

## Social classes, ideology, and national issue in the debate between the FAR and the PRT-ERP

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is addressing the main argumentative cores in the debate between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores-Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (PRT-ERP), two armed organizations in the 1970s. The discussion took place between April and November 1971 and its trigger was a report on the FAR published by the serial *Cristianismo y Revolución*. This document was followed by “Responde el ERP,” a brief replica prepared by political prisoners, and then the response by the FAR with its “Aportes al proceso de confrontación de posiciones y polémica pública que abordamos con el ERP.” In this paper, we address in detail the role assigned in the debate to social classes, to deepen its relation with other topics, such as the national issue and ideology. We are interested in studying the meaning of these categories from the viewpoint of historical players, to track which ideological and discursive constellation they are in.

**Keywords:** Social Class; Ideology; National Issue; Argentine Guerrilla.

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## Classes sociais, ideologia e questão nacional no debate entre as FAR e o PRT-ERP na Argentina

### Resumo

O propósito deste artigo é explorar os principais nós argumentativos do debate entre as Forças Armadas Revolucionárias (FAR) e o Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores-Exército Revolucionário do Povo (PRT-ERP), duas organizações armadas argentinas dos anos 1970. A discussão ocorreu entre abril e novembro de 1971 e seu gatilho foi uma reportagem sobre as FAR publicada na revista Cristianismo y Revolución. Esse documento foi seguido por “Responde o ERP”, uma breve réplica de prisioneiros políticos, e, em seguida, a resposta das FAR, com seus “Aportes al proceso de confrontación de posiciones y polémica pública que abordamos con el ERP” [Contribuições ao processo de confronto de posições e controvérsia pública que abordamos com o ERP]. Neste trabalho, investigamos pontualmente o papel atribuído no debate às classes sociais, para aprofundar sua relação com outros tópicos, como a questão nacional e a ideologia. Buscamos estudar o significado dessas categorias sob o ponto de vista dos atores históricos, para investigar em qual constelação ideológica e discursiva estão localizadas.

**Palavras-chave:** Classe Social; Ideologia; Questão Nacional; Guerrilha Argentina.

## Clases sociales, ideología y cuestión nacional en el debate entre las FAR y el PRT-ERP en Argentina

### Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es explorar los principales nudos argumentativos del debate entre las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) y el Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores-Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (PRT-ERP), dos organizaciones armadas argentinas de la década de 1970. La discusión se desarrolló entre abril y noviembre de 1971, y su disparador fue un reportaje a las FAR publicado en la revista Cristianismo y Revolución. A este documento le siguió “Responde el ERP”, una breve réplica de presos políticos, y a continuación la respuesta de las FAR con sus “Aportes al proceso de confrontación de posiciones y polémica pública que abordamos con el ERP”. En este trabajo indagamos puntualmente el papel atribuido en el debate a las clases sociales, para profundizar su relación con otros tópicos, como la cuestión nacional y la ideología. Nos interesa estudiar el significado de estas categorías desde el punto de vista de los actores históricos, para rastrear en que constelación ideológica y discursiva se ubican.

**Palabras clave:** Clase Social; Ideología; Cuestión Nacional; Guerrilla Argentina.

*In scientific discussion, since it is assumed that the interest is seeking the truth and progress of science, it becomes more “advanced” to take the standpoint that the adversary may be expressing a requirement that needs to be incorporated, albeit as a subordinate moment, to the construction of one’s own mind.*

Antonio Gramsci

The purpose of this paper is exploring the main argumentative cores of the debate between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores-Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (PRT-ERP), two political-military organizations that operated in Argentina in the 1970s. The discussion took place between April and November 1971 and its trigger was the publication of an extensive report on the FAR by the serial *Cristianismo y Revolución*<sup>1</sup> In the interview, the armed group led by Carlos Olmedo exposed a series of controversial statements about the meaning of Peronism, Marxism, vanguard, and armed struggle. The response to the controversial document did not take long: between April and May 1971, a group of political prisoners of the ERP, held in Cárcel de Encausados de Córdoba, released a brief brochure entitled “Responde el ERP,” where they criticized many points of the presentation by the FAR. Olmedo’s murder in the province of Córdoba during the “Combate de Ferreyra,” on November 3, 1971, prevented the final drafting of a comprehensive replica that the leader of the FAR had been preparing. However, his colleagues published the draft, which was the first and only response by the ERP, with a new document, entitled “Aportes al proceso de confrontación de posiciones y polémica pública que abordamos con el E.R.P.” (BASCHETTI, 2004, 186-214). Olmedo’s death officially interrupted the debate, but the controversy continued in prisons that housed political prisoners of both armed groups, such as penal de Rawson or cárcel de Villa Devoto.

If we may think of this discursive duel as one of the highest points in the political, ideological, and cultural exchange within the Argentine guerrilla, we are interested in dismantling the central axes of the debate, such as Peronism, vanguard, nationalism, internationalism, and Marxism. So, we address the meaning of these categories from the viewpoint of historical players, and also which ideological and discursive constellation they are in, which practices and readings they refer to. In this paper, we inquire in detail the role assigned in the debate to social classes, to deepen its relationship with other topics of the

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<sup>1</sup> “Los de Garín”, *Cristianismo y Revolución* no. 28 (abril de 1971), 56-70. Available from: <<http://eltopoblindado.com/revista-cristianismo-y-revolucion/>>. *Cristianismo y Revolución* was a serial published between 1966 and 1971 in Argentina by former seminarian Juan García Elorrio and a group of militants who came from the Catholic youth groups radicalized by the Vatican II and the Third World revolutions. It was a crossing space between the liberationist Christianity, Peronist left-wing, and armed organizations.

controversy, such as the national issue and ideology. In the late 1970, the military regime headed by Juan Carlos Onganía began to show its first signs of exhaustion, beset by a wave of protests that had spread quickly among workers and the middle classes. If 1969 was the year of the great uprising of workers and students in Cordobazo, 1970 was the time of the urban guerrilla in Argentina (ANZORENA, 1998, 93)<sup>2</sup> The emergence of political-military organizations such as the PRT-ERP, the FAR, and Montoneros was added to the actions of previous guerrilla groups, such as the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas, (FAP), comando Descamisados, and the Fuerzas Argentinas de Liberación (FAL). The multiplication of urban guerrillas across the country brought the monopoly of violence held by the military dictatorship to an end and contributed to erode its power. The popular uprisings that had shaken the provinces of Corrientes, Córdoba, and Rosario between May and September 1969 showed the extent of social discontent in unforeseen proportions, whose most visible tip was the intense process of working and student radicalization. Onganía's government stumbled for a while, but it eventually collapsed on May 29, 1970, with the kidnapping of Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, potential protagonist of an electoral alternative. Just ten days after his disappearance, the Junta de Comandantes asked the de facto president to resign and replaced him by Roberto Marcelo Levingston, who at that time was in the USA as a military attaché. Despite the rotation of military men in the government and the promise of a change through the appointment of developmentalist Aldo Ferrer to the Ministry of Economy, the political situation got increasingly complicated, as the actions of political-military organizations increased and the state of civil insurgency grew. In March 1971, Córdoba was again the epicenter of protest against the dictatorship, when the local CGT declared a strike with mobilizations against the new interventor Camilo Uriburu. This new episode of street fighting, popularly known as the Viborazo, led to the resignation of

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<sup>2</sup> In the 1960s, several urban guerrilla actions were taken in the country, but none managed to destabilize the political scenario: the last commandos of the Peronist Resistance, the assault to the Policlínico Bancario in the city of Buenos Aires on the part of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario Tacuara (MNRT), theft of weapons in a military barracks by the Fuerzas Argentinas de Liberación (FAL) in 1969, and several robberies and disarms by the Guerrilla del Ejército Libertador (GEL). On the other hand, two guerrillas were disbanded in rural areas before they went into action: the Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo (1963-1964) and the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas (1968).

Levingston and his delegate in Córdoba. On March 26, the Comandante en Jefe de las Fuerzas Armadas, Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, became president.

### The FAR and the PRT-ERP, in for the debate

The FAR emerged from the merger of several groups, such as that of Arturo Lewinger and his Tercer Movimiento Histórico, or dissidents of the Partido Comunista Argentino, such as Carlos Olmedo, Roberto Quieto, and Marcos Osatinsky. In the case of Arturo Lewinger, the Tercer Movimiento Histórico was a national-popular split of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria-Praxis, political and cultural organization led by Silvio Frondizi. The Tercer Movimiento Histórico was committed to a modernizing Bonapartism, considering the idea that a nationalist military coup might trigger a revolutionary transformation in the backward structure of the Argentine capitalism (CAVIASCA, 2006, 82-97). The groups derived from the Partido Comunista had staged two breaks: the first was the Vanguardia Revolucionaria in 1963, where Roberto Quieto and Elisa Pastoriza were militants. The group led by Carlos Olmedo, related to the serial *La Rosa Blindada*, broke away from the Partido Comunista in 1965<sup>3</sup>. Other groups that joined the FAR were the Comandos Santiago Pampillón, led by Julio Roqué, some militants of Democracia Cristiana, present in northwestern Argentina, and fighters of the Guerrilla del Ejército Libertador (GEL), from Santiago del Estero and La Plata. The common denominator in the unification of all these groups was the formation of cells supporting the guerrilla of Ernesto Guevara in Bolivia, which began to organize in the end of 1966. However, the very death of Che in Ñancahuazú abruptly stopped this initiative and it helped triggering a rapid process of nationalization of the Guevarist guerrilla, which changed the continental perspective of armed struggle. The shift towards the national perspective allowed a new appreciation of Peronism as a popular movement, without abandoning the theory of

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<sup>3</sup> PC dissidence occur for several reasons, including internal criticism to the opposition role played by the party in the first Peronism, its position against the processes of armed struggle in the Third World, and support to the Soviet Union in its confrontation with the communist China. Another major break was that of members of *Pasado y Presente*, serial published by former communist militants as Oscar del Barco and José María Aricó between 1963 and 1965, or the separation of a large sector of the Federación Juvenil Comunista, which by 1968 founded the Partido Comunista Revolucionario.

focusing on its central argument. The strategy to defeat the bourgeois army through a progressive series of armed events that galvanized mass mobilization remained intact, but the idea of taking armed action to large cities also changed the revolutionary subject. The working class was seen as the trigger to be activated by the guerrilla focus, and the Peronist movement became the vehicle for initiating a revolutionary process of national liberation, capable of moving towards a socialist society. Thus, the FAR took Peronism as a political identity without disguising that its origins dated back to the Marxist left-wing.

On June 26, 1969, neatly hidden bombs exploded within toothpaste tubes in thirteen Minimax supermarket stores, a novelty of foreign capital that was ruining grocer shops of the petite bourgeoisie. The attack was conducted to welcome Nelson Rockefeller during his Latin American tour<sup>4</sup>, and this was the first major operation conducted by several of the commandos that would later constitute the FAR. A year later, the organization began a feverish activity that led them to create regional offices in Buenos Aires, La Plata, Tucumán, and Córdoba (GONZÁLEZ CANOSA, 2012, 136-137). On July 30, 1970, a commando of the FAR took the village of Garín, in the province of Buenos Aires, and showed itself to the public through a press release. The audacity shown in this action and the operations that followed it allowed the FAR to be among the main political and military organizations at the time, but at the same time it drew attention to the repressive forces. On July 2, 1971, two members of the FAR, Marcelo Verd and Sara Palacios, were kidnapped in the province of San Juan and they were tortured, to reveal the whereabouts of their companions. Eleven days later, Juan Pablo Maestre and Mirta Misetich were killed after being abducted by a paramilitary group. Then, the FAR suffered their first casualties, and a process of getting closer to several guerrilla organizations began. On April 10, 1972, a joint operation with the ERP killed Teniente General Juan Carlos Sánchez, but the most significant thing occurred on October 12, 1973, with the formal declaration of merger between the FAR and Montoneros.

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson Rockefeller (1908-1979) was an U.S. politician of the Republican Party, member of a powerful family of politicians and businessmen, who achieved power and fortune thanks to the Standard Oil Company. In 1969, while serving as governor of New York, he was invited to visit Latin America, a task that Rockefeller turned into a Presidential Mission that toured in twenty countries in the region, and this became famous due to the protests generated in all of them (MORGENFELD, 2013, 93).

The early days of the PRT-ERP date back to the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, founded in 1965. This was a political organization that emerged thanks to the unification of two groups: Palabra Obrera, headed by Nahuel Moreno, and Frente Revolucionario Indoamericanista Popular (FRIP), headed by Mario Roberto Santucho. While the Trotskyist Palabra Obrera had a presence in the main urban centers in Argentina and established ties to the Peronist resistance, the FRIP was a smaller organization influenced by the Peruvian APRA and the Cuban Revolution, with a political work developed at universities and northwest sugar mills. After defining its Trotskyist identity in the early years of the PRT internal debates multiplied, especially around the possibility of initiating a process of armed struggle in Argentina. Former leaders linked to Palabra Obrera claimed that the objective conditions for such confrontation were not given, but those with a past in the FRIP supported enthusiastically the choice of weapons, claiming that the party should organize combat units of its own (Pozzi, 2004: 23-24). In 1968, the PRT broke because of these discussions, and two separate groups were formed: *La verdad*, headed by Nahuel Moreno, and *El combatiente*, headed by Mario Roberto Santucho. In the IV Congress of the PRT, organized in March the same year by the section favorable to the armed struggle, Moreno's "reformist" positions were criticized and decisive steps were taken towards building a new political identity, as its official document may warn, *El único camino al poder obrero y el socialismo*. There, Mario Roberto Santucho along with Oscar Prada and Félix Helio Prieto, two former members of Palabra Obrera, held a tight and eclectic political synthesis, which tried to combine the contributions by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotskyism, Maoism, and Castroism (SANTUCHO, 2006, 15-37).<sup>5</sup>

In 1969, the PRT's *El combatiente* began its first armed actions, with a series of trials and errors that included the capture of several militants of the organization in Tucumán. For this reason, it was only in the V Congress of the PRT, held in July 1970, when the national situation became characterized as a revolutionary war and the Ejército Revolucionario de Pueblo was created, in the midst of a tough fight of internal fractions for the power of the young organization. From the V Congress on, the ERP was organized as an armed wing with

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<sup>5</sup> In this synthesis, the big debt of the PRT-ERP with the Vietnamese revolutionary tradition is not reported, through the writings by Vo Nguyen Giap and Ho-Chi-Minh.

an anti-imperialist and popular program, unlike the PRT, which claimed to be socialist and class-based. The relationship between these two entities was not always clear: although depuration of trends has focused leadership on Santucho, formally the PRT-ERP was structured from that time as a combat Marxist party, with a political bureau and a military committee. This organizational design served to differentiate clearly from the typical political-military organization with a unified commando, the predominant model between Marxist and Peronist guerrillas in the 1970s. On the other hand, initially the vast majority of fighters of the ERP were at the same time militants of the PRT, although joining the Party was not a prerequisite to participate in the commando, squads, and platoons (POZZI, 2004, 97-102, 243-249). Since 1970, the ERP experienced sustained growth and strong media exposure, which did not devalued but certainly eclipsed the actions taken by the PRT in mass fronts. In September 1970, the ERP made its first public appearance by taking comisaría 24 de Rosario, a confrontation that ended with two policemen killed and several wounded. In the first half of 1971, on the eve of the debate with the FAR, the ERP stood out as the political-military organization with the largest number of guerrilla operations conducted in the country, although as a whole the Peronist armed groups were the protagonists of most of the actions. Between March and July that year, 316 operations were conducted, out of which 120 were signed by the ERP, 26 by the FAL, 16 by Montoneros, 4 by the FAP, and 137 actions, nearly half, were a responsibility of Peronist organizations or unnamed groups (ANZORENA, 1998, 121).

In the issue 28 of *Cristianismo y Revolución*, published in April 1971, a dossier entitled *Reportaje a la guerrilla argentina* was published, with accounts from the FAR, FAP, Montoneros, and FAL. At the head of the section there was an interview with Paco Urondo to Carlos Olmedo, who, due to security reasons and because it was an official statement by the organization, did not disclosed their identity (Duhalde y Pérez, 2003, 66). According to the lead introducing the reader to the circumstances surrounding the production of the text, the series of reports was originally published in the Cuban newspaper *Granma* by December 1970, but later “a news agency collected the extensive report that we reproduced first,” referring to the Chilean magazine *Punto Final*. If for *Cristianismo y Revolución* the FAR “explains there its approach to Peronism by anticipating a future



political decision in this regard,” in this version of the interview, Olmedo does not include his organization within the Peronist movement. However, five months later, in the interview reproduced by *Cristianismo y Revolución*, there is a clear identification with Peronism. The unclear introduction of the report to the Argentine guerrilla contributed to obscure these changes, and even today in several investigations the mistake of believing that the interview in April 1971 is the same as that published by *Granma* is repeated.<sup>6</sup> Let us analyze hereafter the relations of the topics on social class, nation, and ideology in the debate between the FAR and the PRT-ERP.

## Class and nation

Although the problem of the national issue in the left had developed in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the critique of imperialism, in Argentina it was above all the first Peronism and its fall that opened a breach in the revolutionary militancy. To serials such as *Pasado y Presente* or *Contorno*, which inquired the topic of the national issue by means of an appreciation of Peronism, attempts from a sector of Trotskyism were added in order to enter the trade union branch of the movement, without extinguishing its original identification with the left-wing (Altamirano, 2001). In the report published by *Cristianismo y Revolución*, social classes make their first appearance since the beginning, when Carlos Olmedo highlights the primordial link between the FAR and Che’s guerrilla in Bolivia:

And it is significant to point out that the unit of analysis we are using is Latin America, because to some extent the very strategic project that moves us, is still very little in face of the specific social formation called Argentina, and instead people deal with more comprehensive categories - but therefore quite abstracts- such as Latin America, Third World, etc. This, which could be a correct frame in the strategic project of Che, taken

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<sup>6</sup> Mora González Canosa (2012: 145) demonstrates that there is confusion concerning the interview in *Granma*, it is noticed that the interview was conducted with a view of its publication in C & R: “Product of the confusing introduction of the serial to the document, the report often cites the FAR as ‘Los de Garín’ published in *Cristianismo y Revolución*, where for the first time the organization has publicly claimed to be Peronist, as that published by the Cuban newspaper ‘Granma’ in December 1970. in fact, this report was conducted between February and March 1971 and it was immediately published by C y R. The report actually published by the *Granma* was ‘FAR: Con el fusil del Che,’ in which the organization positively valued the role of Peronism, but it does not include itself as a part of the movement.”

unmediated by us, we became a small patrol lost in the space of the class struggle...<sup>7</sup>

This passage is interesting, because the mention of class struggle is introduced to explain the movement from continental revolution promoted by Che Guevara since his arrival in Bolivia in 1966, to an action confined to the national territory. From this viewpoint, social classes were social forces defined by their position in the production process, but also by their struggle experience within the limits of the bourgeois State.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, according to Olmedo the revolutionary subject was the Peronist working class, an argument that colonizes the account and marginalizes the analysis towards other elements of social formation, such as the various levels of the bourgeoisie. This reduction generated a powerful effect of meaning: if the working class was Peronist, then Peronism was essentially a working experience, and those Peronists who, because of their class origin or political position, were lined with bourgeois interests did nothing but betray their essence.

If the FAR designed their strategy from an analysis of national history that led them to an appreciation of the Peronist phenomenon, the ERP on the contrary would use in its response document a conceptual quarrel in the opposite way:

First, we must analyze the capitalist world economic situation and the international revolutionary struggle by considering that the socialist revolution is international in content and national in form. We should then move on to an analysis of the economic situation and the revolutionary struggle in the region and the world, taking into account the development of productive forces that will allow us to have a first approach to estimate the chances of a true revolution (if capitalism still can or cannot develop productive forces), the existence or not of revolutionary classes, the relationship between the political superstructure and the social structure, uneven development of economy, the revolutionary forces, country to country, region to region, etc... (BASCHETTI, 2004, 184-185).

For the organization led by Mario Roberto Santucho, the expansion of world capitalism requires capturing the “big picture,” appreciating the contradictions and class struggles at the national, regional, and international levels. The result of this matrix of

<sup>7</sup> “Los de Garín”, *Cristianismo y Revolución*, n.28 (abril de 1971), 56. Disponible en: <<http://eltopoblindado.com/files/Publicaciones/Publicaciones%20Afines/Cristianismo%20y%20Revoluci%C3%B3n/Cristianismo%20y%20Revoluci%C3%B3n%20N%C2%BA%2028.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> *Cristianismo y Revolución*, op. cit., 57.

analysis is the concept of Argentine working class as a part of the global communist movement, which acts as the revolutionary subject. In his reply to the document by the prisoners of the ERP, Carlos Olmedo ridicules the method that leads from the universal to the particular:

Therefore, to study the Argentine society according to its composition and movement we must start... from the situation of the world capitalist economy and the international revolutionary struggle. This methodological nonsense, similar to that a biologist might commit to study the cell began... by the human body, it is justified by the constant reference made to the universal nature of the proletariat and class struggle, which would be synthesized in the universal political flags of Marxism-Leninism. (BASCHETTI, 2004, 204)

According to the FAR, understanding national history and the role played by the working class since October 17, 1945, when the Peronists date the beginning of their movement through the public act that freed Juan Domingo Perón, is a key part of their political line. It does not mean that international power relations are unimportant, but in practice they operate as a context or framework of the national, since “the external causes act through internal causes” (BASCHETTI, 2004, 205).<sup>9</sup> According to the ERP, however, it is impossible to isolate Argentina from all the oppressed peoples fighting for their liberation, “as if the triumph or defeat of the Vietnamese people had no effect on our reality, not weakening or strengthening our enemy” (BASCHETTI, 2004, 183). In fact, the Vietnamese revolution is an example used by both the FAR and the PRT-ERP to account for the relationship between class and nation. In the report published by *Cristianismo y Revolución*, Carlos Olmedo justifies the cohabitation of various social classes in the Peronist movement, stating that “the Vietnamese revolution is multiclass, therefore it is no longer revolutionary”, as “any process of national liberation commits more than one class.”<sup>10</sup> However, according to the FAR it does not mean a peaceful coexistence between capital and labor, as opposition is the engine of the release process. The response of the ERP

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<sup>9</sup> The idea that external causes operate through internal causes was an argument used by intellectuals of the Peronist left, such as Rodolfo Puiggrós and Juan José Hernández Arregui (PUIGGRÓS, 1968, 70 and HERNÁNDEZ ARREGUI, 1973, 15).

<sup>10</sup> “Los de Garín”, p. 65.

militants, who conceived Vietnam as a model of revolutionary war, marks a significant omission in Olmedo's argument:

They are right in saying that police work is an ambiguous word, but the effort they make to explain the type of police work provided by Peronism are not intended to explain the Vietnamese revolution that they qualify as ranging from multiclass to dry, without considering that its multiclass features corresponds to the specific conditions which the Vietnamese war of national and social liberation unfolds in, with a foreign invader in its territory and under the absolute hegemony of the working class and peasantry, under the leadership of their Marxist-Leninist party (BASCHETTI, 2004, 183).

It is paradoxical that, after marking the differences in their respective methods of analysis, in this part of the debate both proceed in reverse: by citing the Vietnamese case, Olmedo was not doing anything but universalize class alliance in the Peronist movement, shunning its unique nature. The ERP response, however, appreciated what was specific in the Vietnamese revolution, drawing attention to the importance of determining which class ran the emancipation process, and the role played by the armed party as a vanguard. In its reply to the PRT document, Olmedo emphasized the opposition between national liberation movements and the "Marxist politics worldwide" claimed by Trotskyism, which "does not exist anywhere" (BASCHETTI, 2004, 202-203). The dispute with regard to the meaning of the concepts of class and class struggle tightened towards the topic of the national issue, where the ERP argument was weaker. The premise of the FAR became more sophisticated when the focus of the discussion turned to Peronism:

Essentially polyclass, the Peronist Movement is defined from the beginning by its national-popular, anti-oligarchic, and anti-imperialist nature. When we say multiclass, we mean that participated in it, with its fundamental pillars, the national bourgeoisie, born under favorable circumstances and laws, and the working class, which emerged as a result of capitalist development and its indigenous bourgeoisie (BASCHETTI, 2004, 200).

The ideological product of this class alliance was the Justice-based doctrine, which advocated the reconciliation between workers and employers. However, according to Olmedo, the Justice-based doctrine was not an "eternal law," as the national bourgeoisie of dependent countries "is doomed to liquidation" (BASCHETTI, 2004, 201). Thus, how was

the tension between the concepts of class struggle and class reconciliation solved? Following the argument of *Aportes*, the answer was overcoming the Justice-based doctrine through socialism, because “the interest of the working class and national interest are expressed economically today through the expropriation of capitalists” (BASCHETTI, 2004, 201).

## Class and ideology

Beyond the political definitions, it was at the level of ideology and characterization of Marxism that the fire of debate focused on. From the question about the political definition of his organization, Carlos Olmedo tested an argument where the FAR took Peronism as an identity, people’s war as a method, and socialist society as an end. When asked whether socialism had been developed in the works by Marx and Lenin, and how the Peronist ideology was linked to the contributions of Marxism-Leninism, Carlos Olmedo made an extensive digression on the concept of ideology:

I would like to say that the concept of ideology has led and leads to many misunderstandings. No need for academic considerations, I propose that when speaking of ideology we primarily refer to the awareness that men are achieving about their own situation. This awareness may be clear, penetrating, lucid, or incomplete, partial, distorted. The enemy does everything possible so that this happens with the ideology of our people and our own ideology.<sup>11</sup>

Ideology emerges here as a consciousness form capable to grasp the social whole, but also as a false view of reality, “the set of ideas that men form about themselves and their relationships with others” (BASCHETTI, 2004, 190). Well, what is the relationship between ideology and social class? A first indication appears in the account about the taking of Garín, when it comes to explaining the murder of cabo Sulling during a bank heist:

Sulling resisted absurdly and we were forced to shoot him. This has been repeated dozens of times in our struggles and those of other armed organizations (...) We think that once again we must insist, not talking to the enemy, but for employees who risk their lives by interests that do not belong to them. For them we repeat that nor the FAR nor any

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<sup>12</sup> “Los de Garín”, p. 62.

revolutionary organization are interested in finishing them. It is the system that we must bring to an end and not the poorest and hard-living people (...) I think that this is perhaps the most important problem we have been seeing during this period. The need to eliminate men who, from the viewpoint of their location in the production process, are also workers.<sup>12</sup>

When Olmedo argued that the death of cabo Sulling was a problem, he was referring not only to an ethical dilemma, but to the fact that the behavior of certain workers did not correspond to the revolutionary tasks assigned to them by the theory. In other words, there was no mechanical relationship between social class and ideology, since there were “employees who risk their lives by interests that do not belong to them.”<sup>13</sup> In the ERP response, however, prisoners from *cárcel de Córdoba* provided a different perception on the same theme:

Let us see what Lenin tells us about ideology in his book 'What to do?' 'Since we cannot speak of an independent ideology developed by the working masses in the course of their movement, the problem is posed this way: bourgeois ideology or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (as mankind has not developed any third ideology, as well as generally in a society torn by class antagonisms there may never be an ideology outside classes or above classes). So, everything done to belittle the socialist ideology, whatever is away from it, is similar to strengthening the bourgeois ideology.' There may not be a third ideology because it cannot correspond to any class, it can only be a variant of the bourgeois, deformed and deforming, which wears classist and revolutionary clothes when they are actually expressing a populism such as Peronism in our historical reality (BASCHETTI, 2004, 181).

In this passage, the relationship between ideology and class is transparent, and confirmed by an authority quote. The ERP, just as the FAR, believed that the proletariat was a revolutionary force per se, but came to a diametrically opposite conclusion with regard to the working nature of Peronism, as it “cannot be Marxist and capitalist,” but “Peronist and capitalist as Jorge Antonio” (BASCHETTI, 2004, 181).<sup>14</sup> Ideology appeared here with a positive connotation, as a system of values that reflected a particular class structure. This did not mean, however, the fulfillment of an ideal or absolute mechanism,

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<sup>12</sup> “Los de Garín”, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> “Los de Garín”, p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> Jorge Antonio (1917-2007) was an Argentine businessman and politician close to Juan Domingo Perón.

since according to both organizations, the vanguard was the agent leading the revolutionary process, and responsible for the disclosure of Marxism among the subaltern classes. How the FAR reacted in face of the proposal of the ERP? Olmedo's response relativized the possibility that the working class is able to develop an ideology independent from the bourgeoisie, quoting the famous passage in *The German Ideology*, according to which "the ideas of the ruling class are the dominant ideas in every epoch" (BASCHETTI, 2004, 190). Consequently, the document stressed that the creators of scientific socialism were by no means from a proletarian origin:

But the task of the bourgeoisie does not end there, this not only creates the proletariat of the flesh and bones, but through some of its members, bourgeois intellectuals, it also creates scientific socialism, the generic ideology of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie does not give concrete existence only to capital-labor antagonism, but it raises awareness of this antagonism, a consciousness acquired precisely because of some of its members at the first level (BASCHETTI, 2004, 190).

From this viewpoint, since Marx and Engels were bourgeois, and as most of the workers were subjected to the bourgeois ideology, it was impossible to share the thesis of the ERP, which "mechanically assimilated the extraction of class through ideology" (Baschetti, 2004: 192). According to Olmedo, prisoners from Cordoba confused bureaucracy with class identity, forgetting that it was also possible to be a worker and Peronist. In this sense, the political behavior was defined by the interests they advocated, not the position in the social structure. Notwithstanding the theoretical subtleties brandished by Carlos Olmedo to support the arguments, warnings by the ERP about the movement led by Juan Domingo Perón seem premonitory:

...it is not the most suitable Peronism to head the dispossessed class, from the moment it is looking around the leader to calm the revolutionary impulses of the masses (BASCHETTI, 2004, 183).

#### Final remarks

...in the very proletariat, particularly in the proletariat of the oppressed nations, nationalist ideologies remain. And the receptivity of the proletariat to the true internationalism cannot be aroused by a utopian anticipation –in thought– about the socialist status and the future, where there would be no longer nationality issues. (György Lukács, *Observaciones críticas a la Crítica de la Revolución Rusa de Rosa Luxemburgo*, 1922)

The debate between the FAR and the PRT-ERP was an exchange in good unique conditions. On the one hand, Carlos Olmedo, a frame of remarkable political and intellectual skills, known among activists of his organization by different nicknames like *José*, *Germán*, *Rubio*, and *El exquisito*, who was highly respected by Santucho. On the other hand a group of political prisoners led by Domingo Menna, a leader interested in the History of the labor movement and the analysis of Peronism, who were able to produce a written work under harsh conditions of isolation, without access to books or libraries to ground more adequately their theoretical positions. Arguably, the impression of Daniel de Santis about the various languages of the debate is interesting:

My impression is that **seemingly** Olmedo's study is stronger, that, in my opinion, is because Olmedo used as the basis of the controversy *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels and Menna *What to Do with Lenin. Philosophy vs. Politics*.<sup>15</sup>

The report on the FAR published by *Cristianismo y Revolución* had two main targets: on the one hand, the sectors in the left-wing most permeable to nationalism and armed struggle, which attempted to capture through a theoretical and political justification of its insertion in Peronism. On the other hand, Olmedo tried to legitimize the new identity of his organization against the Peronist movement (GONZÁLEZ CANOSA, 2007, 168-169). According to the FAR, the discovery of the national issue implied the passage from the continental strategy of Guevarism to the rather localized practice of the Peronist left-wing, a turn that warded off the risk of becoming "a lost patrol in the space of class struggle." The nationalization of guerrillas was a mutation suffered by several Latin American armed movements in the second half of the 1960s, a trend closely linked to Che Guevara's death in Bolivia and the defeat of the early experiences of armed struggle inspired by the Cuban model (RODRÍGUEZ OSTRÍA, 2005, 89). The analysis of social formation at the national level, and a historical balance of the Peronist experience were the keys to explain the formation of the Argentine working class. Interestingly, in Carlos Olmedo's discourse class struggle was rarely observed, because in his extensive digressions the relational starting

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<sup>15</sup> Account by Daniel de Santis, talking to the author (08/27/2013). The underlined bold highlights belong to the respondent.



point of the classes to refer only to the Peronist working class (act that prevented thinking of Peronism as a form of bourgeois nationalism). In this sense, the multiclass nature of Peronism emerged as a weak link in the argument, expressing the tension between the Marxist concept of class struggle and the Justice-based doctrine of class reconciliation.

The document of political prisoners of the PRT-ERP was a somewhat atypical invitation to debate, since its initiative did not leave the framework of its direction. Nevertheless, as Abel Bohoslavsky states, “to debate, in the PRT there was no need to ask anyone’s permission. Verticality was effective in the tasks, especially military. Also when implementing previously adopted working lines”<sup>16</sup>. The political line of the PRT-ERP applied a method inverse to that of the FAR, as it was based on the analysis of the international and regional situation and then moved to the local level. For this reason, the national did not occupy a central position in its political conception, since for such an organization the socialist revolution was international in its content and national in its form. In this conception, the form was a simple wrapper of the international movement of contradictions that would trigger a revolutionary situation. From the viewpoint of the organization headed by Mario Roberto Santucho, Peronism was a bourgeois, populist, and counter-revolutionary nationalist movement, hence the confrontation between Peronists and anti-Peronists is characterized as a pure simulacrum. Indeed, according to prisoners from the PRT, “the famous antinomy does not exist, there is a class struggle that occurs with increasing intensity” (BASCHETTI, 2004, 183). The ERP endeavored to clarify the meaning of concepts such as socialism and nationalism, concerned about the purity, classification, and segregation of each political identity. So, the analogy tested by Olmedo between the Vietnamese revolution and Peronism seemed inconceivable, since in the first case it consisted of a country occupied by an imperialist power, with a class alliance whose leadership was based on a party armed with a Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Both in the PRT-ERP and the FAR, ideologies were expressions of a particular class structure. However, this premise was taken to opposite conclusions by the two organizations. According to Olmedo, ideology was primarily a false view of reality

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<sup>16</sup> Account by Abel Bohoslavsky, talking to the author (09/17/2013).

produced by the dominant classes, in line with Althusser's characterization of the ideological State apparatuses (GONZÁLEZ CANOSA, 2007, 184). Thus, the relationship between class and ideology was opaque, since there was no automatic matching between the working class and its historical interests. In cabo Sulling's attitude, regarded as a worker willing to die to defend a bourgeois institution, there was a symptom of the clash between class and class ideology, because ultimately, as claimed by Oscar Terán in his reading of the work by Régis Debray, "it is no longer location in the mode of production what constitutes the class subjects" (TERÁN, 2004, 14). A twist on the same line might be saying that, therefore, it was not the dividing line between exploiter and exploited, the place where the production process, which defined the revolutionary individual. In fact, Marx and Engels were bourgeois intellectuals, and as such they became aware of class antagonism. Through his criticism of the mechanism, Olmedo opened a door, an epistemological threshold he did not want to cross, because he had no intention of abandoning Marxism as a tool of social analysis, embodied from his membership in the ranks of the Communist Party.

According to the PRT-ERP, ideology was a system of values reflecting in an undistorted way a particular class structure. In this positive definition, Marxism was a part of the proletarian ideology, understood as a series of principles based on historical and dialectical materialism. Therefore, unlike the report on the FAR, where ideology appeared with all negative connotations of false consciousness, in the ERP response science merged with ideology, becoming a revolutionary input. Prisoners from the PRT relied on the reading of Lenin and *What to do?* to claim that there were only two ideologies, socialist and bourgeois, intrinsically linked to the two antagonistic classes of the capitalist mode of production. In this passage, the relationship between class and ideology was transparent and it consisted in a mere structural effect, because neither mediations (as the vanguard party) or distortions (as what Peronism might mean) appeared. For this reason, someone could be a Peronist and capitalist, or a military and Peronist (i.e. being a part of the ruling classes and their State apparatuses and adhere to Peronism), but never a Marxist and capitalist.

Which consequences did the controversy within the FAR and the PRT-ERP have? Although it is difficult to study the reception of exchange in the two groups, it was possible to notice that Carlos Olmedo's interventions helped consolidating the very identity of the organization, as shown by the reissue of the debate by the FAR after the death of its leader. As for the PRT-ERP, there are mixed opinions about this: according to Daniel de Santis, "it never had much importance. Those who have refloated all the time are the revolutionary Peronists"<sup>17</sup>. However, the historian Pablo Pozzi, who conducted numerous interviews with former members of the organization, says that until the publication of the note in *Cristianismo y Revolución* the FAR was a strategic ally of the organization led by Santucho. Therefore, the PRT-ERP was not only worried to respond to Olmedo, but according to Pozzi "the PRT-ERP accepted the criticism as for the publication of several studies on Peronism trying to remedy the deficit [theoretical formation] synthetizing its position" (POZZI, 2004, 107-108). Olmedo's death in Ferreira fight by 1971, but perhaps also increasingly profound differences between the two organizations because of the imminent return of Perón, prevented further debate.

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<sup>17</sup> Account by Daniel de Santis, talking to the author (08/27/2013).

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