Chapter Six

Capital Accumulation and the Forms and Potentialities of the Labor Movement in Latin America

Critical Reflections on Argentina and Chile

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In his classic book on *Labor in Latin America*, Charles Bergquist attempts to bring the role and forms of the labor movement back into the study of Latin American societies and their historical trajectory. Although Bergquist's book does not offer an explicit in-depth discussion of the theoretical-methodological approach which informs his historiographical research, he does sketch out a very general framework that structures the empirical case studies of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela. Very broadly, his perspective postulates a causal link between the export structure of each country, the consequent potentialities for industrial development, and the features of the workers' movement (mainly, its ideological and organizational forms and its relative strength/weakness). More specifically, according to Bergquist there is an inverse relationship between the potentialities for economic diversification generated by the export structure, and the political leanings (left/right), organizational forms (independent-classist/corporatist), and strength of the workers' movement.

In this chapter, we shall critically examine Bergquist's underlying theoretical framework so as to assess its explanatory power for the study of contemporary Latin American societies. In our view, the connection that Bergquist posits between the export structure and its industrializing potential, on the one hand, and forms and strength of the labor movement, on the other, has the merit of involving an attempt at a materialist conceptualization of the relationship between the economic determinations of the process of capital accumulation and the political action of the working class. However, we shall argue that the particular manner in which Bergquist conceives of the nexus between the economic and political forms of capitalist social relations

is problematic for at least two main reasons. In the first place, the connection remains utterly extrinsic. More concretely, the economic structure of society is reduced to some immediately observable "empirical" features of Latin American countries, which are then seen to coalesce into a set of external circumstances that condition the forms and scope of working-class struggles. In the second place, and more substantively, we argue that Bergquist's characterization of the "economic structure" of Latin American societies, in terms of the particular configuration of the "export sector" of each country, falls short of a rigorous explanation of the specific form of this region's national processes of capital accumulation and their role in the international division of labor. Against the backdrop of these limitations in Bergquist's framework, the chapter provides an alternative approach to the specificity of Latin American societies and the manner in which it has historically determined the forms and scope of the labor movement in Argentina and Chile on a comparative basis.

LIMITS OF BERGQUIST'S THEORETICAL APPROACH

The connection that Bergquist posits between the export structure and its industrializing potential, on the one hand, and forms and strength of the labor movement, on the other, has the merit of involving an attempt at a "materialist" conceptualization of the relationship between the economic determinations of the process of capital accumulation and the political action of the working class. However, we think that the particular manner in which Bergquist conceives of the nexus between the economic and political forms of capitalist social relations remains utterly extrinsic. More concretely, the economic structure of society is reduced to some immediately observable "empirical" features of Latin American countries, which are then seen to coalesce into a set of external circumstances that condition the forms and scope of working-class struggles, which are thereby represented as an abstractly "autonomous" and self-moving political "factor" that externally modifies or influences the potentialities and trajectory of capitalist development in each country. Yet, from a truly critical materialist perspective, the class struggle must be grasped as form-determined by the generalized commodity-form of capitalist social relations. Specifically, the class struggle actually is the most general direct social relation between collective personifications of commodities (thereby differentiated as a political form of social relations), which mediates the unfolding of the essentially indirect relations of capitalist production through the generalized commodity-form (hence distinguished as the economic form of social relations). In its simplest determination, it is the necessary concrete

form taken by the purchase of labor-power at its full value and, therefore, by the attainment of the socially constituted normal material reproduction of the productive attributes of wage-laborers in a capitalistic "exploitable shape" (on average, through the cyclical oscillations of the wage, i.e., the price of labor power, around its "immanent" magnitude of value).[1]

Now, as argued elsewhere (Fitzsimons and Starosta 2018), even the most methodologically minded readings of *Capital* tend to consider that the content and definition of the value of labor-power are exhausted in chapter 6 of that book. However, those perspectives overlook the systematic-dialectical place and significance (i.e., the level of abstraction) of Marx's discussion of the value of labor-power at that stage. More specifically, those readings miss the point that this initial exposition of the latter's determination occurs in the context of the formal subsumption of labor to capital. However, the determination of the value of labor-power is not exhausted at that abstract level but involves further concretization as we move from the formal to the real subsumption of labor to capital, and from the latter to the reproduction of the total social capital.

In effect, as capital takes possession and modifies the labor process to produce relative surplus value, it transforms its requirements of qualitatively different physical and intellectual attributes that need to be set into motion to produce a mass of use-values "pregnant" with surplus value. In other words, with each cyclical renewal of the general technical basis of the valorization process, capital revolutionizes the kind of labor-power of the different organs of the collective laborer. This transformation can only result from, and be reproduced by, the mutation of the respective "norm of consumption," and so of the conditions of reproduction, of the various segments of the working class. The reason for this is that it is the consumption of those means of subsistence that (re)produces "the muscles, nerves, bones and brains of existing workers" (Marx 1976, 717) that materially bear "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities which he sets into motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind" (Marx 1976, 270). Thus, the material conditions of the reproduction process of capital constitute the content of the determination of the value of labor-power, as more concretely posited by the real subsumption of labor. They do so by determining the differentiated forms of productive subjectivity that compose the collective laborer and, as consequence, the quantity and kind of means of subsistence that different workers need to consume to reproduce those variegated technical and "moral" attributes of labor-power.[2] In turn, the class struggle becomes the necessary political form that mediates the contradictory establishment of the material unity between the productive and consumptive requirements of the reproduction of the total social capital.

In sum, the organized antagonistic action of wage-workers as a class, far from enjoying "autonomy" (relative or otherwise), is the necessary political mode of realization of the contradictory economic content of capitalist social relations. Various important points follow from this inner nexus between the economic and political forms of the social relations of capitalist production.

In the first place, it goes without saying that this does not imply the denial of the transformative powers of human practice personified by workers. But it does imply that whatever transformative powers the political action of workers might have—whether capital-reproducing or capital-transcending political action—must be an immanent determination begotten by the movement of capital accumulation and not external to it. And as an expression of its simplest determination implicated in the mere existence of labor-power as a commodity, the class struggle only exists as a necessary form of capital's reproduction, but not of its transcendence. The former, let us crucially stress, is the mode of existence of the class struggle that underpins Bergquist's historical study, which mostly (if not exclusively) tends to focus on "reformist" expressions of workers' resistance, even when it appears in self-proclaimed "anti-capitalist" political and ideological forms. In this sense, it must be noted that the "measure" of the objective (progressive) transformative potentiality of a certain historical expression of the labor movement does not simply boil down to those ideological forms. Instead, it is objectively manifested in the extent to which it manages to improve the conditions of productive consumption and reproduction of labor-power in a relatively universal or undifferentiated manner across the different organs of the working class.

In the second place, this means that the determination of the class struggle as a political action is not restricted to the conquest of state power or to an action involving demands directed at the state. The political determination of the class struggle springs from the objectively general scope of the antagonistic direct social relation between capitalists and wage workers. In other words, it should be clear that this determination of the class struggle as the form of the sale of labor-power at its full value does not simply involve its "trade union" organizational expressions. Concomitantly, neither does it imply that it will always be realized through the development of mere "trade union consciousness." As a matter of fact, that determination may well manifest itself in apparently extremely radical or militant forms of the class struggle (which tends to occur in the upward swing of the cyclical oscillation of the capital accumulation process, when real wages usually rise).[3] In other words, when addressing the diverse historical expressions of the labor movement, as Bergquist intends, it is of paramount importance to grasp the "unity-in-difference" between the immanent content and the concrete mode of appearance of working-class struggles and their ideological and

organizational forms. By contrast, we think the confusion between content and concrete form of the class struggle, which arguably lies at the basis of the orthodox Marxist rigid separation between economistic and political consciousness of the working class, is tacitly taken for granted in Bergquist typological "model."

Against the backdrop of these remarks on the connection between content and form of the class struggle, let us take a closer look at Bergquist's concrete application of his theoretical framework in Latin America. As we have seen, the model associates the left side of the continuum with the development of a vigorous and "independent" labor movement and "Marxist" (i.e., allegedly "revolutionary") ideological forms among leftist organizations. This would find its "material basis" in a highly concentrated and foreign-dominated export structure which blocks the possibilities for so-called import substituting industrialization (ISI). On the other pole of the continuum, a more fragmented and domestically owned export structure would give room for ISI but lead to a weaker labor movement, which thus becomes "co-opted" into "nationalist" or "populist" ideological forms. Thus, this approach implicitly measures and judges the strength and (progressive) transformative potentialities of the labor movement by the ideological forms in which most workers represent the social determinations of their existence. More specifically, Bergquist seems to suggest that the ideological forms that he sees as manifestation of a "co-opted" labor movement lacking in "cultural independence" are a sign of weakness of the class struggle. Argentina, with the "Peronist populist conservatism" as the dominant ideology of the labor movement during most of the historical period covered in his study, would be a paradigmatic case in point of this "right-wing" pole of the spectrum. Conversely, when the immediate appearance of the class struggle mostly takes the form of a self-styled "Marxist" organization, he tends to characterize the respective labor movement as "strong and vigorous" (the case of Chile is deemed as incarnation of this and as the emblematic counterpoint to the former).

Yet, paradoxically as it may seem from Bergquist's perspective, when the transformative potentiality of the labor movement is materialistically grounded as the vehicle for the establishment of socially determined conditions of reproduction of labor-power with historically changing determinate productive attributes, a different picture emerges. Where, by virtue of economic determinations and dynamics that will be discussed in the next section, the process of capital accumulation carries the potentiality to develop through a broader and deeper ISI process, the need arises for the generation and reproduction of a working class which embodies more complex productive capacities (and also of their expanded absorption as active "industrial army," i.e., through rising manufacturing employment). In turn, this will manifest

itself in an overall tendency for an average higher value of labor power of the respective national fragment of the working class. Moreover, as already discussed, the necessary concrete form of the class struggle taken by the sale of the commodity labor-power at its value means that an upward trend in the latter will be realized in a stronger labor movement in its conflict against the bourgeoisie. By contrast, in countries where economic conditions did not allow for a similar degree of development of an ISI process, the material basis for such a rising value of labor-power was missing. Thus, despite the appearance of greater "radicality" and "autonomy" of the respective ideological forms, those labor movements have been actually weaker in their potentiality for attaining improved conditions of normal reproduction of labor-power. This is confirmed when one examines the most significant synthetic "empirical" expression of the transformative potentialities of working-class struggles over the conditions of their reproduction, which does not reside in the hegemonic ideological form but, fundamentally, in the historical trajectory of the average real wage. As can be seen in figure 6.1, during the period of ISI, real wages in Chile, the alleged emblematic case of a "powerful Marxist labor movement," albeit with a comparatively shallow industrialization process, have been systematically and significantly lower than in Argentina, which, according to Bergquist, is exemplary of a co-opted and weak expression of the class struggle.

To conclude this section, the critical scrutiny of Bergquist's theoretical approach shows that his "model" fails adequately to ground, and therefore

Figure 6.1. Source: Rivas Castro (2022)

explain, the real differential strength of Latin American labor movements beyond their immediate ideological and political appearances. In our view, this shortcoming derives, first and foremost, from the external relation that he posits between the "economic structure" of capitalist society and its political and ideological forms. By contrast, we presented an alternative view based on a particular "systematic-dialectical" approach to the Marxian critique of political economy, which grasps working-class struggles as "form-determined" by the "law of value." However, we also noted that there is a further weakness in Bergquist's book; more concretely, in his conceptualization of the "economic structure" of Latin American societies inspired by Latin American Structuralist political economy. In the next section, we therefore offer an alternative approach to the specific "economic structure" of Latin American societies derived from the essentially global dynamics of the capital accumulation process and the resulting forms of the international division of labor and uneven development. On that basis, we subsequently reexamine the different forms of the Latin American labor movements in this new light (with a specific focus on Argentina and Chile), hopefully tracing the immanent unity between the specificity of the capital accumulation process in the region and the general political and ideological forms of the class struggle and its changing historical dynamics.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE SPECIFICITY OF THE CAPITAL ACCUMULATION PROCESSES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE FORMS AND SCOPE OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

The Specificity of Capital Accumulation in Latin America

As is recognized by virtually all accounts of the history of capitalist development in Latin America, and Bergquist's book is no exception, the original subsumption of these territories to the global accumulation of capital was based on the production of agricultural and/or mining commodities for the world market. However, the developmental potentialities and dynamics of those territories was not simply determined by the use-value of those export commodities but, crucially, by the determinations derived from their value-form. As Marx remarks in *Capital*, the establishment of this "classic" modality of the international division of labor (that he labels "new"), which "converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part, which remains a pre-eminently industrial field" (Marx 1976, 580), was determined by the production of relative surplus value through the system of machinery of large-scale industry.

In effect, the exceptional natural conditions prevailing in many of these territories allowed for a greater productivity of agricultural or mining labor, thereby resulting in the cheapening of means of subsistence and a lower value of labor-power (Starosta 2019, 671). However, this form of subsumption of Latin American territories into the global circuits of accumulation was ridden with a contradiction: if, on the one hand, the total social capital enhanced its valorization by reducing the value of labor-power, on the other this was partly offset by the drain of surplus value, otherwise available for capital's appropriation, flowing into the pockets of domestic landowners in the form of ground-rent. Moreover, to the extent that primary commodities produced in the region have been exported and consumed overseas, ground-rent has constituted a continuous extraordinary international inflow of social wealth (as opposed to the normal outflows in the process of equalization of the world-wide rate of profit emphasized by, for instance, the dependency tradition) (Iñigo Carrera 2018; Caligaris, Fitzsimons, and Starosta, 2024). Capital was thus driven to overcome this barrier to its accumulation capacity by reshaping those spaces of valorization to recover part of that surplus value, through the establishment of an "antagonistic association" with local landowners over the appropriation of ground-rent. From being simply a source of cheap raw materials and means of subsistence, those territories became also determined as sources of ground-rent recovery for global industrial capital.

The accumulation of capital through the recovery of ground-rent has taken a variety of forms (Grinberg and Starosta 2015, 242–43). More concretely, the transfer of ground-rent has been achieved through different policy mechanisms (overvalued exchange rates, export and import taxes, direct state regulation of staple food and raw material prices, etc.), which resulted in the establishment of specific domestic conditions for the circulation of capital within those national territories. Consequently, its appropriation could only be done by industrial capitals operating within those countries and whose circuit realized its final phase (i.e., the sale of commodities) almost exclusively on highly protected domestic markets of a very limited size vis-à-vis world market norms (Grinberg and Starosta 2009, 769ff). ISI, which consolidated in most primary-commodity-producing countries between the 1930s and 1950s, and which reached its peak during the "commodities boom" of the 1970s, has been the most paradigmatic and developed form through which this specific modality of capital accumulation has unfolded.

Although this has meant that individual capitals could not reach the scale needed for profitably utilizing advanced technologies, they have compensated for the resulting higher production costs by appropriating a portion of ground-rent. In this way, they have valorized at the average rate of profit despite their restricted magnitude and backward technologies. Thus, this specific modality

capital accumulation has been attractive for domestic capitals that, with the exception of those producing ground-rent-bearing commodities, were not competitive enough to sustain their expanded reproduction by producing for the world market. But, additionally and fundamentally, those protected domestic markets turned out especially profitable for industrial capitals of foreign origin (i.e., transnational corporations), which were established there from the mid- to late 1950s onward.

In sum, an abundant extraordinary mass of social wealth, in the social form of ground-rent, has systematically complemented the surplus-value extracted from the domestic working class to the point of marking the very specificity of the accumulation process in Latin American countries. However, the other side of this same coin is that the scale of those processes of capital accumulation has been "structurally" subject to the markedly cyclical evolution of the magnitude of ground-rent available for appropriation. As we shall see, this explains the peculiarly pronounced "political and institutional instability" that has historically characterized most Latin American countries, with sharp ebbs and flows of the class struggle and, at the level of the state-form, with abrupt oscillations between nationalistic populist and/or developmentalist regimes and neoliberal ones. Against this backdrop, the singularity of the political and ideological forms of the labor movement in each of the four cases studied by Bergquist should therefore be seen as an expression of the specific scale and scope, cyclical dynamics, and timing of the respective national accumulation process through ISI.

The Political Forms of the Capital Accumulation Process in Argentina

Among the four case studies, Argentina arguably stands out as the one in which the ISI process developed earlier and with more breadth and depth. Its beginnings can be traced back to the 1930s or maybe a little earlier (albeit the conditions that paved its way had been germinating from at least the turn of the nineteenth century). In the following decade, mostly under Peronism, the process gained momentum through the multiplication of small nationally owned industrial capitals. Subsequently, toward the end of the 1950s, it experienced a mass inflow of foreign direct investment by virtue of which the major manufacturing transnational corporations settled in the national territory to cater for those profitable, highly protected domestic markets. In this way, global industrial capital started to partake directly as the main active partner in the recovery of ground-rent. The changing configuration of the labor movement evolved in tandem with these transformations of the productive structure of the country.

The Formation and Early Development of the Labor Movement in Twentieth-Century Argentina

Until the beginning and during the germinal stages of the industrialization process, the struggle of the wage-workers was politically and ideologically expressed through independent class organizations that, in Bergquist terms, could be seen as "non-coopted" or "culturally autonomous."[4] In the first place, these early stages of working-class struggles developed through the diffusion of anarchism among its ranks. As the renowned Argentine Marxist Aricó (1999) acknowledged, despite the apparent radicalism of its self-proclaimed "anti-capitalist" ideology and rhetoric, in actual practice most of anarchism's political efforts were geared toward typically "reformist" trade-union demands (such as full "freedom of association"). In this sense, this spread of anarchist trade-unionism was the political form taken by the emergent partial and fragmented tendency for improved conditions of sale of labor-power within particular branches of the social division of labor, as the material conditions of the specific form of valorization of capital in Argentina gradually started to require an expansion of the productive attributes of workers (hence of their "norm of consumption" and the real wage), and the restriction in the extensive productive consumption of labor-power (i.e., the shortening of the working day), to compensate for the increased intensity of labor. Later on, as this tendency became generalized across the productive structure, the political action of workers had to transcend its narrow trade-union organization and acquire an overtly political independent mode of expression at the level of the capitalist state; more specifically, at the level of its legislative power, so that the results of the class struggle could be objectively sanctioned in a universally valid and coercive manner, that is, through the legal-form. Therefore, anarchism became partly complemented by the growth of parliamentary socialism, whose mediation in the class struggle directly personified the passing of several labor laws, the extension of the franchise (given the large number of immigrants among wage-workers) and the establishment of a first, rather modest, spate of social rights (e.g., compulsory, nonreligious public elementary education). Thus, despite their outward opposing ideological rhetoric, anarchism and parliamentary socialism formed an immanent differentiated unity in this phase of the class struggle over the normal reproduction of labor-power, respectively: a "revolutionary" extra-parliamentary left and a "reformist" wing. As Iñigo Carrera (2022, 474–75) perceptively puts it, ideologically unconstrained by the state and legal-forms, the former could "hit hard" through violent direct actions and the call to general (wildcat) strikes, at a time when the regulation of the class struggle had not been fully institutionalized through the web of labor law and the corresponding bureaucratic organs. However, precisely by virtue of this, it could not politically personify

the necessity for the generalization of these improved conditions of sale and productive utilization of labor-power through their sanction in the objectively binding form of the law, which was precisely the role played by the "Socialist Party" through electoral, yet class-independent, politics.

Finally, this formative stage of the labor movement culminated between the mid-1910s and early 1920s with the hegemony of revolutionary syndicalism (at the expense of and in conflict with the union branch of the Socialist Party), and its refusal for the organized working class to take any active part in the political representation of the accumulation of capital through the legislative or executive control over the capitalist state. In practice, this refusal meant that the mass electoral representation of workers fell in the hands of "bourgeois" parties (specifically, of so-called Radicalism), while their "ideologically autonomous" organization narrowed down again to its trade-union form. At first sight, this configuration of the labor movement might appear broadly to resemble the "unity-in-difference" between anarchism ("revolution") and the Socialist Party ("reform") as the necessary political forms of social mediation for the establishment a higher value of labor-power and a shorter working day, as just described. However, there are at least two significant differences. In the first place, through its mass electoral support of the Radical Party, which eventually managed to win the by then free democratic elections, the (syndicalist) working class acquired an indirect but practically effective capacity to exercise some participation in the executive branch of the political power of the capitalist state. Thus, as Iñigo Carrera (2022, 489) notes, despite its revolutionary rhetoric against "bourgeois" electoral politics, the dominant syndicalist trade-unionism did not shy away from establishing a mutually convenient nexus of clientelism with the Radical administration of Yrigoyen to "wring concessions" from capital and the state in exchange for insulation from the more intransigent and recalcitrant elements of the class struggle coming from the remnants of the anarchist movement. In the second place, the wage-workers' mass electoral support of the Radical Party meant that the labor movement's political participation in the state was no longer personified by a "reformist" yet class-independent organization (as was the case of the legislative action of the Sociality Party), but became expressed through a cross-class "populist" alliance with, fundamentally, the increasingly sizeable petty bourgeoisie.[5]

Various implications can be drawn at this juncture from this concise sketch of the formation and early development of the labor movement in Argentina. First and foremost, despite their diversity and the varying degrees of "anti-capitalism" of their ideologies and organizations, they all expressed the different changing forms in which the political action of the working class personified the development of the national process of capital accumulation

and its requirements around the simplest content of the specifically capitalist determination of the class struggle, namely the evolving material forms taken by the normal reproduction of labor-power, which reflected the changing productive configuration of the capitalist labor process. In other words, despite the overtly anti-capitalist sentiments, rhetoric, and political programs of various of these manifestations of the organized working class, they were all "capital-reproducing" and not "capital-transcending" forms of political action. Fundamentally, their immanent potentiality came down to be necessary mediating forms for a moderate increase in real wages, the shortening of the working day, and the achievement of still rather limited social rights. Moreover, insofar as many of these economic determinations necessitated the mediation of the participation of the labor movement in different instances of the general political representation of the total social capital through the state-form, the sale of labor-power at its full value (hence the class struggle) had to take concrete juridical form through the attainment of certain political rights (extension of the franchise to all male adults, democratization of the "political regime" through the implementation of secret and compulsory voting that ended so-called patriotic electoral fraud, and so on). Figure 6.2 plots the evolution of real wages that synthetically expresses this phase of capitalist accumulation and class struggle in Argentina.

On the other hand, our historical sketch suggests that there seems to be a clearly identifiable tendency underlying the development of the class struggle during those early stages of capitalist accumulation in Argentina. Specifically, the modest yet progressive improvement in the normal conditions

Figure 6.2. Source: Iñigo Carrera (2007)

of reproduction of labor-power asserted itself through the strengthening of the labor movement in the class struggle that, in turn, took concrete shape through the expanding scope of its organizations: they gradually evolved from one-sided (seemingly "revolutionary") trade-unionist expressions to the point of taking active part in the management of the political power of the capitalist state (firstly formally limited to the legislative branch, although later having an informal "clientelistic" channel of influence on the executive). Evidently, the ideological forms of the labor movement transformed accordingly. The more the necessary mediation of the class struggle in the upward trend and changing material composition of the "norm of consumption" entailed a labor movement with an increasingly prominent role in the personification of the general political representative of the total social capital (i.e., in the management of the capitalist state), the more the hegemonic ideology of the corresponding organizations of wage-workers took a "reformist," and eventually "populist," form. Note, however, that what might appear to Bergquist's eyes as an increasing loss of "cultural autonomy" (and thereby also of "strength" and "political power" according to his yardstick), were, in fact, changing necessary ideological forms through which the political action of the working class personified its expanding immanent potentiality to improve the normal conditions of reproduction of their labor-power. Only by idealistically grounding the objective determination and potentiality of the class struggle in the (seeming) radicality of workers' consciousness, and not in the actual form-determined practical movement of the materiality of their (alienated) social being, can Bergquist conclude that at stake in this historical process was a gradual weakening of the labor movement in Argentina (Bergquist 1986, 149–54). The labor movement, additionally, would have been already latent from its birth with a "congenital" condition of "innate debility" vis-à-vis, for instance, the labor movement in Chile (Bergquist 1986, 173–74).[6]

Thus, although the assertion of working-class power in the struggle over their normal conditions of reproduction carried an immanent limit during this stage vis-à-vis the later phases of "ISI" mediated by the formation of Peronism, we shall see, contrary to Bergquist's account (Bergquist 1986, 189–200), that the latter did not express a discrete qualitative break in the evolution of the labor movement in Argentina. Rather, it involved an ulterior continuous development of the same underlying tendency that we have just sketched out. Moreover, once we uncover the qualitative economic content that determines the specificity of the capital accumulation process in Argentina (i.e., its "structural dependence" on the oscillating inflows of ground-rent) and grasp the immanent nexus between those economic form-determinations and the political modes of existence that mediate their contradictory development, the

Figure 6.3. Source: Iñigo Carrera (2007)

Figure 6.4. Source: Iñigo Carrera (2007)

twenty-year hiatus of acquiescence that, according to Bergquist, separates, on the one hand, the sudden demise of a "leftist," "culturally and organizationally autonomous" first wave of working class struggles, and its resurgence after World War II in a "corporatist," "nationalistic," and "right-wing" (in sum, "co-opted") Peronist shape (Bergquist 1986, 101–2), on the other, loses its apparently enigmatic character. More concretely, as figures 6.3 and 6.4 show, toward the 1920s the inflow of ground-rent experienced a sharp contraction (and so did in particular the portion channeled to other social subjects than landowners), which led to a deceleration of economic growth and which, in turn, was expressed in a slowdown of the upward trend of real wages. In other words, those twenty years represented one of first historical expressions in the twentieth century of the highly volatile dynamics of ground-rent-fueled capital accumulation, and the consequently pronounced instability of the corresponding political mediations.

As evidenced by figure 6.3, at the turn of the 1920s ground-rent drastically plummeted and remained, on average, at historically very low levels for the subsequent fifteen years. Moreover, as has usually happened in those circumstances (Caligaris et al. 2022), most of that mass of social wealth ended in the pockets of landowners in order to sustain the scale of agrarian production, a sector that is key to the unity of the accumulation process. Thus it should come as no surprise that the general political representation of the accumulation of capital at the level of the state reverted to its old "oligarchic" forms (whether through military governments or through the resurgence of "patriotic fraud"), with a heightening of the political repression of the working class.

FROM THE GENESIS OF PERONISM TO THE ARMED STRUGGLE

As the ISI process consolidated and gathered pace during the 1930s, the labor movement experienced three main political and ideological transformations. First, nationalism experienced a significant rise at the expense of all internationalist leanings. Second, toward the mid-1940s an internal dispute developed within the workers' movement over the political participation of unions, which, to phrase it in Bergquist's terms, brought to the fore the apparent ideological antinomy between "autonomy" and "co-option." Third, both within the organized working class and within the structure of the capitalist state, there was an emergent concern over, and search for, the legal-bureaucratic regulation of labor conflicts (Matsushita 2014; Torre 2014; Del Campo 2012; Gaudio and Pilone 1984; Cazón 2019; 2021). All these processes eventually

coalesced since the mid-1940s in the institutionalization of trade unions, their growth by virtue of an accelerated mass unionization of workers, and their political participation in a cross-class, "Peronist" party that would hold office until the mid-1950s.

It goes without saying that this process of state-regulated institutionalization of trade unions did not come about in a peaceful, "judicious and orderly" manner, but took an antagonistic form, which involved the fierce repression of the more recalcitrant parts of the working class by the state. Thus, in 1943 the government decided to ban so-called National Labor Federation N°2 (CGT 2) on the grounds that it was a "communist" organization (Del Campo 2012, 181), which further involved the incarceration of numerous trade union leaders and members of the Communist Party (Matsushita 2014, 348; Iñigo Carrera 2019, 105). Unions that had formerly integrated CGT 2 were then forced into CGT 1 under the leadership of newly appointed representatives (Matsushita 2014, 350). Even under the subsequent democratically elected administration of Perón, two clearly distinct stages in the state's role in the regulation of the class struggle over conditions of reproduction labor-power can be discerned. First, between 1946 and 1948 the government supported the CGT's trade-union actions (strikes and mass demonstrations) with a view to breaking the resistance of the bourgeoisie and thus facilitating the rise in real wages. But after ground-rent dropped in 1949, the Peronist administration withdrew its explicit support of trade-union actions and actually tried to contain them through direct intervention into different levels of their institutional organization or, in some cases, through the sheer suspension or outright cancellation of their legal status (Doyon 1977; Cazón 2015).

Bergquist sees these developments as the final capitulation of the labor movement in Argentina, which relinquished all "cultural and organizational autonomy" and became fully "co-opted" by right-wing corporatist institutions and ideology, thus definitively abandoning its socialist aspirations "in exchange for" certain economic prosperity and social mobility. By contrast, we mentioned that the emergence and hegemony of Peronism was the necessary political and ideological mediation to unfold the economic developmental potentialities of ground-rent-fueled accumulation, albeit in a cyclical phase of accelerated inflows of that extraordinary mass of social wealth, and in a novel stage which involved different main modalities of its appropriation.

As can be seen in figure 6.3, the end of World War II went hand in hand with an unprecedented spurt in the flow of ground-rent into Argentina, the greatest part of which slipped through the fingers of the personifications of landed property and, with the mediation of a wide array of public policies as outlined in a previous subsection, was transferred into the pockets of industrial capital-in-general. More concretely, this diversion of ground-rent into

Figure 6.5. Source: Iñigo Carrera (2007)

industrial capital accumulation reached such a scale and, crucially, involved such modalities, which could only take place through the establishment of visible mechanisms such as the public monopoly over their foreign trade. Above all, this was necessary to swell the fiscal capacity of the state, whose activities would come to play a more prominent role to mediate the new modalities of appropriation of ground-rent by individual capitals (e.g., state-captured ground-rent was the main source of fiscal revenue that funded the nationalization of formerly foreign-owned public utilities, albeit usually at an overinflated price; see figure 6.5) (Iñigo Carrera 2007, 76–78).

Hence, despite being industrial capital's "hostile brothers" who also shared in the "fruits" of the expanded reproduction of this form of accumulation, landowners could no longer directly partake in its general political representation at the level of the executive branch of the capitalist state. As a matter of fact, the personifications of landed property began ideologically to appear as "enemies of the people," whose parasitic greediness thwarted the economic development and political autonomy of the "national community."

Contrariwise, enhanced political potentialities were carried by both the domestic personifications of individual capitals and the working class. In effect, although it would prove to be a transitory phenomenon which, through the consolidation of the domestic market for local manufacturing products, paved the way for the later arrival of transnational corporations as the main

genuine "drivers" of industrial capital's recovery of ground-rent, this phase of ISI was led by the proliferation and vigorous expanded reproduction of small nationally owned capitals. Coupled with the resulting greater diversification of the productive structure, this stage of the national process of capital accumulation entailed a remarkable growth and upskilling of the demand for labor-power, hence of employment. More specifically, manufacturing employment increased by around 70 percent between 1945 and 1952 (Iñigo Carrera 2007, 209). On these grounds, real wages not only continued their ascending trend but notably hiked: real labor compensation (i.e., gross wages plus social security contributions) doubled between 1945 and 1952 (see also figure 6.2). Decisively, this material necessity for expanded conditions of normal reproduction of labor-power was not confined to specific organs of the collective laborer but reached across the great bulk of the working class. Against the backdrop of this greater degree of universality or undifferentiation in the "norm of consumption" of wage-workers, it proved more "economical" for the reproduction of the unity of the capital accumulation process to socialize the mass production of, and access to, certain use-values (health, education, transport, leisure, culture, etc.) through state-provision (i.e., in the juridical form of "social rights of citizenship").

In sum, the aftermath of World War II was characterized by material and social changes in the accumulation of capital that required a significant advancement and socialization of the conditions of reproduction of labor-power (alongside the nationalization of widely used industrial inputs). These economic transformations had to be politically mediated by a renewed strengthening of the labor movement in the class struggle which, in turn, had to take concrete shape through an increasing scope and effective political potentiality of its organizations. However, such was the magnitude of the change involved in the quantitative and qualitative determination of the value of labor-power, that the labor movement's indirect "clientelistic" participation in the executive branch of the capitalist state did not suffice to personify the establishment of these novel conditions of reproduction, as it did under the previous political and ideological hegemony of the syndicalist/Radical Party "antagonistic unity." Under these different historical circumstances, the Argentine working class had to become fully and directly incorporated in the active management of the political power of the capitalist state. Coupled with the growth and multiplication of small nationally owned individual capitals as the main drivers of this stage of ISI, and also with the need for directly "confrontational" mechanisms of primary appropriation of a large proportion of total ground-rent by the state to mediate its subsequent flow into the process of capital accumulation, all this meant that distinct forms of political and ideological mediation had to develop to give course to these economic

transformations. In contrast to the earlier integration into the cross-class electoral constituency of the Radical Party with the petty bourgeoisie and the less "reactionary" section of landowners, the great majority of the working class converged with the petty bourgeoisie in the "Peronist Party," which crystallized as the hegemonic "nationalistic-populist" political and ideological form.

However, toward the mid-1950s ground-rent plummeted again (see figure 6.3), and so did the scale of the accumulation of capital and real wages. A military coup brought Perón's second administration to an abrupt early end. Moreover, the turn of that decade saw the mass local establishment of transnational corporations as main beneficiaries and drivers of ground-rent-fueled accumulation at the expense of domestically owned small capitals. The material bases that took the form of the Peronist Party's mediation of the general political representation of the national total social capital thereby faded away. With most of the working class, who comprised the bulk of the voting population, still leaning toward Peronism, the latter became electorally banned. Thus, reduced again down to narrowly trade-unionist expressions, the ebbs and flows of the organized collective action of wage-workers (and so the movement of real wages) would reflect, over the following two decades, the extremely cyclical rhythm of the accumulation of capital, in turn determined by the heightened volatility of ground-rent inflows. The labor movement therefore became suddenly and firmly empowered during the upswing, but only to become swiftly weakened during the downturn. Overall, however, the trend throughout this period was for a continued expansion of the conditions of reproduction of labor-power, which reflected the ongoing upskilling of the composition of the collective laborer as ISI proceeded further into more complex branches of the social division of labor.

Now, although most of the labor movement remained "loyally" Peronist during this later phase, it needs to be stressed that the "anti-capitalist" left did not just disappear. However, it did prove to remain confined to a very precise and definite role in the class struggle over value of labor-power; namely, it spearheaded the organized action of workers to personify the ascending movement of wages during the opening phases of the cyclical upswing, in order to then become overshadowed by Peronist organizations and, eventually, to end up as the scapegoat and main target of the capitalist state's violence when the time came to force down wages during the downturn. Still, with the so-called Cordobazo in 1969 as symbolic political watershed, this period saw a multifarious proliferation of (formally) socialist or communist organizations (Leninist, Maoist, Trotskyist, "Guevarist," and even a radical "Peronist left," etc.). This would inaugurate a phase of effervescence and radicalization of leftist activism, which would gather force as ground-rent hiked again in the early 1970s, and which would even lead to expressions of armed struggle.

The real wage would thus reach its all-time historic peak in 1974, only to collapse a few years later as the inflow of ground-rent brusquely slowed down upon the sudden drop of the international prices of raw materials. Against the backdrop of the prior wave of radicalization of the class struggle, a civilian-backed military government was needed drastically to force down wages, through strategically calculated mass disappearance and assassination of wage-workers (militants and activists primarily among them).[7]

Our admittedly condensed historical sketch of the formation and development of the labor movement in Argentina during the twentieth century suffices to cast doubts on the explanatory validity of Bergquist's overly schematic typology to capture the former's complexity. We cannot expand further this critical discussion into an in-depth comparative direction which includes the four countries studied in Bergquist's book. However, some brief remarks on the allegedly contrasting case of Chile are in order.

SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON BERGQUIST'S CHARACTERIZATION OF THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN CHILE

At first sight, the early phases of the labor movement in Chile do not show significant differences from the course taken in Argentina. Thus, it also comprised a left-leaning "differentiated unity" between a "revolutionary" or "extra-parliamentary" anarchist wing and a "reformist" leg personified by the Communist Party (Bergquist 1986, 68ff). Moreover, despite the formally "anti-capitalist" rhetoric (in correspondingly varying degrees depending on the organization), most of their effective practical efforts and objective transformative potentialities revolved around narrowly "economic" trade-unionist demands as well. Specifically, during the 1920s working-class struggles tended to aim at certain elementary issues like full freedom of association, right to strike, and working conditions, many of which eventually materialized with the passing of the 1924 labor law, which, however, was not only rather paltry in its "concessions" but actually remained dead letter for quite a few years to come (Bergquist 1986, 69). As matter of fact, by 1928 the Chilean labor movement had suffered a resounding defeat in the heavy hands of the repressive forces of the military-controlled capitalist state, and most of the first generation of its trade-union and political organizations had been virtually wiped out (Bergquist 1986, 70). So far, then, there seems to be no significant differences in the expressions, scope, and historical pattern of the class struggle in Chile: an initial growth and effervescence with rather modest concessions motorized by a "revolutionary" anarchist plus "reformist"

communist party "antagonistic dyad," and subsequent defeat and acquiescence during 1920s and most of the 1930s. At any rate, one would conclude that the improvements in the material conditions of sale and productive consumption of labor-power during this formative phase of the labor movement actually were more meager than in Argentina, and that the reflux of the initial momentum of class antagonisms was, arguably, even more pronounced.

It is in the subsequent phase of resurgence that, according to Bergquist, Chile's latent more leftist inclinations came to the fore. Thus, after a hiatus of acquiescence of about ten years, the labor movement did not resurface in a "nationalistic-populist guise," but managed to rebuild an unprecedentedly powerful radical leftist trade union federation and two Marxist mass parties whose influence would overshadow that of the Communist Party in the 1920s. This upsurge of those radical organizations reached such momentum that they took part in the center-left electoral coalition (the Popular Front) that would hold office in 1938. As Bergquist himself notes, however, the "Marxist" participation in the Popular Front was as a minority partner, a condition that would persist in their subsequent electoral "successes" throughout the following decade (Bergquist 1986, 72–73). Moreover, Bergquist further observes that this allegedly broader electoral incidence was the other side of the same coin of an "economic" weakness in the trade union dimension of the class struggle, which remained tightly constrained by the restrictive and repressive labor laws and overall system of industrial relations that had been inherited virtually untouched from the paltry legislation passed in the 1920s (Bergquist 1986, 72). Finally, he remarks that all those achievements by "Marxist" or leftist organizations came at the very high economic, political, and ideological expense of tainting their "revolutionary" credentials (i.e., by fully embracing "reformist" electoral politics). This first ascending phase of the Chilean labor movement would become eventually defeated through multiple splits and fragmentations of its diverse organizations and the systematic repression of the Communist Party in 1949 (Bergquist 1986, 73).

According to Bergquist, the combativeness of the Chilean labor movement resurfaced in the 1950s. Thus, only at this arguably rather late stage did it engage in a determined and vigorous attempt at challenging the long-standing repressive and restrictive system of industrial relations. Still, at a broader political level the left remained committed to an "electoral road" to socialism. All in all, however, and as Bergquist's own narrative attests, the improvement in the conditions of reproduction of labor-power during this period remained comparatively modest. In effect, albeit with strong oscillations, average real wages would continue experiencing a rather moderate upward trend at least until the end of the 1950s (Rodriguez Weber 2014). Crucially, average real wages in Chile gravitated persistently around 15 percent of Argentina's

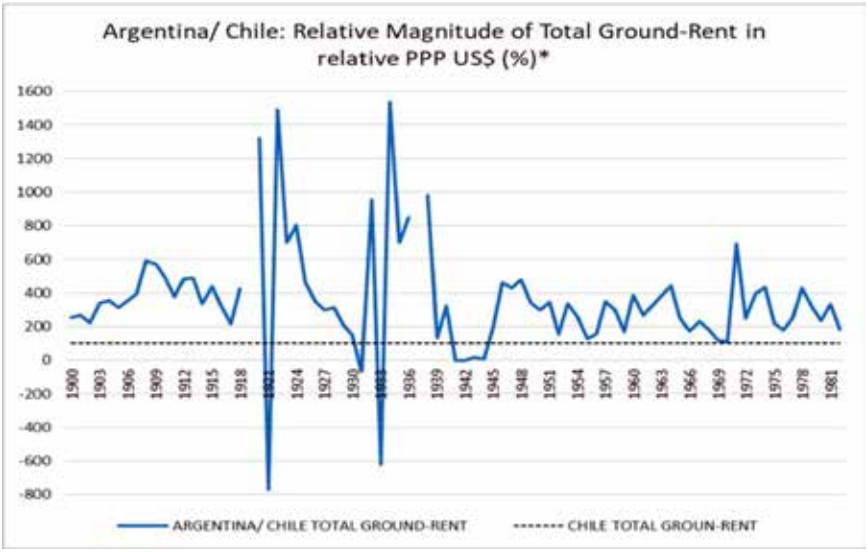

Figure 6.6. Note: Data for 1919 and 1937 have been removed to preserve the scale of the chart Source: Iñigo Carrera (2007) for Argentina; Rivas Castro (2022) for Chile

purchasing power parity, equivalent between 1946 and 1958, actually standing below the relative levels that they had reached before 1945 (see figure 6.1). This, Bergquist continues, was the expression of a faltering and high inflation economy "as export production stagnated and the limits of import substituting industrialization were reached" (Bergquist 1986, 78). Yet he does not consider this to be an expression of the comparatively weaker developmental potentialities for capital accumulation, derived from lower inflows of ground-rent available for appropriation in the Chilean national space (see figure 6.6). Instead, in what we think is an overly contentious and untenable "voluntarist" view, the stagnation of capital accumulation is explained as the outcome of the "withering political and ideological offensive by the left against capitalism in general, and foreign capitalists in particular," which "jeopardized dependent capitalist development" (Bergquist 1986, 74).

Be that as it may, Bergquist submits that this wave of intensified militancy of organized labor and "Marxist" parties led to "increased support for their policies among workers and the electorate" during the 1960s. Eventually, this leftist ideological turn among the population at large crystallized in their hegemony within, and electoral victory of, the Popular Unity coalition, which "managed to elect Socialist Salvador Allende to the presidency" (Bergquist 1986, 74). The labor movement thus eventually assumed a direct active role

in the general political personification of the national total social capital. However, as it transpires from Bergquist's own historical sketch, despite the "formal anti-capitalism" of the Popular Unity's ideology and rhetoric, both its organic electoral base and political program hardly differed from Peronism's in Argentina: a cross-class coalition between "progressive" and "nationalist" elements of the petty bourgeoisie and the great bulk of the working class, with "reformist" public policies aimed at the expansion and socialization of the conditions of reproduction of wage-workers, which, nevertheless, lagged far behind those of the Argentine workers in the same period.

Yet there is one noticeable difference. In Chile, the Popular Unity's nationalization program did include the copper export sector (i.e., the main ground-rent-bearing commodity). However, we do not think that this is self-evident proof of an unbridgeable ideological gulf between a powerful and "culturally autonomous" Chilean left, and a weak labor movement co-opted by corporatist populism in Argentina. As argued elsewhere in relation to the oil sector (Caligaris, Fitzsimons, and Starosta, 2024), due to the peculiar material conditions prevailing in mineral extractive industries, the latter are similarly prone to lead to the joint personification of capital and landed property, with a consequent tendency for a greater capture of ground-rent by mining individual capitals themselves. Thus, in a phase characterized by the need for a larger primary appropriation of ground-rent by the state prior to its subsequent channeling into the valorization process of the generality of individual capitals, the nationalization of copper companies emerged as the concrete form that gave "room to move" to the "antagonistic association" between capital-in-general and landed-property. In this sense, the nationalization of the mineral export sector was not a partial measure in the "electoral road to socialism," but a particular concrete form taken by the reproduction of the specificity (and "backwardness") of ground-rent-fueled accumulation in Chile. So much so that it would remain untouched by Pinochet's "neoliberal" military coup that overthrew Allende's government in 1973.

It seems to us that this brief critical reconstruction of Bergquist's own account of the historical trajectory of the Chilean left shows that there are no substantive differences of qualitative content vis-à-vis the Argentine case. It has also been an oscillating development which, beyond the anti-capitalist ideological rhetoric, had no transformative potentiality other than being a concrete form of the simplest determination of the class struggle as the necessary mediation in the establishment of the normal material conditions of reproduction of labor-power (i.e., it had a "reformist" content). In turn, the latter have been shaped by the developmental dynamics of the specific modality of capital accumulation based on ground-rent recovery by capital. As a matter of fact, this is where the essentially quantitative differences are

to be found: the magnitude of the immanent potentialities of ground-rent-fueled capital accumulation in Chile have been arguably smaller, thus leading to a narrower and shallower ISI process. This means that the material basis for a steadier expansion of the conditions of reproduction of labor-power developed both later and to a lesser degree: the productive attributes of the collective laborer acquired a less complex configuration, the absorption of manufacturing employment was lower, and, therefore, the reproduction of a rural latent relative surplus population was larger. In brief, capitalist development in Chile generated a much more modest, fragmented (i.e., not universal), and unstable objective ground for working-class power, which has been synthetically manifested in the comparatively weaker upward historical trend of the real wage.

As a matter of fact, we think that the outward appearance of greater resilience of "culturally autonomous," leftist ideological, and organizational forms of the Chilean labor movement, rather than expressing a greater transformative potentiality of the class struggle, actually manifests the opposite content: it has been the form taken by the greater objective impotence of the working class to overcome the continued reproduction of harsher conditions of exploitation of their labor-power by capital. They were, to put it bluntly, expressions of "desperate resistance." In this sense, it could be argued that the longer-lived ideological or formal "anti-capitalism" of Chilean trade-union organizations manifested a more enduring and longer-lasting phase of the more restrictive and narrowly institutionalized modalities of managing class conflict, which delayed the universalization of unionization levels and the crystallization of effective legally sanctioned recognition of labor rights until significantly later. In a similar vein, until the late 1960s or early 1970s the electoral gains of Chilean "Marxist" parties were always with a minority share in ideologically very broad and "flexible" cross-class electoral coalitions alongside the more progressive elements of the urban petty bourgeoisie (Aggio 2008). Although this might have meant the preservation of a more pristine "cultural and institutional autonomy," in practice it meant a weaker incidence over the general political representation of the executive power of the capitalist state than the also cross-class, yet labor-led, populist Peronist Party in Argentina (Grinberg 2022).

CONCLUSION

The first conclusion that can be drawn from our discussion is that the comparative historical trajectories of the labor movements is much more complex and intricate than Bergquist's overly schematic model allows. For

instance, "ideological autonomy" versus "co-option" is not a mutually exclusive dichotomy that can be easily applied to different countries but actually expresses distinct moments of the unfolding of the class struggle in its synchronic and diachronic unity, as it obtained throughout the highly cyclical movement of capital accumulation in both Argentina and Chile.

Nevertheless, we acknowledged that, to some extent, the contrast that Bergquist makes between the respective institutional and ideological forms of the labor movement in Argentina and Chile does make some sense. However, our own explanation of that phenomenon is at odds with Bergquist's. Thus, we argued that the alleged greater "cultural and institutional autonomy" of the Chilean labor movement, which Bergquist sees as a sign of its superior strength, has been in fact an expression of the less developed material basis of the capital accumulation process that, in turn, has led to weaker transformative potentialities in the class struggle over the normal conditions of reproduction of labor-power.

Paradoxically, the connection between a weaker material basis and a more radical ideological expression of the labor movement is acknowledged by Bergquist himself. Thus, he links "the failure of the export economy to promote capitalist expansion and economic development even indirectly" with the "strength and Marxist commitments of organized labor and the Left" and the broader predisposition of "more social groups . . . to share the Marxist vision of national problems" (Bergquist 1986, 78). By contrast, we have seen that he considers the farther-reaching material gains of the labor movement in Argentina as the "culprit" for the greatest ideological and organizational disappointment in the history of the Latin American working class. In our view, this amounts to making virtue out of necessity: the glorification of harsher conditions of exploitation for the sake of the preservation of an alleged ideological and institutional "purity." In sum, this seems to be an idiosyncratic version of "defeatism" applied to the class war, captured in the old political formula: "the worse, the better."

Still, the bottom line is that both "Peronism" and the Chilean "Marxist left" have been political and ideological forms of the reproduction of the specific Latin American modality of "ground-rent-fueled" accumulation, which, as we have argued, has allowed capital to retard the development of the productive powers of social labor and, therefore, the development of its own historical supersession through the conscious revolutionary action of the global working class.

NOTES

1. For a more in-depth discussion of the historically specific simplest determination of class struggle in the capitalist mode of production, see Starosta (2015, chapter 7).

2. By "moral" attributes of labor-power, we mean the aggregate of determinate forms of consciousness, self-understanding, attitudes, and dispositions that, coupled with the narrowly defined "technical" attributes, *also* need to be "set into motion whenever the workers produce a use-value of any kind." See Fitzsimons and Starosta (2018) for an in-depth discussion of this issue.

3. As we shall see in the next section, this statement merits a caveat, as the radicalization of the class struggle over the value of labor-power can actually embody the *opposite* content. Thus, under certain circumstances, it can express the *impotent* desperate resistance to the deterioration of the conditions of reproduction of wage-workers.

4. For the account of the content and form of these initial political and ideological expressions of the class struggle in Argentina, we fundamentally draw on Iñigo Carrera (2022).

5. As a matter of fact, the electoral base of the Radical Party was organically comprised of some segments of landowners and of the most concentrated agrarian capitalists, and, to a large extent, of the massively expanding petty bourgeoisie (Sigal and Gallo 1963). The latter expressed not only the multiplication of small capitals and petty commodity producers generated by the limited scale of the national process of capital accumulation, but also the mass of wage-workers employed as civil servants in the expanding state bureaucracy.

6. Admittedly, those expanded potentialities were limited to the simplest determination of the class struggle as a necessary form of the reproduction of capital and, more concretely, of its specifically "backward" modality in Argentina. However, as we have already mentioned, this is the only relevant determination as far as the critical assessment of Bergquist's contribution is concerned, whose effort is chiefly concerned with the comparative task of making sense of the respective degrees of "ideological and organizational autonomy" in the different national labor movements that comprise his study.

7. As a matter of fact, the disappearance and assassination of workers and activists already started under the Peronist administration through the state-sponsored creation of a brutal parapolice force called Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance.