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## “Unity for the Defense of Culture”: The AIAPE and the Cultural Politics of Argentine Antifascism, 1935–1943

JAMES CANE

ON the evening of July 28, 1935, more than 80 doctors, poets, psychologists, and journalists, including many of Argentina's most prestigious intellectuals, gathered in Buenos Aires to discuss the cultural effects of what were now five years of authoritarian and semiauthoritarian rule. While the nation had ostensibly returned to constitutional democracy three years earlier, it was clear to those gathered that evening that the reactionary cultural policies of the dictatorship of José F. Uriburu had spilled over into the “patriotic fraud” of the quasi-constitutional administration of Agustín P. Justo. The assembled professionals immediately drafted a note of protest over the regime's jailing of Communist poet and journalist Raúl González Tuñón for his militant poem “Brigada de Choque.”<sup>1</sup>

More generally, the encroachment of right-wing Nationalists into the “apolitical” world of cultural production through their growing influence in the state's expanding intellectual patronage apparatus appeared to threaten intellectuals' capacity to engage critically and freely in the social and cultural life of the nation.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, taking advantage of the open cultural and political space maintained by the Justo regime as a demonstration of

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1. Raúl Larra, *Con pelos y señales* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Futuro, 1986), 35.

2. See Jesús Méndez, “Argentine Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century, 1900–1943” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1980).

its legal-constitutional character, the intellectuals at this meeting voted to formalize their opposition to right-wing cultural politics through the creation of an ideologically inclusive cultural institution. The Agrupación de Intelectuales, Artistas, Periodistas, y Escritores (AIAPE, the Association of Intellectuals, Artists, Journalists, and Writers), as the group was soon baptized, sought to unite all centrist and leftist Argentine intellectuals in the common project of the “defense of culture” from the perceived onslaught of *fascismo criollo*.

That the eight-year life of the AIAPE would ultimately correspond to a period of profound reworking of Argentine political thought is by no means coincidental: the organization emerged as one of many local responses to the world crisis of economic and political liberalism that began in earnest in 1929. In addition to reflecting the ideological turmoil of the 1930s and early 1940s, however, the AIAPE contributed decisively to the articulation of a leftist nationalism that foreshadowed in important ways the Peronist answer to that crisis.

The transition from the Argentine left’s previous strong internationalism was anything but smooth. Yet precisely for this reason, an examination of the history of this long-ignored organization might shed some light on the rapidly shifting ideological environment of Argentina’s Infamous Decade.<sup>3</sup> As an example of similar organizations formed throughout the Americas and Europe, furthermore, the AIAPE might provide a glimpse of the ideological strategies for overcoming the obstacles, both external and internal, to the construction of leftist political legitimacy in Latin America in the 1930s and beyond.

Not surprisingly, the impetus for the creation of the AIAPE did not emanate solely from national circumstances. The common perception that European ideological conflicts might spread beyond the Old World—a perception bolstered both by memories of the Uriburu corporatist experiment (1930–32) and the increasingly confrontational discourse of local admirers of Mussolini and Hitler—called for an antifascist intellectual alliance, free from ideological and geographical constraints. That the driving force in the AIAPE came precisely from those Argentine intellectuals who, besides sharing many of the cosmopolitan tendencies of their liberal colleagues, maintained close ties to the Argentine Communist Party (PC), served to heighten the organization’s internationalist bent.

Yet the imperative of local cultural and political action mitigated this internationalist commitment. David Harvey’s characterization of the 1930s

3. Previous examination of the AIAPE is largely limited to the memoirs and brief essays of participant Raúl Larra, *Mundo de escritores* (Buenos Aires: Sílabo, 1973); *Etcétera* (Buenos Aires: Anfora, 1982); *Con pelos y señales*; and “Para una historia de la cultura argentina: AIAPE, un movimiento de intelectuales de defensa de la cultura,” *Nueva Historia* 3:3 (Apr. 1994).

in Europe as “a period when the always latent tensions between internationalism and nationalism, between universalism and class politics, were heightened into absolute contradiction” is accurate for Argentina as well.<sup>4</sup> These interrelated tensions were present not only *between* competing political movements and factions but also *within* the movements. This is particularly true of Argentine Communism, whose intellectuals were charged with organizing the ideological hegemony of what was then the most dynamic and militant sector of the Argentine labor movement. The Third International’s initiation of the Popular Front strategy in early 1935 introduced a contradictory element into the Communists’, and therefore many AIAPE members’, notions of the scale of their struggle for ideological hegemony. Now, in addition to claiming to represent the revolutionary aspirations of the world proletariat, the Communists found themselves in the awkward position of attempting to gain legitimacy as an organically *national* political force with the goal of reestablishing a previously derided bourgeois legality.

The resolution of these contradictions necessarily implied the discursive construction of a new Argentine political imaginary that might reconcile the revolutionary aspirations of the Communist rank and file with the demands of alliance with liberal democratic political currents. By reworking national political mythologies and reformulating notions of the local and the extralocal, Communist intellectuals hoped to open the political system to the party’s legitimate presence. Thus the AIAPE often became a forum for reshaping notions of Argentina’s “being in the world” and the world’s and the Communists’ “being in Argentina.”

The AIAPE’s attempts to maintain an intellectual antifascist front rested on both the common threat of the Right’s ascendance and an emphasis on the unifying power of vaguely defined universal notions of democracy, justice, and liberty. This unity of the center and Left was often threatened as the more politically disciplined members of the Communist Party pulled the AIAPE’s general program into line with the changing needs of party strategy throughout the period 1935–1943. To assume that these intellectuals automatically submitted their own cultural interventions to party mandates, however, or that the non-Communist forces in the AIAPE did not resist attempts to subordinate the cultural organization to the political necessities of the PC ignores the roots of the substantial divergence of style, content, and strategy among different Communist intellectuals. For more centrist intellectuals, close association with an organization so influenced by its Communist members—the AIAPE was, after all, a “front” organization—often threatened to lend legitimacy to a political movement whose

4. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 33.

final goals and, often, only strategic interest in antifascism they abhorred. The fear that this might also taint their own credibility as liberal democrats was overshadowed only by the very real possibility that the government's persecution of Communism might soon come to include all those associated with the "Communist" AIAPE.

Three interrelated questions, then, seem crucial to understanding the history and surprising success of the AIAPE project. How did the local political, cultural, and social juncture—particularly the need to combat Nationalist attempts to monopolize "national" political myths—influence the discourse of Argentina's often self-consciously cosmopolitan intellectuals? What was the nature of the balance in that discourse between necessary appeals to the normative value of different universalistic claims and the impetus toward class politics? How did each intellectual at different times reconcile the individual commitment to free creative expression with the imperatives of collective political action? None of these antagonisms could be reconciled in a static, universally valid formula. Instead, AIAPE members resolved these tensions in a fluid and always contingent manner that often threatened to break apart from its own internal contradictions.

### **Transition: July 1935–December 1936**

Having recently returned from Paris, where he witnessed the formation of the Comité de Vigilancia des Intellectuels Antifascistes, psychologist Aníbal Ponce—the most accomplished disciple of positivist José Ingenieros—emerged as the natural leader of the new organization. Ponce's liberal credentials, gained through a lengthy and passionate engagement with Argentine positivist liberalism that culminated in the widely read books *La vejez de Sarmiento* (1927) and *Sarmiento, constructor de la nueva Argentina* (1932), made him a highly respected figure among Argentina's centrist intellectuals. Similarly, his more recent formal embrace of Marxism gained him credibility among even those more radical intellectuals who rejected his conservative aesthetic stance.<sup>5</sup> Given his intellectual trajectory and presence as president of the AIAPE, accompanied in the vice presidency by renowned center-left authors Alberto Gerchunoff, Edmundo Guibourg, and Vicente Martínez Cuitiño, Ponce seemed to embody the new organization's commitment to an alliance among a broad spectrum of antifascist intellectuals.<sup>6</sup>

5. See Oscar Terán, *Aníbal Ponce: ¿el marxismo sin nación?* (Mexico City: Pasado y Presente, 1983).

6. Larra, "Para una historia," 56. Gerchunoff, author of *Los gauchos judíos* (1910) and journalist with the oligarchic newspaper *La Nación*, had ties with the Socialist Party and was perhaps the best known of the three vice presidents. Guibourg, however, who also maintained

Ponce's address to the meeting of July 28, the "Message to the Intellectuals of Latin America," would eventually become the preamble to the constitution of the new organization.<sup>7</sup> In the address, Ponce did not propose a radical break with bourgeois culture, as many of his fellow Marxists had wished. Instead, he called on the assembled intellectuals to defend the "duty of culture accumulated by humanity through centuries of painful struggle and tenacious effort" that they themselves embodied.<sup>8</sup> This "defense of culture," Ponce argued, must be at once collective and aggressive in order to face the rising reaction that threatened to subvert it.

Culture must be militant . . . , and given that the dangers that threaten the body of the nation like sinister shadows affect us all—the artists who see their possibilities for creation diminished; the writers prevented from expressing their truths; the scientists who find themselves submitted to an auditor who limits and at times neutralizes their research—we anxiously want to articulate that common uneasiness in such a way that it gives the necessary force to that truth diminished by division.<sup>9</sup>

The threat of the Right's cultural politics was toward all ("the body of the nation"), and the assembled artists, writers, and scientists agreed, by their very formation of the AIAPE, that they must overcome their own ideological differences and act collectively to counter that threat. Ponce's emphasis on "unity for the defense of culture," moreover, provided the group's motto.

In the course of its first year, the organization seemed to meet the demands of its own criteria of public cultural-political action with a breadth of activity that went well beyond that of similar antifascist organizations.<sup>10</sup> The group organized a symbolic funeral for French author Henri Barbusse; initiated its own journal, *Unidad*; and publicly denounced perceived signs of the rise of the Right, such as the assassination of Senator Enzo Bordabehere on the Senate floor and the expulsion of 15 students from the Escuela de Bellas Artes. In addition, the AIAPE intellectuals attempted to heighten their own social consciousness by organizing conferences for medical doctors on the

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Socialist connections, was probably more widely read because of his column "Calle Corrientes" in the enormously popular daily *Crítica*. The dramatist Martínez Cuitiño also worked as a journalist.

7. As Héctor Agosti asserts, no copies of the original address remain, although fragments can be found in Aníbal Ponce, "El primer año de AIAPE," in Terán, *Aníbal Ponce*, 228–33 (originally published in *Dialéctica* [Buenos Aires], Aug. 1936); and Larra, *Etcétera*. See also Héctor Pablo Agosti, *Aníbal Ponce: memoria y presencia* (Buenos Aires: Cartago, 1974).

8. Cited in Ponce, "El primer año de AIAPE," 228.

9. Cited in Larra, *Etcétera*, 18.

10. Other organizations formed around the same time generally concentrated on specific issues, such as the Spanish civil war, European refugees, or the fight against rising anti-Semitism. See Ronald C. Newton, *The "Nazi Menace" in Argentina, 1931–1947* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 139–79.

relationship between economics and scientific practice, and debates among writers on society and politics in the Americas. The organization also replicated itself, as local branches of the group formed in the interior cities of both Argentina and Uruguay, while affiliated organizations emerged in Paraguay, Peru, and Chile.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the AIAPE'S most significant public act, however, was its participation in the May Day demonstration of 1936, a demonstration that appeared to signal the consolidation in Argentina of an opposition Popular Front that might soon follow its French and Spanish counterparts to electoral victory. Marching under banners hailing Henri Barbusse, Maxim Gorky, and jailed Argentine author Héctor Agosti (who would later emerge as the Communist Party's most important intellectual), the AIAPE intellectuals were engulfed by the much more numerous columns of the various unions that composed the Confederación General de Trabajo.<sup>12</sup> Demonstrators sang both the Argentine national anthem and the "International." When Progressive Democrat Senator Lisandro de la Torre ended his speech with "Free men of all the world: Unite!" the possibility of pan-ideological anti-fascist unity, the acceptance of the PC as a legitimate political force, and the much sought-after fusion of intellectuals with the masses they claimed to represent seemed deceptively near and its maintenance misleadingly simple.<sup>13</sup>

In reality, Radicals, Socialists, Progressive Democrats, and independent intellectuals found ample reason to suspect that the Communist Party's true intentions in promoting the political Popular Front and its cultural counterpart, the AIAPE, went beyond a simple defense of parliamentary democracy and the intellectual freedoms it guaranteed. Party leader Luís Sommi himself would later admit that important Communist leaders had sought to heighten the violence of the 1936 construction workers' strike to prompt a revolutionary situation, despite the party's alleged adherence to the Popular Front strategy.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the publication of AIAPE member José Portogalo's collection of poems, *Tumulto*, and the literary scandal it engendered illustrated the ambiguous manner in which many leftist intellectuals attempted to assume their new role as the mediators of a broad political and cultural antifascist alliance.

11. *Ibid.*, 229–30. The AIAPE's Chilean counterpart was the Alianza de Intelectuales, headed by Pablo Neruda.

12. Larra, *Con pelos y señales*, 14; and *Por la Defensa de la Cultura* (newspaper of the AIAPE Montevideo), Mar. 1937. The banners used in the AIAPE column were painted by artist Antonio Berni.

13. *La Prensa* (Buenos Aires), May 2, 1936. Besides emphasizing the immense size of the demonstration (the columns stretched for 20 city blocks, the paper insisted), *La Prensa* highlighted the orderliness of the demonstrators.

14. Joel Horowitz, *Argentine Unions, the State, and the Rise of Perón, 1930–1945* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, Univ. of California, 1990), 117.

Published only five months after the formation of the AIAPE, *Tumulto* was exactly the kind of sectarian and unabashedly revolutionary intervention in public life from which the AIAPE was attempting to distance itself. The poems of *Tumulto* frontally attack rather than attempt to co-opt Argentine social and political norms. They romanticize working-class resistance in a way that clearly reflects Portogalo's anarchist leanings and continued adherence to the class-against-class strategy that the Communists had only just abandoned. It seems worthwhile, then, to examine at some length the content of the work because, in many ways, *Tumulto* is emblematic of the internal obstacles the AIAPE faced in its move to construct an ideologically inclusive antifascist intellectual front.

The particular form in which Portogalo represents class struggle helps to reveal the rapidly changing social conditions in which the AIAPE intellectuals operated. Over the course of the 1930s, the balance, for Buenos Aires, between being a space of consumption and a space of production shifted increasingly—and, for the *gente decente*, ominously—toward the latter, but the corresponding shift in the visibility and political clout of the city's industrial working class over the consuming middle and upper classes lagged far behind. In *Tumulto*, however, Portogalo asserts that this situation is only temporary, in the face of the ultimately uncontrollable urban "tumult" that industrial capitalism has itself created. The modern, bourgeois Buenos Aires is merely laying the foundation for the socialist city that will inevitably supersede it: "The city rises like a skyscraper, dizzyingly, victoriously, / and a red star is born at the height of a clenched fist."<sup>15</sup>

The anonymous working inhabitants destined to enact this transformation of Buenos Aires, it is significant, are not the exclusively male subjects of traditional politics. Along with the ever present prostitutes who almost mandatorily peopled the works of the avant-garde poets of the 1920s, the women of *Tumulto* now also work in the factories, workshops, and offices of the rapidly changing city. Despite inevitable sexual harassment, many of these women are capable of achieving a level of social mobility often denied to their male counterparts.<sup>16</sup> In addition to their traditional feminine characteristics, Portogalo's working-class Porteñas are intelligent, self-confident, and in charge of their own sexuality. Given their status as members of the proletariat, moreover, they are revolutionary subjects themselves, absolutely essential to the project of social transformation.

Those girls who know how to wink at the guards on the bus while they read a novel by Gorky or a novel by [fellow *aiapeano* Roberto] Arlt, and they have glances as clean as the first star in the world. They are our comrades, they sweat in the workshops and factories.

15. José Portogalo, *Tumulto* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imán, 1935), 48.

16. *Ibid.*, 23, 70.



—Only their hands will give the revolutionary poem that interests us.—  
 And although their voices are sweet and smooth like the midday sky, in them rancor tends to rear itself like the caresses of the wind in a flag.<sup>17</sup>

It would be misleading, however, to assume that *Tumulto* reflects an unambiguous profeminism on the part of its author. Although these “girls” might confidently occupy public spaces and engage the “masculine” world of ideas by reading Gorky and Arlt, Portogalo assumes that his own audience is male (“*They* are *our* comrades”). If part of Portogalo’s project is to show the irrelevance of the ideal of the docile housewife (and, implicitly, of the bourgeois conception of the nuclear family) to the social realities of Argentina’s new industrial working class, his concomitant attack on traditional sexual morality reflects a strong machismo that leaves women politely but passively “possessed.” Nevertheless, even this ambiguous challenge to a gendered social hierarchy would give way in later writings of AIAPE members—even of Portogalo himself—to a significantly more conservative and paternalistic representation of gender, as the leftist members of the organization softened their revolutionary fervor in favor of a more conciliatory stance toward their liberal and middle-class allies.

*Tumulto*’s assaults on traditional notions of morality and femininity are also specifically meant to offend the main representative of tradition: the Catholic church. Yet Portogalo does not limit his direct attacks on the church to tired celebrations of his “awakening” from the “opium dream” of religious belief. Instead, nuns “dream about the penises / of bleeding Christs,” while God himself is a sexually repressed fascist.

Another [news flash]: God is bored. The immobility of his stone lips and the sacristy smell of his enclaustrated penis hurt him. . . . A little angel dressed in white offers him an olive branch. But he orders four sharpshooters, two brown shirts and two black shirts to execute him against the clouds for being an imbecile.<sup>18</sup>

In “Canción de la primavera del año 1934” (Song of the Spring of the Year 1934), Portogalo singles out for special ridicule the hypocritical outpouring of public piety surrounding the 23rd Eucharistic Congress, held in Buenos Aires that year, remarking “how beautiful it would be . . . to climb the skyscrapers and piss on the shields of the Eucharistic Congress” and to “fill the luggage of Catholic tourists with dynamite.”<sup>19</sup> Portogalo is determined not just to discredit the church as an institution or religious belief itself but

17. *Ibid.*, 106.

18. *Ibid.*, 48, 72–73.

19. *Ibid.*, 58.

to alienate even those believing Argentines who might be potential allies in the broader antifascist project.

This symbolic aggression also extends to the Communist Party's would-be partners in the proposed Argentine Popular Front, as Portogalo denounces "Those panegyrists of Democracy [who] profit from the highest offices. / They speak of the fatherland and they sell themselves to Yankee imperialism. / They speak of the wealth of the land and they sell themselves to English imperialism."<sup>20</sup> Thus, not surprisingly, Portogalo also maintains serious reservations about the wisdom of an alliance with "bourgeois" intellectuals ("those sons of bitches with lunch and dinner!") in the name of antifascism, because of the limitations it might place on his own exercise of free expression.

Don't say, for example: God doesn't exist. Or, war is made by big capitalists to line their pockets.

But what the hell, comrades! I understand that this is the plain truth and I look at my fists.<sup>21</sup>

He even seems to dismiss the entire AIAPE project as an unwise flirtation with the same bellicose and deceitful bourgeois internationalism that led to World War I, as he ironizes,

London, Rome, Paris, New York.

"In defense of the rights of Man."

*"In the defense of culture:"* . . .

In defense of private property.

For the conquest of international markets:

Petroleum. Automobiles. Steel. Wheat. Meat.

Capital in combat. Struggle of interests: That was the truth.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to his scathing attacks on traditional politicians—the well-fed "pederasts of politics"—Portogalo also seeks to dissolve the very glue meant to hold together the broad coalition of centrist and leftist intellectuals.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the Communist Party began its first attempts to establish its legitimacy by discursively tying its existence to local progressive political traditions, and the AIAPE intellectuals pointed to the continued relevance of the doctrines of nineteenth-century liberal icons like Domingo Sarmiento, Portogalo dreams of destroying all remnants of bourgeois Argentina. Singled out for special attack are those "bodies" who, while representing private accumulation, symbolically occupy the public spaces of the city: "How beau-

20. *Ibid.*, 83.

21. *Ibid.*, 44, 74.

22. *Ibid.*, 101. Emphasis added.

23. *Ibid.*, 100.

tiful it would be to file down the legs of [the statues of] these heroes / and leave them crippled for posterity!"<sup>24</sup>

Instead of pursuing a politics embedded in necessarily false "national" unifying myths, Portogalo insists that to assume fully the tasks of the future, his reader must "leave that text of history of the fatherland. Button up / your pants and board the clippers of the sky."<sup>25</sup> Argentine events thus are simply local manifestations of an international class struggle that can be won only through a decisive break with history and the notion of "nation."

Portogalo would resolve the tensions in Argentine society not through a cross-class antifascist alliance to halt and reverse the local slide to the right, but through the romantic violence of resistance itself: "I wish I had a bomb, a rifle, a machine gun / and a girl of the people with a red handkerchief on her head. / Then I would be happy."<sup>26</sup> For Portogalo, then, the individual and collective revolutionary act occurs in the street, not the Congress or the literary salon, and his utopia is nothing less (or more) than a "revenge of the century," reconcilable only with difficulty with a strategy of class alliance.<sup>27</sup> Portogalo also proclaims, however, that the purpose of his poetry is to incite collective political action; and the confrontational politics and aesthetics of *Tumulto* would eventually give way to the significantly more conciliatory tactics of the Popular Front and the AIAPE.

Although José Portogalo's efforts to graft revolutionary social commentary onto avant-garde poetry did not always produce the aesthetic innovation he sought, his attempts to offend met with much greater success. While the work earned him the enormously prestigious (and lucrative) Municipal Prize of 1935, *Tumulto* did not sit well with government censors. Portogalo spent a brief period in prison, along with the book's illustrator, Demetrio Urruchúa, while authorities removed all copies of the book from the city's bookstores.<sup>28</sup> The regime's threat of revoking the author's Argentine citizenship and deporting him to Mussolini's Italy—Portogalo had emigrated with his parents from Italy at the age of 2—came to naught, although such threats generally were by no means idle.<sup>29</sup>

If *Tumulto* seemed to advocate total rupture with a decadent Argentine past, the AIAPE's defense of the work moved in precisely the opposite direction, rooting free expression—as well as government censorship—

24. *Ibid.*, 79.

25. *Ibid.*, 113.

26. *Ibid.*, 78.

27. *Ibid.*, 31.

28. *Dialéctica* (Buenos Aires), July 1936.

29. Liborio Justo, "Carta abierta de Liborio Justo al presidente de la AIAPE," *Claridad* (Buenos Aires), Oct. 1937. In late 1937, the Justo government placed five Communist construction workers (Fioravanti, Pariocioni, Pini, and Emilio and Pedro Fabretti) on an Italian ship bound for Fascist Italy. *La Vanguardia* (Buenos Aires), Jan. 18, 1938.

in the national past. Aníbal Ponce denounced the authorities' "monstrous sequester" of the book, noting the escalation of the charges against Portogalo compared to those against Raúl González Tuñón only one year earlier. (In addition to "inciting rebellion," *Tumulto* was "blasphemous" and "immoral.") Ponce saw this as an indication of increased vehemence in the Right's reactionary cultural politics. The contest over *Tumulto*, Ponce declared, harked back to the oppression of colonial Argentina and the struggle against nineteenth-century dictator and current Nationalist icon Juan Manuel de Rosas.

Who doesn't understand, just by pronouncing them, all that ["blasphemous" and "immoral"] mean as a most direct insult, not just to the full dignity of the writer and artist, but also to the democratic core of our history, to Argentina's liberal past? How do these supposed "crimes," of which various of our comrades are now accused, differ from those equally imaginary "crimes" that stained the history of Spanish colonialism or Rosista despotism?<sup>30</sup>

The AIAPE declaration on the incident proclaimed, "Not only are the forces of the great masses with us, but also the liberal past of Argentina."<sup>31</sup>

That the tensions embodied in the text of *Tumulto* permeated the organization in its first turbulent year is clear from Ponce's anniversary address to the AIAPE. Without the universalistic appeals of the inaugural manifesto as a guide, Ponce declared, the group might have strayed from its goal of remaining ideologically inclusive, under pressures from inside and outside the organization. Instead, the AIAPE could define itself only by what it was not, to avoid the divisive effects of members' tendencies toward class politics.

An association of intellectual workers with no more purpose than that of defending national culture against the fascist offensive, the AIAPE could not have a norm of conduct other than that which emerges from its clear principles: neither political party, nor sectarian chapel [*capilla sectaria*], nor salon of snobs, nor association of revolutionaries.<sup>32</sup>

The preservation of antifascist unity within ideological heterogeneity to which the organization remained committed, however, did not mean that members should avoid taking potentially controversial stands. Ponce encouraged all members and leaders to manifest their convictions freely. Yet if, as Ponce suggested, a workable balance could be achieved between the demands of individual expression and the exigencies of collective action, such a balance would prove much more difficult to maintain than expected, for

30. Ponce, "El primer año de AIAPE," 229.

31. *Dialéctica*, July 1936.

32. Ponce, "El primer año de AIAPE," 231.

the political climate underwent a rapid transformation during the second half of 1936.

The outbreak of civil war in Spain had serious ramifications in the Argentine political sphere. While the viciousness of the Franco uprising against the democratically elected Popular Front government seemed to prove the necessity of concerted action against domestic fascism, it also provided a powerful symbol around which that action could organize. At the same time, the right-wing reaction “provoked” by the Spanish Popular Front, and especially the republican government’s dependence on the Communist-dominated militias, made flirtations with an Argentine Popular Front increasingly unacceptable to the more staid Argentine Radicals. Given the Unión Cívica Radical’s clear status as the majority political force in the nation, it simply was not clear what the party might gain from such an alliance.

Nationalist Senator Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo’s introduction of the Law for the Repression of Communism, itself couched in terms of an impending civil war, further illustrated the Right’s unwillingness to accept complacently any Radical-Communist alliance: the law made associating with Communist leaders and intellectuals increasingly risky.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, rank-and-file Left enthusiasm for the moves toward sweeping social revolution in the republican zones of Spain, as well as the popularity of more revolutionary figures like the “Spanish Lenin,” Largo Caballero, proved incompatible with Radical, Socialist, and even Communist attempts to reduce the war in Spain to a simple question of democracy versus fascism.

In this charged atmosphere, Ponce’s confidence in the AIAPE intellectuals’ ability to maintain antifascist unity amid the organization’s ideological heterogeneity underestimated the gravity of the situation. On the one hand, his intellectual authority acted as a powerful restraint on the more radical members of the AIAPE. Cayetano Córdova Iturburu would later remember that Ponce

had to restrain, every day, our unpremeditated impulses. His prudence struck us, then, as excessive. And, it must be confessed, it did not please us. . . . We would have liked to throw ourselves immediately in the middle of the tumult and the political and union struggles, displaying categorical flags, forgetting our specific function as the agglutinant of a possible vast movement of antifascist intellectuals.”<sup>34</sup>

33. “Glosas políticas: el mito del fantasma rojo,” *Revista Hechos e Ideas* (Buenos Aires), Dec. 1936, p. 401.

34. Córdova Iturburu, “Aníbal Ponce y nuestro tiempo (Discurso pronunciado en el homenaje a la memoria de Aníbal Ponce organizado por la AIAPE de Rosario),” in *Cuatro perfiles y otras notas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Problemas, 1941), 53–54.

On the other hand, Ponce's own pronouncements of the period, as Oscar Terán has convincingly argued, still owed much to the class-against-class strategy.<sup>35</sup> In a widely disseminated lecture delivered only one month after his anniversary address, Ponce rejected the idea that the universalistic notions of order and democracy were the ultimate goals of the Spanish republican cause—with obvious implications for the opposition to the Justo regime. Instead, he declared, the war in Spain was a war between that country's social classes, and he made clear the nature of the eventual outcome. After examining the history of class struggle in Spain, Ponce pronounced,

It is not the defense of order that has made Spain raise its clenched fist; it is the burning conviction that the time has arrived to fulfill the promises so many times betrayed. Because the bourgeoisie has demonstrated itself inept, the working class is there to fulfill those promises with its own hands, but with this difference that signifies the times in which we live: when the working class of today is disposed to realize a democratic revolution, it can be nothing other than the prologue to the socialist revolution.<sup>36</sup>

If the “times in which we live” demanded either a purely instrumental appeal to class alliance for common democratic goals or an outright abandonment of that strategy, it is hardly surprising that many committed antifascist liberal intellectuals soon left the ranks of the AIAPE. While government repression had plagued the organization from the very beginning—the Patriotic League and the Special Section of the federal police had disrupted the inaugural meeting—that harassment now took a more serious turn.<sup>37</sup> In October, Ponce was removed from his position as professor of psychology, while Socialist and fellow *aiapeano* Gregorio Bermann lost his appointment as professor of legal medicine and toxicology at the University of Córdoba for publicly rallying fellow professionals in Ponce's defense.<sup>38</sup> As a result, many AIAPE members withdrew their overt allegiance, as much from fear of similar reprisals as from disagreement with Communist members' ideological commitments.<sup>39</sup>

35. Terán, *Aníbal Ponce*, 32.

36. Aníbal Ponce, “Examen de la España actual,” in *El viento en el mundo: examen de la España actual, en el centenario de Fourier* (Buenos Aires: Ateneo, 1939), 263–64.

37. *Por la Defensa de la Cultura*, Mar. 1937.

38. See Gregorio Bermann, “Aníbal Ponce, delincuente y profesor indigno,” published in *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), Dec. 20, 1936; and “Carta abierta al Ministro de Instrucción Pública,” published in *Córdoba*, Dec. 19, 1936, both reprinted in *Conciencia de nuestro tiempo: personas, obras, combates, viajes, epístolas* (Buenos Aires: Hernández, 1971). Bermann would later travel to Spain and participate as a physician for the Republican cause.

39. I have been unable to locate membership figures for the organization, partly because many rank-and-file members chose to keep their affiliation secret for fear of political persecution. See Larra, *Etcétera*, 21.

Both Ponce's and Bermann's defense of their ideological stance in open letters to Minister of Public Instruction Jorge de la Torre emphasized their commitment to the universal notions of culture and democracy, as well as an anticlericalism and a denunciation of the "reactionary classes" that fell well within the bounds of Radical Party discourse. Ponce's letter in particular framed his actions in terms of "the national," declaring that he preferred among his own works *La vejez de Sarmiento* and *Sarmiento, constructor de la nueva Argentina* and asserting his own "profoundly Argentine" nature: "for my ancestry, my education, and my culture, I feel proudly rooted in the liberal tradition of my native land."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the government's censure of Ponce seemed to replay the drama of nineteenth-century Argentine conflicts.

How could the trampling of my professorship take me by surprise, together with so many other well-known offenses, if the same forces that now muzzle education did not respect in another time even the glorious figure of Sarmiento? . . . [I]t is good to meditate [on national history] from time to time to the perennial contempt of those reactionary classes that speak endlessly of patriotism and have in their frightful past the tremendous shame of having discharged [*exonerado*] none other than Sarmiento. Sarmiento, Mr. Minister!<sup>41</sup>

Ponce left for Cárdenas' Mexico in January of the following year, but rather than return triumphantly as Sarmiento did, he died three years later, still in exile.

Ponce's and Bermann's letters signal a final consolidation in the AIAPE of a discourse based on universal appeals and national mythologies. Besides the official government harassment, Radical Party leader Marcelo T. de Alvear stated his unwillingness to engage in "dangerous experiments" as presidential elections approached. Individual assertions of more extreme positions, then, could easily lead the AIAPE to the same dismal fate as the political Popular Front.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the failure of total social revolution in Spain and the regularization of the republic's war with Franco meant that the ideological residues of the class-against-class strategy posed a heightened threat to the interclass, antifascist collective action that now appeared essential. Members of the AIAPE, therefore, would seek new, more flexible ways to resolve the interrelated tensions between national and international commitments and between the necessity of antifascist unity and the impetus toward class-based politics.

40. Aníbal Ponce, "Carta abierta al Ministro Jorge de la Torre," in Terán, *Aníbal Ponce*, 234-36.

41. *Ibid.*

42. "Conceptos del Dr. Alvear sobre el momento," *Revista Hechos e Ideas*, Dec. 1936, p. 406.

### Consolidation: January 1937–August 1939

AIAPE members' renewed attempt to rebuild and maintain the organization as an ideologically inclusive and democratic force in Argentine antifascism depended on the willingness of Communist intellectuals like José Portogalo to rescind their previous self-portrayal as advocates of a radical and total break with the national past. The Communists now maintained that their movement emerged from a national tradition of progressive political action, whose origins lay in the independence movement itself and whose historical achievements were now under attack from the foreign-inspired devotees of the European fascisms.

This appeal to the power of national myths for the creation of an anti-fascist political imaginary—a recognition not only of the relative success of the Nationalists' attempt to monopolize “the national,” but also of the Right's concomitant ability to set the boundaries of the legitimate discursive terrain—often rested uneasily beside the Argentine Communists' obvious commitments to the Third International, the defense of the Soviet Union and republican Spain, and socialism. Nevertheless, the AIAPE did successfully reemerge as a united antifascist intellectual front, and maintained strong links to similar organizations until the eruption of all-out war in Europe again shifted the political and ideological landscape in Argentina.

The general acceptance in the AIAPE of a “national” political discourse allowed the group to continue organizing antifascists in civil society, despite the failure of the political Popular Front. A series of lectures on “The Personality and Work of Sarmiento,” held in the AIAPE salon in mid-1938, had the benefit not only of emphasizing the organization's ideological identification with the liberal patriot, but also of allowing figures like the young Radical Arturo Frondizi and Socialist author Roberto Giusti, editor of the literary journal *Nosotros*, to address the organization on comfortable and respectable ideological terrain.<sup>43</sup>

The initiation of regular courses on colonial Argentine history that same year further exemplifies the group's commitment to rooting its discourse in local traditions. Earlier, in the May Day celebrations of 1937, the banners of Barbusse and Gorky that had served as unifying symbols in 1936 gave way to that of Juan Bautista Alberdi, the epitome of nineteenth-century Argentine liberalism.<sup>44</sup> The message the *aiapeanos* now presented could not be clearer: they were the rightful heirs to a political-intellectual tradition that had guided Argentine society until the institutional rupture of September 1930.

43. A partial calendar of AIAPE events for 1938 is found in Emilio Troise, *Los germanos no son arios* (Buenos Aires: Cuadernos de la AIAPE, 1938).

44. Raúl Larra, *La Revolución de Mayo y su pensamiento democrático* (Buenos Aires: Cuadernos de la AIAPE, 1939), 5.



In his lecture at the AIAPE “The May Revolution and Its Democratic Thought,” in May 1938, the young Communist journalist Raúl Larra attempted to explain this shift in the balance between a cosmopolitan, internationalist perspective and the increasingly nationalist tenor of leftist intellectual discourse.<sup>45</sup> The massive corruption of Argentine political life in the name of “the high interests of the fatherland’ [and] in the bicolor shadow of our flag,” Larra argued, had given the word “nationalism” a connotation of oligarchical venality that honest intellectuals rejected. Unlike their earlier counterparts, who had “built our independence and forged the nationality,” intellectuals since the turn of the century had remained oblivious to local circumstances; they were either indifferent intellectuals with no social commitment or “infantile extremists” who, while managing to break down certain taboos, failed to adapt their radical ideologies to local realities.<sup>46</sup>

In a formulation that owed much to right-wing Nationalist discourse, Larra proclaimed that the “cosmopolitanism,” meaning the cultural effects of massive immigration, “in which the nation—and especially the capital—dissolved at the beginning of this century consummated the conversion of that sentiment of the Argentine, that living unity between man and soil, into an unattainable state of perfection [*entelequia*].” As a result, the “large landowners and demagogues at their service have appropriated ‘nationalism’ and, armed with it like a magic license, will traffic in the future of the fatherland, pawning its possibilities.”<sup>47</sup>

Just as the Unitarists’ ignorance of Argentines’ profound Catholic sentiment had allowed nineteenth-century caudillos to rally popular support by raising the banner of religion, contemporary progressives only furthered their opponents’ cause by remaining aloof from nationalist and, implicitly, Catholic sentiment.<sup>48</sup> No longer could the radical revolutionary and militantly atheist stance, along the lines of that expressed in Portogalo’s *Tumulto*, advance the struggle for leftist ideological hegemony, especially when, as Tulio Halperín Donghi has noted, Communist labor unions increasingly sought episcopal mediation for the resolution of disputes.<sup>49</sup> Instead, Larra urged the assembled intellectuals to reclaim the nationalist notions currently monopolized by the Right, transforming them to meet the needs of the Left’s anti-imperialism and politics.

45. Larra would eventually emerge as something of an official biographer for the Communist Party, writing works on Roberto Arlt, Roberto Payró, and Lisandro de la Torre, among others.

46. Larra, *La Revolución de Mayo*, 6.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, 8.

49. Tulio Halperín Donghi, “The Years of Fake Democracy: Economic Restructuring and Political Disarray (1930–1943),” chapter from work in progress.

We aspire to forge a national consciousness that frees the country from a-national financial capital, because we consider ourselves the custodians of Argentine culture, civilization, and democracy. We are capable of culminating a new cycle of progress and social betterment. In this sense we love the fatherland. Because to love the fatherland means to love the popular masses who form the majority of the nation.<sup>50</sup>

Even though the Left's nationalist project found its guarantor in the emergence of a new social class—the proletariat—with its own interests to defend, what Argentine antifascist, of whatever ideological persuasion or social class, could object to “culture,” “civilization,” “democracy,” love of country, and majority rule?

Larra's call for the elaboration of a leftist nationalism echoed that of the current AIAPE president, physician Emilio Troise. In a previous AIAPE-sponsored presentation, Troise had declared the forging of a “national” leftist discourse essential to the consolidation of a progressive political culture.

To create [a national consciousness], action that is continuous, energetic, and not free of troubles and risks is necessary. But this is the only way of making the country a cultural unit, of annihilating the colonial vestiges that make us inferior.<sup>51</sup>

The reinstatement of functioning national bourgeois-democratic institutions, which had at times appeared in the pronouncements of Aníbal Ponce as only the first step toward inevitable socialist revolution, now became an end in itself. Alongside the more obvious figures of nineteenth-century liberalism who served as unifying symbols of this incipient progressive nationalism, Troise also raised a significantly more controversial national figure, with whom men of science might identify: Florentino Ameghino (“our humble and formidable Ameghino!”), whose assertion that Patagonia was the cradle of humanity scientists had already refuted.<sup>52</sup>

This attempt to form a new leftist political imaginary based on the unifying myths of Argentine nationality was accompanied by a parallel attack on the supposed autochthonous nature of right-wing Nationalist discourse. Besides emphasizing the Nationalists' adherence to much of the ideological foundation of their European counterparts, AIAPE members singled out the German, Italian, and “Moorish” participation in the Franco uprising—

50. Larra, *Revolución de Mayo*, 9.

51. Troise, *Germanos no son arios*, 40.

52. Troise's praise of Ameghino bordered on the sycophantic: “Ameghino—whose investigative genius and love of truth are comparable only to his modesty and serene stoicism . . . —found in the pampean formation, which corresponds to the tertiary period of other geologists, fossil remains that unleashed passionate discussions often unjust for this eminent man, wise as few are.” *Ibid.*, 8.

whose cause the Argentine Nationalists embraced as their own—as clear evidence of what was essentially a perverse right-wing internationalism. By thus “denationalizing” the Nationalists, the Argentine opposition hoped to deflect longstanding, traditional characterizations of the Left as “foreign-inspired” and “antinational” onto the Right, thereby bolstering its own claims to be the genuine representative of the nation and its true interests.

Ironically, some of the more exemplary work toward this end came from German exile Clément Moreau (Carl Meffert). Moreau, a graphic artist, joined the AIAPE immediately on his arrival in Argentina in 1935 and participated, to wide acclaim, in the organization’s first art exhibit.<sup>53</sup> While his primary target was Nazi repression in Germany and fascist aggression in European politics, Moreau also denounced what he perceived as a parallel movement in Argentina. From the pages of newspapers like *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, *Argentina Libre*, *La Vanguardia*, and the hugely influential *Crítica*—which maintained the largest circulation of any Spanish-language daily in the world in the interwar period—his caricatures and engravings juxtaposed Hitler and the symbols of *argentinidad* that formed the touchstones of Nationalist discourse. Through a “curious transformation in Plaza San Martín,” Hitler, giving the fascist salute, sits astride the horse of the Argentine *Libertador*; Hitler, now disguised as a *payador* with a fittingly National Socialist guitar, proclaims, “this way nobody will recognize me”; a gaucho Hitler, bearing a fascist rendering of the Argentine flag and unaware of his *untermensch* status, prepares to celebrate May 25.<sup>54</sup>

Through the concise, highly visible, and easily digestible medium of the political cartoon presented in a daily press of massive circulation, Clément Moreau attempted to denounce the ideologically foreign nature of the self-proclaimed Nationalists while neutralizing their capacity to use representations of “the national” to advance their political objectives.

This “fascist infiltration” of Argentine political life was not confined to the realm of ideology, however. In a series of articles published in *Crítica* in late 1937 and later collected in the volume *Hitler conquista América* (Hitler Conquers America), Communist journalist and AIAPE member Ernesto Giudici denounced the supposed presence of a Nazi “fifth column” in the German communities of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil. Because, for the moment, armed aggression by the “international Nazi bloc” in Europe was not on the agenda, the real threat came from a “fascistizing infiltration” of the Americas carried out by this fifth column and local sympathizers.

53. Michael Nungesser, “Ilustraciones y caricaturas contra la tiranía fascista: el trabajo gráfico de Clément Moreau en la Argentina,” in *Clément Moreau: con el lápiz contra el fascismo*, by Beate Luca Engelbert, Martín Lauga, and Michael Nungesser (Buenos Aires: Instituto Goethe, 1994), n.p.

54. Clément Moreau, *Contra el nazismo y el fascismo: 30 dibujos del año 1938* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1938).

Times have changed. Fascist wars are won by introducing into each country a wedge of treason and intrigue. This wedge is the so-called nationalists who always find official warmth, who grow under official protection and one day will strike. . . . *The "nationalists" represent the antinational sectors par excellence.*<sup>55</sup>

If the Nationalists truly were agents of anti-Argentine foreign aggression, Giudici declared, antifascists could contain them with an Argentine solution: a "strong democracy" opposed to fascism with decision and energy. Something like the strong democracy that Sarmiento demanded."<sup>56</sup>

That the Communists also had obvious international links Giudici conceded. Unlike the dangerous "Brown International" directed from Berlin, which conspired to subjugate the countries in which it operated, however, the Communist International was simply a manifestation of international proletarian solidarity that sought to combat the oppression some countries exercised over others. Communists favored "to the maximum the national development of each country separately and of all countries in the international whole."<sup>57</sup>

This was not a demand for social revolution or an unqualified declaration against foreign capital, but rather a call for support of the "democratic sectors of the national bourgeoisie" and "national economic development, the *economic independence* of the country, and the social and political elevation of the middle sectors and the working class."<sup>58</sup> Such a protopopulist, multi-class alliance, when combined with strengthened diplomatic and economic relations with the United States, would ensure the defeat of local fascists and help to secure Argentine autonomy in relation to the British imperialism that the Left could not afford to ignore.

The AIAPE actually did attempt to forge such alliances, with varying degrees of success. In mid-1938 Emilio Troise solicited the U.S. State Department for funds to turn the organization, with its two prolific publishing houses, Cuadernos de la AIAPE and Ediciones AIAPE, into the "central press bureau" for anti-Nazi activists in Argentina. Because of the "radical tendency [of] many or most of its members," however, the State Department balked at his request.<sup>59</sup>

Other efforts to achieve closer ties with explicitly antifascist organizations did come to fruition. AIAPE vice president Cayetano Córdova Iturburu (a former editor of the 1920s avant-garde literary magazine *Martín Fierro*),

55. Ernesto Giudici, *Hítler conquista América* (Buenos Aires: Acento, 1938), 83. Emphasis added.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, 115.

58. *Ibid.*, 156, 143. Emphasis added. The demand for economic independence would later become a Peronist rallying cry.

59. Newton, *Nazi Menace*, 429, n. 54.

accompanied by Gregorio Bermann and Raúl González Tuñón, traveled to the Second Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers in Valencia, Spain, in June 1937. In addition to promoting international antifascist links, the trip also boosted the AIAPE's antifascist credentials in the large prorepublican movement in Argentina. The umbrella organization Federación de Organismos de Ayuda a la República Española published Córdoba Iturburu's journalistic account of his journey, *España bajo el comando del pueblo* (Spain Under the Command of the People) through its makeshift company Ediciones FOARE. The Comité de Lucha Contra el Racismo y el Antisemitismo (Committee of Struggle Against Racism and Anti-Semitism), established in June 1937, counted among its founders many AIAPE members, as well as prominent opposition politicians, including Progressive Democratic senators Lisandro de la Torre and Julio Noble, Socialists Mario Bravo and Enrique Dickmann, and Radicals Ernesto Sammartino, Ricardo Balbín, and (future presidents of the republic) Arturo Frondizi and Arturo Illia.<sup>60</sup>

The organizational links between the AIAPE and the Comité de Lucha are clear: Emilio Troise held the presidency of both groups.<sup>61</sup> In Rosario, the local sections of both the AIAPE and the Comité shared the same president, the psychologist Simón Neuschlosz, and even operated out of the same offices.<sup>62</sup> So many journalists from the strongly antifascist *Crítica* joined the AIAPE—most notably Edmundo Guibourg, Raúl González Tuñón and his brother, Enrique, and Giudici—that the group's program also gained an informal presence in the popular press, as Giudici's series on the Nazi threat demonstrates.

The AIAPE's success at expanding its network of associations, however, did not imply total agreement over the direction in which the group seemed headed. Liborio Justo ("Quebracho"), the Trotskyist son of President Agustín P. Justo and a former member of the AIAPE Comisión Directiva, denounced the reformist direction of both the PC and the AIAPE as early as October 1936.<sup>63</sup> In late September 1937, however, the newspaper *Avance* made public a letter of reprimand from the Comisión Directiva to the prominent authors César Tiempo and Samuel Eichelbaum for their alleged organization of Jewish support for the official Concordancia presidential candidate, Roberto Ortiz.<sup>64</sup> While claiming not to censure their "ideological

60. "Comité Nacional Contra el Racismo y el Antisemitismo," *Claridad*, Aug. 1937.

61. *Por la Defensa de la Cultura*, July–Aug. 1938.

62. See Simón Neuschlosz, *Racismo y ciencia* (Rosario: Comité Contra el Racismo y el Antisemitismo de la Argentina, Filial Rosario, 1939).

63. Liborio Justo, "Carta abierta a los camaradas comunistas," *Claridad*, Oct.–Nov. 1936. In the letter, Justo defends his assertion in the daily *Crítica* that "the best means to which one can appeal to resolve the problems of culture in the face of Fascism is the use of a machine gun." See also the reply of Communist Rodolfo Puiggrós, "Respuesta a una epístola de Liborio Justo," *Claridad*, Dec. 1936.

64. The poet and playwright Tiempo (*Versos de una puta, Pan criollo*) had served as sec-

evolution,” the letter denounced the candidacy of Ortiz as “contrary to our democratic and liberal principles,” making any AIAPE member’s support of that candidacy a sign of “moral defection.”<sup>65</sup>

César Tiempo responded publicly to Emilio Troise that he had not actually supported the candidacy of Ortiz, but rather had made public his approval of Ortiz’ private expressions of hostility to anti-Semitism—just as the Comité de Lucha Contra el Racismo y el Antisemitismo, headed by the same Dr. Troise, had approved similar declarations of support for now-president Ortiz.<sup>66</sup> Troise, however, responded by echoing Marx’s stance in *On the Jewish Question*—whose recent publication in Argentina Tiempo opposed as untimely.<sup>67</sup> Troise discarded the possibility that the AIAPE might become a forum for identity politics, telling Tiempo, “you prefer to be a Jew rather than a free man.”<sup>68</sup>

Troise characterized Tiempo as a “chauvinist” and a “venal writer.” Tiempo responded with an unrestrained attack on Troise’s character and tenure as AIAPE president. Tiempo declared that Troise had a “grade-school” [*escolar*] writing style, and that he maintained his public life “as secret as the [venereal] diseases that he attends.” The poet even alleged that “if it were in his power,” Troise “would have sent me to a concentration camp.”<sup>69</sup> The polemic between Troise, Tiempo, and Liborio Justo in the pages of the leftist cultural journal *Claridad* ended only when the journal’s editor, Antonio Zamora, voiced his disgust over the malicious tone of the debate and closed the journal to further letters on the subject in January of the following year.

The polemic demonstrates the degree of ideological tension—even confusion—that the AIAPE and PC’s attempt to occupy an ill-defined political center produced, but also the organization’s ability to contain that tension. As the AIAPE proclaimed itself a defender of Argentine liberalism and democracy, the difference between its members and others became less clear; President Roberto Ortiz, for example, could also convincingly espouse a centrist liberalism. As a result, for members like César Tiempo, the reasoning behind the organization’s political line became somewhat opaque. Yet despite the extreme hostility of the exchange between Tiempo and Troise, the controversy passed without leading to a break within the AIAPE.

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retary to the editor of *Claridad*, Antonio Zamora, in the late 1920s, and was currently director of the literary magazine *Columna*. Eichelbaum was best known for his plays *Un guapo del go* and *Un hogar*.

65. Cited in Liborio Justo, “Carta abierta de Liborio Justo al presidente de la AIAPE,” *Claridad*, Oct. 1937.

66. César Tiempo, “Los puntos sobre las jotás,” *Claridad*, Nov. 1937.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Emilio Troise, “La danza de los puntos y de las jotás,” *Claridad*, Jan. 1938.

69. César Tiempo, “Los inmóviles puntos sobre las jotás,” *Claridad*, Dec. 1937.

In late November, the general membership voted, in an apparent bow to Troise, to support the actions of the Comisión Directiva in its original denunciation of Tiempo and Eichelbaum. At the same time, the membership refused to carry the matter further, rejecting any sanctions against the two writers beyond the September letter of reprimand.<sup>70</sup> Even Liborio Justo, who continued to attack Troise personally and Stalinism in the AIAPE and the Left in general, remained a member of the organization.<sup>71</sup> The AIAPE thus proved itself capable of encompassing a broad range of ideological stances—certainly not without tension or even personal bitterness—despite attempts by many of its Communist members to direct its internal politics.

Again, the work of the once uncompromisingly rebellious José Portogalo marks the degree of change the AIAPE had undergone since its inception in July 1935. The publication of his new collection of poems, *Canción para el día sin miedo*, by the group's publishing house Ediciones AIAPE appears not only a contribution to the AIAPE's more conciliatory cultural project but also a personal—though not unambiguous—attempt to counteract the lingering effects of the controversy surrounding *Tumulto*. While still explicitly retaining the author's strong socialist impulse, the politics of this collection are decidedly more universalistic; furthermore, confrontation with the existing social order and its political, moral, and religious representatives is almost entirely absent. Almost self-consciously eschewing any mention of rebellious and revolutionary acts (the tumult of *Tumulto*), Portogalo instead diplomatically places his utopia well into some future “day without fear.”

As a result, notions of class conflict that had “incited to rebellion” in *Tumulto* are washed away without ever surfacing explicitly in the text; Portogalo's utopia is *already* a classless society. At a moment of impending war internationally—*Canción para el día sin miedo* was published only two weeks after the invasion of Poland—and of an increasing need to build and maintain political alliances locally, it is not surprising that utopia as the “revenge of the century” gives way to the significantly less objectionable call to “bury fear.” Portogalo's stated hopes for the future are more a vindication of the rights of the innocent than the demands of the exploited.

We will capture the dream . . .  
 The dream with a hammer  
 and a sickle that looks to the sky,  
 between the shining of a star  
 and a fist that drowns fear.

70. Cayetano Córdova Iturburu to César Tiempo, *Claridad*, Jan. 1938.

71. Liborio Justo, “Respuesta final al Dr. E. Troise y a los compañeros del Partido Socialista Obrero,” *Claridad*, Jan. 1938. In the same open letter, Justo also insinuated that Troise was a secret admirer of Trotsky, in an obvious attempt to discredit him in the PC.

The fear of the weak child!  
The fear of the hungry child!<sup>72</sup>

The poems themselves are both populated by and ostensibly addressed to children—especially young girls, and an adaptation of “Pinochio” forms the centerpiece of the collection. Yet these are not *Tumulto*’s “children with ripped little pants” who smell of tobacco, or girls who “should be possessed”; these are children whose eyes are “so pure, so happy, / as deep and as simple as bread, / like wine and [like] salt, so simple and pure.”<sup>73</sup> Buenos Aires itself—the noisy, cosmopolitan battleground of the Argentine bourgeoisie and the new industrial proletariat in *Tumulto*—also vanishes into a child’s surreal dream world, neither completely rural nor urban and only ambiguously tied to any “real” location. Who could object to the advent of a socialism of happy innocence, brought about not by violent and divisive human action but by the benevolent forces of nature? Even *Tumulto*’s “girl of the people with a red handkerchief on her head” becomes in *Canción para el día sin miedo* the harmless, unsuspected—though still female—harbinger of socialism, Little Red Riding Hood! Portogalo has, in effect, displaced the site of revolutionary action from the urban barricade to the little cottage in the forest.

Portogalo’s transformation, however, is not complete. Elements of the strongly internationalist and anticapitalist (as opposed to peaceably pro-Communist) stance of *Tumulto* continue to manifest themselves in *Canción para el día sin miedo*. References to the national colors of sky-blue and white are entwined with the symbols of international socialism.

And it was a sky-blue dove in sky-blue air.  
And it was a red dove in red air.  
And it was a white dove in white air.  
In the beak of each glowed a star.<sup>74</sup>

Little Red Riding Hood’s messenger brings greetings from “all the comrades of the wind” and intimates that the birth of utopia will not be entirely painless: “On my flanks hang two severe swords / that open two holes so that the future / inserts its two legs.”<sup>75</sup> Significantly, at the one moment when pointed social protest does emerge in the text, it is not only fascist violence against the innocent that Portogalo denounces and insists will be overcome.

That was when the Black children of Africa,  
of Abyssinia and of *Harlem* came, suffering so. And the freckled

72. José Portogalo, *Canción para el día sin miedo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones AIAPE, 1939), 75.

73. *Ibid.*, 7.

74. *Ibid.*, 81.

75. *Ibid.*, 72–73.



redheads of the ghettos of Europe came . . .  
 And a Spanish child and a Chinese child came.  
 They all went about without heads, without hands, destroyed and  
 burning,  
 but alive and also singing.<sup>76</sup>

That a banker plays wolf to Portugal's socialist Little Red Riding Hood emphasizes the point further.<sup>77</sup> If fascism and international, especially U.S., capitalism are no longer explicitly identical, they are at least similar in their effects.

The impact of such ideologically divisive allusions, however, is mitigated by their scant use, and even then by their absence almost until the very end of the text. Because these images appear only in the last two poems of *Canción para el día sin miedo*, it is also conceivable that the author inserted them as the book went to press in the early days of the Nazi invasion of Poland. The beginning of World War II, and the Hitler-Stalin pact that maintained Soviet neutrality in the conflict, had produced yet another shift in the AIAPE strategy. This new position, while alienating many of the organization's overtly pro-Ally sympathizers, would nevertheless open new possibilities for the co-optation of key elements of Nationalist discourse and would attract the participation of previously unreachable sectors of the Argentine political spectrum.

### **Transformation: September 1939–June 1941**

Although the Communist Party and members of the AIAPE had, only months earlier, chided the European liberal democracies for their complacency in the face of obvious Nazi and fascist aggression in Spain, the Third International's commitment to warding off an invasion of the Soviet Union now forced Argentine Communists to take an entirely different stance. The Communists' insistence on maintaining Argentine neutrality in the now global conflict—sustained by assertions of the war's "interimperialist" character and a discursive fascistization of the Allies—meant that non-Communist participation and membership in the AIAPE would once again diminish. Pro-Ally members began to question how far some members' commitment to the Soviet Union had undermined the organization's anti-fascist mission. This awkward situation made the new balance between a tentative leftist nationalism and an institutional internationalism, universal appeals and a commitment to class politics increasingly volatile, until the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union once again required a revision of strategy.

76. *Ibid.*, 81. Emphasis added.

77. *Ibid.*, 73.

Emilio Troise's eulogy for Aníbal Ponce at the inauguration of the AIAPE's new Avenida de Mayo office, on May 11, 1940, exemplifies the shift in the way the organization represented the European situation. Germany still embodied the "negation of thought, the contempt for the human being, and the iron, implacable dictatorship of plutocratic capitalism over the enslaved masses." Now, however, the outbreak of the "imperialist war" had revealed the equally malicious nature of the erstwhile paradigms of liberal democracy.

The France of the Revolution and the England of the so-called individual liberties are today in a situation identical to that of the fascist countries. Neither in France nor in England can one freely express what one thinks, when that thought does not submit itself to the will and the interests of the reactionary classes who govern.<sup>78</sup>

The war itself was not the result of the fascist aggression the *aiapeanos* had long denounced as dangerously imminent, but instead corresponded to the attempts of the "stupid plutocratic dictatorships"—Germany, England, and France—to "save themselves from their inevitable downfall."<sup>79</sup> Faced with a conflict in which both sides were equally dictatorial and morally reprehensible, the only justifiable stance for Argentines to take was that of neutrality.

In rejecting the AIAPE's prewar characterization of the European tensions as one of "democracy versus fascism," Troise also effectively foreclosed the possibility of alliance with those classes that theoretically saw their aspirations embodied in either band. Troise emphasized Ponce's Marxism—and not his rootedness in Argentina's liberal traditions—to assert that the AIAPE founder's true intentions for the organization went beyond the formation of a multiclass alliance for the defense of culture against fascism. Ponce, he maintained, had repeatedly affirmed that human liberation would not be achieved except "through the action of the proletariat and the free intelligentsia fused with it, and with it engendering, in a struggle to the end, the advent of the true man in a Society without classes."<sup>80</sup> The AIAPE, then, presented itself as a forum for the articulation and advancement of a specifically proletarian ideological hegemony, rather than as an institution open to the participation of all antifascists.<sup>81</sup>

78. Emilio Troise, *Aníbal Ponce, la cultura y el humanismo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones AIAPE, 1940), 4.

79. *Ibid.*, 5.

80. *Ibid.*, 44–45.

81. In a conference in Rufino, Santa Fe, AIAPE-Rosario president Simón Neuschlosz made a similar affirmation: "only the working class is called on to save democracy [by] installing a better society," and "the fundamental role of intellectuals is that of helping the working class, contributing, with their knowledge, to opening the way for human liberation." *La Hora* (Buenos Aires), July 4, 1940.

At the same meeting, Cayetano Córdova Iturburu, now secretary of the AIAPE, echoed Troise's declarations. He went on, however, to launch a verbal offensive against those former AIAPE sympathizers who now sided with the Allied cause. He attacked the pro-Ally paper *Argentina Libre*, which counted former AIAPE vice president Alberto Gerchunoff and caricaturist Clément Moreau among its main contributors, ridiculing its claim to be the "mouthpiece of the intellectuals of the Left."<sup>82</sup> This "sudden" activism of liberal intellectuals, Córdova Iturburu declared, was strangely inconsistent with their previous scorn for popular politics and their indifference to the cause of antifascism.

Those writers are worried about the world fate of democracy. And they go out into the street to defend it. At last we see them in the street! The spectacle is edifying. Where have they been until this grave moment?<sup>83</sup>

Where had they been, he continued, when a true democracy, republican Spain, suffered from international fascist aggression? How could they now support the France that had closed its borders with the martyred republic and had refused—in the name of neutrality—to allow decisive munitions shipments to reach the militias? Because the French and British only fought off the German attempt to rob them of the empires that represented their own capacity for plunder, Argentines should stay out of the conflict that marked the final self-destruction of imperialism.

The shift in the way Córdova Iturburu characterized the international politics of the European democracies could not have been more abrupt. Only three years earlier, he had applauded today's "oppressors of Indochina" as the selfless bearers of "civilization" and progress to their West African subjects.<sup>84</sup>

While awkward assertions of the "fascist" nature of England and France served only to justify the antifascist organization's unwillingness to side against Nazi Germany, denunciations of European, and especially British imperialism carried significantly more weight. The crisis unleashed in October 1929 had shattered Argentine illusions of limitless economic growth and endless prosperity by exposing the dependent nature of Argentine capitalism. As the 1930s progressed, the country's dependence on Britain had become more starkly evident. The 1933 Roca-Runciman agreement, which informally integrated Argentina into the British trading bloc on terms popularly perceived as highly unequal, had been followed two years later by

82. Cayetano Córdova Iturburu, "Los intelectuales y la guerra (editorial para el número 3 de la *Revista Oral de la AIAPE*, leída el sábado 11 de mayo 1940)," *Orientación* (Buenos Aires), May 16, 1940.

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Idem*, *España bajo el comando del pueblo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones FOARE, 1938), 21.

the creation of the British-dominated *Corporación de Transportes*, which maintained a transportation monopoly in the capital.

The Justo regime's attempts to overcome the crisis of international capitalism through an even closer association with Britain did not significantly alter the course of Argentine economic development. In effect, though, this was a secondary concern. Popular wisdom increasingly saw Argentina as a semicolonial nation with the added misfortune of dependence on a metropolis now in obvious decline. As a result, issues of economic nationalism, besides boosting the Nationalists' fortunes (at least rhetorically), soon found exponents even in an influential segment of the Radical Party, the *Fuerza de Orientación Radical de la Juventud Argentina* (FORJA).

Specific denunciations of British imperialism were therefore a strategy that would allow the AIAPE to tap into a significant current of nationalist sentiment in hopes of channeling it toward the left. Given the new international and national political context, the Leninist anti-imperialism that the AIAPE had suppressed in hopes of gaining politically centrist members and allies now reappeared in modified form as a means of asserting the Left's legitimacy as a genuinely local political actor.

The series of articles by Ernesto Giudici published in the new Communist Party daily *La Hora* in February and March 1940 reveals the vehemence of the AIAPE's new anti-British stance. Their collective publication in the book *Imperialismo inglés y liberación nacional* (British Imperialism and National Liberation) one month later also belied Giudici's promise, in *Hitler conquista América*, that his next work would deal specifically with Nazi subversion in Argentina.<sup>85</sup> In the previous work, Giudici had addressed the perils of British imperialism but alleged that the primary threat to Argentine sovereignty came from Nazi infiltration. Now, he affirmed, "everything that we said at the time about Nazi penetration we can repeat with respect to English imperialism. England has taken the place of Germany. Germany, for its part, has abandoned Latin America because of the British blockade."<sup>86</sup>

Why had the fundamental enemy changed from Berlin to London?

It is that, apart from both belligerents having placed themselves in the same category with respect to the means of the struggle—*which does not permit one to establish the difference between "democracy" and "fascism"*—the war economy of the Allies has effects as prejudicial for our countries today as were the threats of Nazi-fascist infiltration and aggression yesterday. As prejudicial? No. More prejudicial.<sup>87</sup>

85. Giudici, *Hitler conquista América*, 10.

86. Idem, *Imperialismo inglés y liberación nacional* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984), 51. This edition is unchanged from the original edition of April 1940 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Problemas).

87. Ibid., 59. Emphasis added.

The signing of the Russian-German nonaggression pact and the start of the war had broken the fascist axis and made the “scandalous economic and political pressure of the Allies” more dangerous than the international action of the Nazis. “To say the contrary,” Giudici declared, “is to deny reality; and to remain in what was true yesterday and not today is to remain behind in changing circumstances [*a la zaga de los acontecimientos*].”<sup>88</sup>

The publication of *Imperialismo inglés y liberación nacional*, however, signaled more than just a deepening of the Left’s attempts to occupy the discursive terrain delineated by the Right; it was also a bow in the direction of a political sector that the *aiapeanos* had previously vowed to combat. Indeed, Giudici’s book is a conscious attempt at dialogue with the works of Nationalist ideologues Rodolfo and Julio Irazusta (*La Argentina y el imperio británico: los eslabones de una cadena*, 1934), and FORJA spokesman Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz (*Historia de los ferrocarriles argentinos*, 1940); Giudici’s assertion notwithstanding that the majority of anti-British groups inspired by those works remained “amorphous conglomerations of confused ideologies or active centers of fascist propaganda” in spite of their “good intentions.”<sup>89</sup>

The result, at least for Giudici, was a reevaluation of the now undeniable popular appeal of fascism and the Nationalist movement: “One must see and appreciate that, many times, behind that fascist ideology beats an aspiration of the masses, which, *for being of the masses, it is of little importance that it is fascist or not.*” Instead of struggling against local fascist sympathizers—the very *raison d’être* of the AIAPE and the Popular Front—the Left should reach out to them, giving the anti-imperialist and antioligarchic elements of that movement the “necessary political rectification.”<sup>90</sup>

Unlike Troise and Córdova Iturburu, however, Giudici did not imply “political rectification” as a rebirth of the class-against-class strategy. Instead, Giudici called again for alliance with the national bourgeoisie in an anti-imperialist movement of “national liberation” that would achieve Argentine economic independence *within* the capitalist world system. Through active state guidance of foreign and especially U.S. investment, Argentina could industrialize further, making the “revolutionary pass” that would put it “at the progressive rhythm of those more advanced countries.”<sup>91</sup> Argentina therefore must remain neutral in the European conflict to prevent the subjugation of this program of economic autonomy to the demands of the Allies’ war economies.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, 27, 33. Scalabrini Ortiz was also the author of the celebrated 1931 study *El hombre que está solo y espera* and the main intellectual force behind the Radical Party’s nationalist *corriente interna*.

90. *Ibid.*, 29. Emphasis added.

91. *Ibid.*, 30.

The promotion of such a protopopulist program of national capitalist modernization, under the auspices of the local bourgeoisie allied with the proletariat—and the necessary appeals to bourgeois conceptions of “progress” and “national development” that sustained it—rested uneasily next to the Communists’ self-identification with revolutionary socialism. Still, Giudici denied that his proposal contradicted the imperatives of Communism or implied that the party might cease to be a revolutionary organization.

To struggle against imperialism together with the national bourgeoisie does not mean that the class struggle has been postponed or that the class struggle has been denied. . . . To be Communists and struggling for Communism [is to be], exactly, sincere defenders of bourgeois democracy.<sup>92</sup>

Any possible tension between the maintenance of an international perspective and a nationalist program, between the conciliatory discourse of class alliance and the exigencies of class politics, found its resolution in the assertion that socialism simply was not next on Argentina’s historical agenda.

The strong anti-British stance of the now militantly neutral AIAPE did, as Giudici had hoped, open the possibility for contacts with sectors previously deemed unreachable. In late August 1940, Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz addressed the AIAPE on the topic “Exchange, Salaries, and Credit: Instruments for Shackling Argentina.” The FORJA’s strictly “national” perspective had previously proved anathema to the internationalist commitments of the *aiapeanos*; FORJA members had even abstained from all debate on the Spanish civil war, maintaining that it was unrelated to truly national problems.<sup>93</sup> Scalabrini Ortiz, however, with his oddly Leninist-inspired view of British imperialism in Argentina, had greatly influenced AIAPE members’ own attempts to engage national political issues.<sup>94</sup> In an article of nearly the same title published shortly after his lecture, Scalabrini Ortiz took the possibilities for the rupture of British imperialism in the new circumstances to their logical conclusion.

Simpler souls will reason in this manner: you attack England and therefore you play up [*hace el juego*] to Germany. That is, effectively, true. But it is no less true that Germany is playing up to us, if we know how to take advantage of it. If a bomb fell right on the head of every one of the directors of the so-called Argentine railroads, the bus drivers and

92. *Ibid.*, 43.

93. Miguel Angel Scenna, *FORJA: una aventura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Belgrano, 1983), 203.

94. Larra, *Etcétera*, 130.

the truck drivers would be a bit surer of being able to continue to win their bread honorably.<sup>95</sup>

It is unclear whether Scalabrini Ortiz actually uttered such extreme anti-British views in his AIAPE lecture, but such pronouncements would not have been out of character for the outspoken writer. It is also uncertain how the *aiapeanos* and their sympathizers received such a German-friendly message. The AIAPE's formal invitation to Scalabrini Ortiz to address the organization, in any case, does demonstrate the group's opening to a brand of nationalism unimaginable only one year earlier. The FORJA spokesman's acceptance of that invitation also provided the AIAPE with legitimation from an increasingly influential political force that previously would have rejected the organization's international connections and internationalist perspective.

Overtures to nationalistic groups like the FORJA did not, however, signal an embrace of what Ponce would have termed the legacy of "Rosista despotism" at the expense of the historically based liberal unifying myths that the AIAPE had cultivated since its inception. Instead, many *aiapeanos* attempted to articulate a discourse that would reconcile nineteenth-century Argentine liberalism, orthodox Marxism, a virulently anti-British nationalism, and the exigencies of an internationalist perspective amid the destruction of the first years of World War II. The historian Rodolfo Puiggrós provided a historical materialist answer to the historical revisionist movement spearheaded by Julio Irazusta and Scalabrini Ortiz. His work contributed greatly to the relative coherence achieved by this new shift in AIAPE discourse.<sup>96</sup>

While Puiggrós continued the AIAPE's previous efforts to boost its local political legitimacy by rooting contemporary progressive intellectual currents in the national past, he also sought to root current strategy in the past. In his lecture at AIAPE headquarters for the 1940 commemoration of the May Revolution, Puiggrós echoed Raúl Larra's exhortation for the elaboration of a leftist discourse that would avoid the "intellectual colonialism" traditionally exercised by Europe. "We will not struggle . . . effectively against the foreign imperialism that oppresses our nation," Puiggrós maintained, "until we base ourselves on and identify ourselves with national forces, national factors, national history."<sup>97</sup>

The AIAPE's status as the most advanced manifestation of the progres-

95. Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, "Cambios, salarios y créditos (1941). La política de cambios, salarios y créditos instrumenta el coloniaje Argentino," in *Yrigoyen y Perón* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1972), 43. Scalabrini Ortiz' reference to "so-called Argentine railroads" was an acknowledgment that they were actually British owned.

96. The AIAPE sponsored a course given by Puiggrós, which formed the basis of his book, *De la colonia a la revolución* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones AIAPE, 1940). See also *Orientación*, May 23, 1940.

97. Rodolfo Puiggrós, *A ciento treinta años de la Revolución de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones AIAPE, 1940), 8.

sive, democratic tendency vying for hegemony since Argentine independence implied that the group must necessarily draw from the Argentine past to inform current tactics, Puiggrós declared. The leaders of the May Revolution had never lost close contact with the “oppressed national forces” and had avoided “international complications” (such as European wars) that might have caused them to veer off course.<sup>98</sup> The revolutionaries, furthermore, maintained a clear sense of the gravity of forming and sustaining alliances. Knowing that imperialism was the enemy of “the whole of the Nation; of the agriculturists, of the industrialists, of the small producers, of the workers,” the interest in overcoming it was universal. Thus, while Puiggrós asserted, like Troise and Córdova Iturburu, that only the proletariat could lead the anti-imperialist struggle, history seemed to reject the possibility that the proletariat alone might accomplish the task; a multiclass movement of national liberation was necessary, desirable, and possible.

An equally important lesson that the AIAPE must draw from the past—and here Puiggrós diverged emphatically even from Scalabrini Ortiz’ democratically oriented historical revisionism—pertained to the form Argentine anti-imperialism should take. The results of the Rosas dictatorship, contrary to Nationalist assertions, militated against any attempts to return to an a-tarctic Argentina. The Nationalist Right, Puiggrós asserted, believed “that the best way of defending national independence is by cutting all links that unite us with the rest of the world, when in reality, that is the best way of maintaining backwardness; that is, the material conditions that make foreign imperialist penetration possible.”<sup>99</sup>

By closing Argentina to the outside world, Rosas had simply delayed the country’s inevitable incorporation into the capitalist world system, but with a devastating consequence: instead of achieving that incorporation at a time when foreign investment might modernize local social relations of production, as it had done in the United States, a weakened Argentina became fully integrated into the capitalist system only after capitalism had entered its imperialist phase.

That the integration finally came about under the guidance of the liberal figures now firmly placed in the AIAPE’s pantheon of national heroes in no way tarnished their legacy, Puiggrós averred. On the contrary: the Unitarist victory over Rosas at the Battle of Caseros had ended Argentina’s economic weakening in relation to a dynamic European capitalism, whereas a Unitarist defeat would have resulted in continued isolation and, eventually, outright territorial colonization by England and France, as had happened in Asia and Africa.<sup>100</sup>

The imperialist nature of capitalism in the second half of the nineteenth

98. *Ibid.*, 20.

99. *Idem*, *La herencia que Rosas dejó al país* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Problemas, 1940), 84.

100. *Ibid.*, 45.



century, along with the feudal legacy of the Rosas era, however, continued to impede the necessary social transformation that the opposition to the dictator had envisioned.

They wanted a capitalist Argentina, great, prosperous, and strong. *Las bases* of Alberdi constituted their doctrine. The practical action of Sarmiento their politics. Nevertheless, Argentina still has not given of itself all the forces necessary so that that transformation might be fully realized.<sup>101</sup>

Socialism was not and never had been in Argentina's historical plan, Puiggrós argued. Instead, the heirs of Alberdi and Sarmiento—the intellectuals of the AIAPE—should support the democratic aspirations of the national bourgeoisie that remained unfulfilled under the hindrance of British imperialism. Like Giudici, Puiggrós promoted a protopopulist program of national capitalist modernization that would ensure economic independence without making the potentially devastating mistake of forsaking Argentina's links with the outside world.

If the more moderate, universalist appeals of Giudici and Puiggrós held sway over the exhortations to class politics of Troise, Neuschlosz, and Córdoba Iturburu, the problem of neutrality hurt the AIAPE's credibility among non-Communists nonetheless, by shifting emphasis away from the group's antifascism. Only days before the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union would again change the organization's stance, the Montevideo branch of the AIAPE broke off relations with the antifascist group *El Ateneo*, with which it had shared offices, because of that group's outspoken support for the Allies.<sup>102</sup>

The AIAPE maintained a high level of activity during this period nevertheless. Its cultural offerings included an ongoing painting and sculpture workshop under the direction of Cecilia Marcovich, a puppet theater by Enrique Wernique, and lectures on topics as diverse as jazz, provincial politics, and Uruguayan painting. While specific figures are unavailable, attendance at the lectures and classes frequently seems to have exceeded the organizers' expectations.<sup>103</sup> On May Day 1941, the organization's new monthly journal, *Nueva Gaceta*, replaced the long defunct *Unidad* as the forum for AIAPE members' essays, poetry, stories, and graphic art.

The AIAPE, however, did not become an exclusively Communist organization in the nearly two years that its obvious pro-Soviet stance overshadowed its avowed antifascism. In addition to lectures by Scalabrini Ortiz and the ambassador of the Spanish Republic in exile, Angel Ossorio y Gallardo, the young Radical Arturo Frondizi also maintained his link with the AIAPE, while novelist Roberto Arlt contributed to the first issue of *Nueva*

101. *Ibid.*, 88.

102. *Orientación*, June 19, 1941.

103. *Ibid.*, Sept. 28, 1939, Nov. 2, 1939, July 16, 1940, Jan. 9, 1941.

*Gaceta* an essay on the Chilean aristocracy.<sup>104</sup> The rapid rightward drift of national politics with Ramón Castillo's assumption of the presidency of the republic in late 1940—to the dismay of the Radical Party—only boosted the pressure inside and outside the PC to resurrect the opposition coalition. Finally, Nazi Germany, by invading the Soviet Union in June 1941, placed the “country of socialism” firmly in the Allied camp, removing the last doctrinal impediments to the resurgence of the AIAPE as an all-inclusive, militantly antifascist organization.

### Reconsolidation: June 1941–June 1943

The Soviet Union's forced involvement in the war against Germany placed the AIAPE in a position similar to its stance of the prewar years. Now, however, the nationalist elements of its members' discourse, strengthened during the period of neutrality, were firmly entrenched, while Nazi aggression once again became the primary target of the group's organizing activities. Domestic events also seemed to echo the years of the Spanish civil war. The democratic opening under President Roberto Ortiz was now in full reversal under the new president, Castillo, and it culminated in the latter's declaration of a state of siege in mid-December 1941. As a result, by the end of that year, even members of the governing Concordancia coalition began to move over to the opposition, shattering what little liberal legitimacy the Castillo administration might have preserved and leaving it as the obvious “tool of the reactionaries from the far interior.”<sup>105</sup>

Police harassment of the AIAPE now spread to more unequivocally centrist institutions, such as the Comité de Lucha Contra el Racismo y el Antisemitismo, Acción Argentina, and the Sociedad Argentina de Escritores (SADE).<sup>106</sup> The well-founded Radical, Socialist, and independent fears of growing reaction in Argentina, combined with reports of the impressive Soviet effort in combating the German invasion, once again gave the AIAPE the legitimacy it needed to maintain an ideologically inclusive antifascist intellectual front.

Indeed, the renewed acceptance of the AIAPE intellectuals as legitimate antifascists appeared almost immediate. Natalio Botana, the politically powerful owner of the hugely popular daily *Crítica*, called Ernesto Giudici back to the paper to write a special editorial on the Nazi invasion.<sup>107</sup> Gregorio Bermann addressed the population of the capital via Radio Mitre, run by

104. *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1940, Nov. 28, 1940; Larra, *Etcétera*.

105. David Rock, *Argentina, 1516–1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín*, rev. and expanded ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987), 245.

106. *Nueva Gaceta* (Buenos Aires), Dec. 1941.

107. Ernesto Giudici, “Natalio Botana: el hombre, el político, el periodista,” *Orientación*, Aug. 14, 1941.

the oligarchical newspaper *La Nación*.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, both the Communist journalist, Giudici, and the Socialist doctor, Bermann, placed the new global situation immediately in class terms. Giudici titled his *Crítica* editorial “The Proletariat Enters the War,” which, while ending claims of the war’s inter-imperialist character, also fundamentally differentiated the presumed means and ends of the Soviet war effort from those of England and France.<sup>109</sup>

Bermann also emphasized the class nature of the struggle against fascism, arguing that “regardless of the party that they might militate in, the sympathy for fascism is accentuated among the large property owners and businessmen, among the privileged employees and professionals.”<sup>110</sup> Because fascism was a “class attitude,” the automatic suspicion that would fall on the assumedly middle-class constituencies of the Socialists and Radicals—not to mention disgruntled *Concordancia* liberals—warned against the possibility of effectively forming a local coalition of classes opposed to the fascist advance. If the Nazi invasion had placed the Soviet Union in the Allied camp, it was not immediately apparent that the AIAPE intellectuals would follow suit.

Still, pronouncements like Giudici’s and Bermann’s, by revealing the continuing presence of tensions between the class politics of many AIAPE members and the organization’s stated universalist agenda, delayed the full reemergence of the organization as a “respectable” antifascist institution. *Acción Argentina*, a pro-Ally organization that counted most of Argentina’s major opposition politicians among its ranks, revoked the membership of Bermann and Deodoro Roca, an AIAPE associate, lawyer, and author, in October 1941.<sup>111</sup> No member of *Acción Argentina*, they were informed, could simultaneously belong to the AIAPE, an organization of “clear Communist style.”<sup>112</sup> To reestablish the broad intellectual coalition the AIAPE had achieved in the years of the Spanish civil war, therefore, universal appeals must once again take precedence over class politics, and a new formulation of the anti-British nationalism of the first years of the European conflict must follow the now radically changed international situation.

In his address to the Tenth National Congress of the Communist Party in November 1941, Ernesto Giudici articulated the revised party outlook, which, while not directly binding on the AIAPE, did affect the Commu-

108. Bermann, *Conciencia de nuestro tiempo*, 74.

109. Giudici, “Natalio Botana.”

110. Gregorio Bermann, “Para combatir al pardo-fascismo hay que empezar por comprenderlo,” in *Conciencia de nuestro tiempo*, 72.

111. Roca directed the periodical *Flecha* (1935–36) and the magazine *Las Comunas* (1934–40). Defeated as the *Alianza Civil* candidate for intendente of Córdoba in 1931, Roca served in various activist groups; his effort to create a local branch of the AIAPE in Córdoba failed. See Deodoro Roca, *El difícil tiempo nuevo* (Buenos Aires: Lautaro, 1956), esp. Gregorio Bermann’s introductory comments, 9–19.

112. See “Polémica con *Acción Argentina*,” in *ibid.*, 334–45.

nists, who remained the organization's most dynamic element. England, now allied with the Soviet Union, was no longer fascistic, Giudici declared; instead, it was solidly within the front of the "democratic and free countries of the world," which struggled to save "Civilization" from the Axis.<sup>113</sup> Argentina itself should enter the conflict, in keeping with the national tradition of liberty, of which the Communists formed an integral part.

It is in maintaining that traditional line of our democratic liberalism that today we want to see Argentina on the side of the Soviet Union, of Great Britain, of the United States, of China, [which,] in defending their liberties and their right to exist as independent nations, also defend our liberties and national sovereignty.<sup>114</sup>

With the Nazi menace once again overshadowing any remnants of British imperialism, the defense of the universal values of "democracy," "freedom," "liberty," and "civilization"—both locally and internationally—demanded the formation of a multiclass, pan-ideological antifascist alliance.

The "redemocratization" of England and France and the call for active support of the Allies, while resolving the tension between anti-imperialism and antifascism, raised problems for the continued development of a coherent and convincing leftist nationalism. Deprived of the powerful and persuasive anti-British element of that discourse by the exigencies of solidarity with the Allied cause, Giudici instead turned to the role played by the European Communists in the war effort.

Communists defend their country even with their lives, and he who doubts it should look at the world stage for proof! Look at the Soviet lands! Look at the Yugoslavs, French, Norwegians, and so many others who defy Nazi tyranny in defense of their subjugated and humiliated fatherlands!<sup>115</sup>

Thus, although the war lost its class character—Red Army soldiers and Resistance fighters struggled not for socialism but for love of country—the party's national and nationalist credentials became awkwardly entwined with the international; or, as Giudici remarked, "universal[ist] or internationalist ideologies are, in every country, the most evolved expression of the true nationalism."<sup>116</sup> Internationalism, in effect, had become the highest stage of nationalism.

While Giudici's universalist appeals for antifascist unity remained in-

113. Ernesto Giudici, *Los comunistas en defensa de la legalidad democrática* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Comité Central del Partido Comunista), 57. Giudici does not mention that the British government continued to suppress the British Communist Party newspaper, *Daily Worker*.

114. Giudici, *Comunistas en defensa*, 58.

115. *Ibid.*, 57.

116. *Ibid.*, 62.

scribed within a rapidly changing and at times contradictory Communist discourse, this was not the case for all AIAPE members. From the pages of the AIAPE journal *Nueva Gaceta*, the young leader of the left wing of the Radical Party, Arturo Frondizi, made similar appeals. For Frondizi, the current ideological crisis was simply a struggle between political democracy and totalitarianism, rather than a particular phase of the class struggle that required the formation of interclass alliances. Legitimizing Communist participation in the political life of the nation, Frondizi divorced the question of individual liberties from “the existence of a determined economic system,” and instead posited that the Right threatened something much more basic than the property relations the Communists ultimately sought to undo.

If the concept of property is restricted or disappears, if the right to become rich has limits, if we cannot freely manage our own possessions, if, finally, the development of our activity in the material realm is limited, these are all matters that we might consider grave, according to the conceptions of each individual. But what concerns us is something more important than all of that: preparing ourselves to stop the advance of restrictions in the field of the essential freedoms of man.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, unlike most of his fellow Radicals, Frondizi simply did not consider property rights “essential.” Instead, the rights of free expression, religious belief and practice, and free suffrage—all immediately threatened by the Castillo regime—remained absolutely indispensable for the development of the “human personality.”

For Frondizi, however, safeguarding these rights in Argentina did not require a movement of national liberation, formed by the proletariat in alliance with the national bourgeoisie, that would redefine the nation’s position in the capitalist world system. Instead, the mechanism that guaranteed these rights already existed: the Constitution of 1853. The current quagmire in which Argentines found themselves was the result of the presence of “enemy functionaries” in state institutions, who sought to use their positions of power for personal gain. The solution, Frondizi argued, was to mobilize the Argentine people through those traditional institutions of civil society—political parties, the press, faculty posts, even the street—that might back the democratizing efforts of any “good functionaries” who still existed.

That such a mobilization might include traditional liberals as well as Communists is implicit in Frondizi’s particular, though not uncommon, formulation of liberalism. He posited that only the “spiritual” rights of the individual were fundamental. In addition, he asserted that “within the play” of the principles of the Constitution of 1853, “the solution of the essential

117. Arturo Frondizi, “Como se lucha contra la democracia desde la función pública,” *Nueva Gaceta*, Dec. 1941.

problems of the country is possible.” This formulation made it possible to reconcile the Communist stance on property relations with liberal conceptions of constitutional rule. Furthermore, by vaguely defining democracy as simply the “ideal regime of human conviviality,” Frondizi blessed as true democrats all those who sought the full implementation of the 1853 Constitution, regardless of their ultimate intentions for social revolution.<sup>118</sup>

The unifying effects of the kind of liberal discourse Frondizi elaborated were bolstered by the Soviet war effort against Nazi Germany. Not only did the means of struggle of Argentine antifascists converge after the Communists abandoned neutrality, but the alliance of the liberal democracies of Europe and North America with the Soviet Union naturally assuaged local fears of alliance with the Communists. Indeed, the new Communist stance, as articulated by Giudici, effectively negated any appearance of ideological conflict between the PC and other opposition forces, while a broadening of state political repression strengthened their common interests. Continued Communist hegemony within the AIAPE thus became progressively less of an issue to non-Communist associates. Even Acción Argentina, itself now besieged by the police, changed its stance to implicit alliance with the AIAPE.<sup>119</sup>

In November 1942, an AIAPE exposition-benefit in homage to the Red Army's stand at Stalingrad drew contributions not only from the Left intelligentsia but also from politically centrist figures, such as the painter Norah Borges de Torre (sister of Jorge Luis Borges) and the writers Alberto Gerchunoff, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (author of the 1933 classic social critique *Radiografía de la pampa*), and Roberto Giusti, despite greatly increased police harassment of this group as well.<sup>120</sup> With “an act destined to pay homage to the liberal spirit of Combatant France,” the AIAPE hosted a talk by a former cultural attaché of the French embassy, R. Weibal-Richard, in May of the following year.<sup>121</sup> Historian Emilio Ravignani, head of the University of Buenos Aires Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Radical Party deputy in Congress, and one of the founding members of Acción Argentina, took the podium of the “Communist” AIAPE in 1943 to give a lecture in commemoration of the May Revolution.<sup>122</sup> The following day, a ceremony

118. Ibid.

119. On October 15, 1942, the secretary general of Acción Argentina, Alejandro Ceballos, addressed a gathering held in homage to Emilio Troise. At Troise's table with Ceballos were the Spanish republican ambassador, Angel Ossorio y Gallardo; the current AIAPE president, Gregorio Bermann; Roberto Giusti; the exiled Spanish poet Rafael Alberti; Judge Horacio Dobranich; and national deputies Julio González Irmain and Camilo Stanchina. *Nueva Gaceta*, Nov. 1942.

120. *Orientación*, Nov. 19, 1942.

121. Ibid., May 6, 1943.

122. Alberto Ciria, *Partidos y poder en la Argentina moderna (1930–1946)* (Buenos Aires: Hyspamérica Ediciones Argentina, 1986), 93; *Orientación*, May 6, 1943.

to mark the fifth anniversary of the death of AIAPE founder Aníbal Ponce attracted the formal support of SADE, the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, and Giusti's journal *Nosotros*.<sup>123</sup> The AIAPE seemed to be coming closer than ever to embodying its self-proclaimed ideal of an ideologically inclusive association of all antifascist intellectuals.

Another abrupt change in the political landscape, however, this time locally determined, would finally terminate the rejuvenated AIAPE's efforts "to defend culture." The military coup of June 1943, which took place less than two weeks after the fifth-anniversary memorial to Ponce, only confirmed that the rising influence of the Right threatened what did remain of Argentina's democratic institutions, and the freedom of political and cultural expression that those institutions had purportedly guaranteed. The quasi-fascist conspiracy of which the antifascists had long warned had finally succeeded.

## Epilogue

The depth of the new regime's reactionary character remained obscure in the first weeks following the coup. After all, the military had only just deposed an administration whose rightist tendencies were notorious, and General Pedro Ramírez, of rumored Radical sympathies, had promised to guarantee the elections scheduled for later that year.<sup>124</sup> The AIAPE's June 15th declaration on the coup therefore sought to bolster what members perceived as the democratic potential of the military movement: to close definitively the period of illegitimate rule opened 13 years earlier and to join the global conflict as a liberal democracy.

The AIAPE understands . . . that the people, so often invoked, cannot be absent from the process of national reconstruction. For, as the "source of all sovereignty," they have a fundamental mission in the labor of channeling the Nation in the constitutional forms mocked, falsified, or insulted by an oligarchy of suspicious Nazi tendencies [*de sospechosa vecindad nazista*]. We understand by this that the effective struggle against the deposed oligarchy can only be conducted to valid ends if the full force of the Constitution is obtained and if the country . . . faithfully fulfills the obligations contracted with the other countries of America. . . . Faced with the new circumstances through which the country must navigate, [the AIAPE] reaffirms the slogan that defines its reason for being: defense of culture in liberty.<sup>125</sup>

123. *Orientación*, May 20, 1943.

124. Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, 248.

125. Cited in Larra, *Etcétera*, 27-28.

This final pronouncement of the AIAPE, with its appeals to the universal notions of the nation, democracy, liberty, and constitutional legality and its denunciations of an amorphous oligarchy, might just as easily have come from the centrist Unión Cívica Radical. In its desire to form a united front for the renewal of constitutional democracy, the organization had long left behind the confrontational, class-based discourse that had been a significant current in the AIAPE since its inception.

The democratic course that the *aiapeanos* hoped the leaders of the June coup might chart, however, vanished almost immediately. Only a week after the AIAPE declared its support for a return to the implementation of the Constitution of 1853, the federal police invaded the organization's headquarters and effectively disbanded the group.<sup>126</sup> Among those imprisoned and held incommunicado in the course of the new regime's repression of the opposition was the AIAPE's final president, the Socialist Gregorio Bermann.<sup>127</sup> Meetings at the home of *Nueva Gaceta* co-editor Arturo Sánchez Riva to reorganize the AIAPE as a vehicle for dissidence failed in the face of continuous police harassment. The Ramírez regime, unwilling even to allow the use of the Buenos Aires underworld dialect *lunfardo* on the radio, would certainly not allow the resurgence of a politico-cultural institution formed for the purpose of combating fascism.<sup>128</sup>

In its eight-year struggle for ideological hegemony, nevertheless, the AIAPE had helped to lay the foundation for opposition to the new regime. That movement would eventually culminate in the formation of the Unión Democrática coalition that opposed Juan Perón's 1946 presidential candidacy. The AIAPE, of course, was far from the only factor in the creation of the new alliance. Shifting political coalitions characterized the Infamous Decade, from the Socialist and Progressive Democratic Party Alianza Civil of 1931 to the Concordancia itself; pressure from the United States for a united anti-Peronist opposition was notorious. Even as the political Popular Front foundered over the course of the 1930s, however, the AIAPE continued to act as a forum for significant contact between different political sectors. More important, the group contributed decisively to the creation of a new political imaginary, in which the Unión Democrática's alliance of Communists, Socialists, Radicals, and Conservatives became not only conceivable, but even acceptable to both the Right and the Left.

In a similar way, the AIAPE attempted to articulate a leftist nationalism that would overcome Argentina's economic dependence through a program of capitalist modernization based on a strong state, radical income redis-

126. Ibid.

127. Bermann, *Conciencia de nuestro tiempo*, 249.

128. Larra, *Mundo de escritores*, 95, *Etcétera*, 15.



tribution, and a political alliance of the national bourgeoisie with the local proletariat. Ironically, the elaboration of this discourse—especially in the work of Rodolfo Puiggrós and in Ernesto Giudici’s demand for national “economic independence”—also contributed to, and reinforced, the general climate of ideas from which Peronism would emerge.<sup>129</sup>

Perón, however, with the state’s power and patronage apparatus already behind him, could actually enact the sweeping national capitalist reforms that assured him working-class and “national bourgeois” support. Confronted with a movement whose ability to reconcile conflicting political actors and absorb contradictory ideological currents outstripped its own, the Argentine Left quickly found itself deprived of the previously unthinkable degree of political legitimacy it had finally achieved; the Communists, it would seem, had at last successfully gained acceptance among the very political forces that Peronism was about to sweep away.

129. Perhaps not surprisingly, several AIAPE members also joined the ranks of Peronism, including Puiggrós, Elías Castelnuovo, Ramón Doll, Nicolás Olivari, and César Tiempo. See Mariano Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: propaganda, rituales políticos y educación en el régimen peronista (1946–1955)* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1994), 69.