The Communists and the World of Work in Argentina, 1920–1935*, Hernán Camarero conducted a thorough analytical reconstruction of the hitherto unknown active participation of the early Argentinean communist movement in workers' organizations, strikes, workers' culture activities and migrant communities.¹ Camarero's new book addresses an earlier moment which refers to the connection of the First World War with the Russian Revolution and interprets the impact it exerted on the development of political events in Argentina.

Although the title promises to address a topic too large for a single volume, even more so as the first third of the work deals with general issues in order to introduce the reader to the subject, the content presents a precise problem-oriented layout. The chronological framework comprises the five years from the outbreak to the end of the "rise and initial expansion of the revolution and the Comintern" (p. 24), the end of which is attributed to the year 1922. In geographical terms, the city of Buenos Aires is placed at the center of the action. Seated within the trend of transnational studies dedicated to the Russian Revolution, the work constitutes the first general history on the effects of the Russian Revolution in Argentina. The attention is focused mainly on the Argentine labor movement, on the drifts of socialism, on the emerging domestic communism and the beginnings of its difficult relationship with the Comintern. To a lesser extent, it also accounts for the reception of revolutionary events by trade unionism, anarchism, Catholicism, the reactionary right embodied by the Argentine Patriotic League and the Labor Association, and the cultural field with Jorge Luis Borges at the head.

The author reconstructs highly relevant aspects which are seldom addressed in historiography, comprising both the diplomatic relations between the Argentine and Soviet governments, and the activism of the militants of Russian origin who arrived in Argentina and contributed to the enrichment of the country's political culture. César Tiempo, Simón Radowitzky, Mayor Mashevich, Ida Bondareff, Mikhail Komin-Aleksandrovsky and Mikhail Yaroshevsky are some of the outstanding biographies. The book features a valuable assemblage of various groupings organized by those who were exiled from the Tsarist Empire: the Avangard Jewish Social Democratic Labor Organization created in 1907; the Russian Circle which emerged the following year and was attached to the Socialist Party until 1914; the Committee of Assistance to the Exiles and Forced Laborers of Czarist Russia

¹ Hernán Camarero: *A la conquista de la clase obrera. Los comunistas y el mundo del trabajo en la Argentina, 1920–1935*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI editores, 2007.

founded in 1916 and renamed into “Committee of Assistance to Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies” after the February Revolution of 1917 – this Committee was subsequently reconverted into the Russian Socialist Workers’ Union, attached to the Argentine Communist Party at the beginning of 1921 under the new name of the Russian Communist Group; and finally the Federation of Russian Workers’ Organizations of South America which emerged in 1917–1918.

The Argentine Socialist Party (PSA) celebrated the fall of czarism and the formation of the Provisional Government and condemned the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. The reconstruction of the reception of news from Russia as events took place is one of the great achievements of *Tiempos Rojos*. Interestingly, there is a preponderance for the analysis of *La Vanguardia*, the official organ of the PSA, “to political representations”, without “fully gauging the weight of popular prominence” (p. 150). As the PSA identified itself with the Provisional Government, it praised outstanding leaders of Menshevism and the Socialist Revolutionary Party, while expressing its support of favorable statements for the continuation of the participation of the Russian army in the war in order to achieve the defeat of Germany. Most of the leadership of the PSA professed a political line that, without signifying the definitive abandonment of the revolution, was based on reformism as a method of conducting the gradual transformation of society. Camarero shows how the growth of the Bolshevik Party within the Petrograd Soviet ignited the alarm among the Argentine parliamentary socialists. After the storm of the Winter Palace, *La Vanguardia* interpreted it as a *coup d’état*. But this position was not the only one within the party, which had to deal with the presence of an internationalist wing that identified itself as Marxist and revolutionary. Present in the heart of the PSA since 1912 and expressing itself by various political, trade union and editorial practices, the internationalists opposed the pressure which the parliamentarians exercised on the national government to break relations with Germany after the sinking of Argentinean merchant ships by German submarines. The internal conflict erupted at the Third Extraordinary Congress of the PSA at the end of April 1917. Contrary to all expectations, the internationalist slogans that demanded the maintenance of neutrality received the vote of the majority of the delegates. Counting on socialist representatives in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Chamber of Senators of the Nation, the parliamentary nucleus within the PSA asserted its position to intimidate its members, threatening to leave their seats if support for the position of the leftists continued and the resolutions voted at the Congress were adopted.

Camarero dedicates an entire chapter to present the repercussions generated by the Russian Revolution among the political, trade union and social forces, both on the left and on the right. He contextualizes the position of the Argentinean anarchists, split between those who initially supported the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia and those who continued to oppose it. From 1921 onwards, the anarchist reading of Bolshevik rule as a “party dictatorship” – that undermined the power of the free soviets – was increasingly reducing the support from Argentinean anarchism to the path that the Russian experience was taking. Reformist-oriented trade unionism celebrated the triumph of the Russian Revolution, which led a small sector within it to recover part of the revolutionary positions that Argentine trade unionists had initially outlined.

For many decades, the nature of the Comintern has been subject to reductionist perspectives that tended to find in it the imposition by Moscow of a mechanism of control over the national communist parties. In contrast to this position, and in line with more recent

fundamental studies that depict the complexity of the relations that the Comintern had with its national sections (Brigitte Studer, Olga Ulianova, Víctor and Lazar Jelfets, to mention some central authors), Camarero's book contributes to deepening and problematizing a shifting reality which did not imply in the communist parties the simple mechanical implementation of political lines established unilaterally by the Soviet communists. In this sense, the role of the Comintern agents in the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) makes it possible to capture with more precision the process of establishing relations, where Mashevich, Komin-Aleksandrovsy and Felix Weil mainly tried to present themselves in the eyes of the Executive Committee of the Comintern as its most valuable exponents for the implementation of political work in Argentina. However, in this process, personal competition ensued both between foreign emissaries and between them and the leaders of the PCA, who in turn disputed their right to officiate as an exemplary party for the communists of the rest of the countries of South America. The PCA leadership claimed privileged treatment by the Comintern based on the greater degree of development registered by the Argentine section in relation to the other South American sections, a position that was especially promoted by the early failure of the Pan American Bureau founded in 1920, wherein the Japanese Cominternian Sen Katayama had played a leading role. A symptom of this reality was the formation of the Communist Propaganda Bureau for South America, which "was vital for the development of several communist parties in the region" (p. 215). It was based in Buenos Aires, and was chaired by five members, among whom was PCA's general secretary Rodolfo Ghioldi.

In short, Camarero's book is aimed at a broad – academic as well as non-academic – audience. The prose is careful and precise. The organization of the arguments is very useful to guide the reader through the route the author proposes. An important issue to be highlighted is the fact that the bibliographical references were reduced to a minimum, while the explicit documentary references were omitted. However, for the reader who wants to go deeper into the proper investigation of the documents addressed, the author provides all the necessary information (names and dates) to identify the complete references of each of the primary sources. Just as it is not necessary to be a connoisseur of the history of the Russian revolution to read this book, prior knowledge of the political history and social conflicts in Argentina is not required either. That is why it is a work equally accessible to Argentine and foreign readers. Particularly in its treatment of the complex, changing and reciprocal initial links between the Comintern and the PCA and the work of the emissaries designated to Buenos Aires by Moscow, the optics adopted in *Tiempos Rojos* allow us to pose essential questions about the particular history of the origins of Argentine communism that enable, in return, advance in the general knowledge about the Comintern itself.