



## Under German Eyes: Germán Avé-Lallemant and the Origins of Marxism in Argentina

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*ABSTRACT:* During the late 1880s and early 1890s, German socialist immigrants grouped around a club called *Vorwärts* played a key role in the consolidation of the first socialist groups in Argentina. In the context of a deep economic and political crisis, Germán Avé-Lallemant (1835–1910) — a mining engineer and land surveyor born in Lübeck, who later served as the Argentine correspondent of *Die Neue Zeit*, the theoretical journal of German Social Democracy edited by Karl Kautsky — became the main personality of Argentine socialism before the appearance of Juan B. Justo's *La Vanguardia* in 1894. Distancing themselves from Lassalle and embracing a Marxist ideology more closely aligned with the political line of the SPD, the first Argentine socialist groups also sketched, under Lallemant's direction, an analysis of Argentine history stressing its backwardness and arguing that capitalism would play a progressive historical role in the immediate future — an analysis explaining their originally sympathetic attitude towards the new Radical Party. Lallemant's previously unresearched German writings, set against the background of contemporary political currents in Argentina and the Second International, shed new light on his role in the origins of Argentine socialism.

**M**ARXIST ACTIVISTS AND HISTORIANS in Argentina have long been embarrassed by the fact that the local Socialist Party, founded in 1896, was born reformist, leaving the armed struggle against the oligarchic regime that ruled the country in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the hands of either the anarchists or the main bourgeois opposition party, the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR). This legalistic and parliamentary bias has been largely attributed to the policy of the Party's historic leader, Juan Bautista Justo

(1865–1928), a physician drawn to socialism by his identification with the sufferings of the poor but intellectually closer to revisionism than to the “orthodox” currents in world socialism. But the importance of Juan B. Justo as the historical leader and founder of the Socialist Party should not obscure the fact that in the early years of Argentine socialism the key figures were a group of German militants led by the mining engineer and land surveyor Germán (Hermann) Avé-Lallemant (1835–1910), who also served as the Argentine correspondent of *Die Neue Zeit*, the SPD theoretical journal edited by Karl Kautsky.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from a brief reference in the “official” history of the Socialist Party (Oddone, 1934), Lallemant’s political and theoretical activity remained largely unnoticed until the 1960s, when he became a topic of discussion between the Moscow-inspired Communist Party and splitting Maoist groups. Maoist historian José Ratzer, criticizing what he regarded as a reformist line originating in Juan B. Justo and adopted by the Communist Party, regarded Lallemant as the main theoretician of an “orthodox” and revolutionary Marxism that gained momentum during the first years of the 1890s and then lost its place to the reformism of the Socialist Party leaders (Ratzer, 1969). Five years later, Communist Party historian Leonardo Paso answered Ratzer’s arguments with a poorly edited anthology of Lallemant’s writings (which included, however, Spanish versions of all his reports to *Die Neue Zeit*). Paso claimed that Lallemant belonged to a “revolutionary” tradition opposed to Justo’s reformism — arguing, however, that it had been reclaimed by the CP (Paso, 1974). Those books were poor history in that they tried to find in Lallemant an “orthodox” Marxist inheritance instead of contextualizing his work. More recently, this claim has been contested by both amateur historians belonging to revolutionary organizations, such as Hernán Díaz (1997), and by professional historian Horacio Tarcus in his book *Marx en la Argentina* (2007b). The discovery of a microfilmed edition of *Vorwärts*, a socialist newspaper published in Buenos Aires from 1886 to 1901, and the recent publication of an anthology of *Vorwärts* articles (Zeller, *et al.*, 2008), shed new light on the activity of the German socialists in Argentina and their role in the origins of the local workers’ movement. In this article we will focus on Lallemant’s previously unresearched German writings, setting them against the background of contemporary

1 SPD: *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland*: Social Democratic Party of Germany.

political currents in Argentina and the Second International and assessing his role in the origins of Argentina's socialism.

*Germán Avé-Lallemant and the German Origins of Argentine Socialism*

Even though Argentina won its political independence from Spain in 1816, the country underwent several decades of political crisis, recurrent civil wars, and economic stagnation immediately after independence. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that political unity was achieved, drawing in a growing amount of mainly British foreign investments. The strengthening of the national government made possible the military conquest of Indian Territory in the Patagonia region and the building of a national railway system, centered on the city of Buenos Aires. This, in turn, created the conditions for massive European immigration, which began to arrive in the last quarter of the 19th century. According to the national census of 1895, Argentina had a population of approximately four million people, more than 660,000 of whom lived in the capital city of Buenos Aires. The country had 1,104,500 immigrants, amounting to 25.4% of the population. Although the number of German immigrants was relatively small (17,143, or 1.7% of the immigrants and less than 0.5% of the total population), this group was to play a key role in the development of the workers' movement during the last two decades of the 19th century.

Though Marxism was first introduced in Argentina in the 1870s by French *communards*, it only sank roots in the 1880s thanks to the efforts of the German immigrant community, which then included between 100 and 150 political exiles from Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws. The main personality during this period was Germán Avé-Lallemant, who emigrated from Germany at the age of 25 and, after a trip in Europe and Brazil, arrived in Buenos Aires in 1868. Once in Argentina, Lallemant worked as a geologist, geographer, engineer, land surveyor, professor and statistician. After a short stay in Buenos Aires, he settled for two years in the province of Mendoza, where he carried out exploratory work in mines and analyzed oil samples. In 1870 he moved to the remote province of San Luis, on the Argentine-Chilean border, where he lived for most of the following 40 years.

San Luis was then hardly a hotbed of political activity. According to the 1895 census, this arid province had 81,450 inhabitants, while the

homonymous capital was actually a town of 9,826 people — most of whom lived, according to Lallemand's own description, from subsidies granted by the federal government or from "cattle raising, carried out in the traditional *gaucho* manner" (*Vorwärts*, 1889). A regular correspondent for local and international scientific journals, Lallemand also served as temporary headmaster of the *Colegio Nacional* (Normal School) of San Luis, where he taught physics and trigonometry and met his future wife, Enriqueta Lucio Lucero, a teacher at the Normal School and daughter of a prominent San Luis family (Tarcus, 2007a, 36–39; Ferrari, 1993).

Although his professional activities made Lallemand a member of San Luis' elite, the German engineer followed with interest the first organizational attempts of the local working class. Like Friedrich Sorge in the United States, Lallemand operated politically through the German community, grouped around the *Verein* (club) *Vorwärts*, created in 1882. Despite its small size (45 members in 1889 and 260 in 1895, only 60 of whom were naturalized) the *Vorwärts* club began to issue in Buenos Aires, on October 2, 1886, the weekly *Vorwärts: Organ für die Interessen des Arbeitenden Volkes* (*Forward: Organ for the Interests of the Working People*). 696 issues of *Vorwärts* appeared in the course of the next 15 years, until March 15, 1901, with a circulation of 600 to 700 copies.<sup>2</sup> Lallemand's conversion to Marxism apparently took place as late as 1888 (*i.e.*, well into his fifties), when he became a regular San Luis correspondent for the weekly *Vorwärts*. At any rate, in that year he wrote an introduction to his *Memoria Descriptiva de la Provincia de San Luis*, paraphrasing *Das Kapital*'s chapters on primitive accumulation (Avé-Lallemand, 1888; Marx, 1976, 247).

The following year, on July 14–19, 1889, the Second International was set up in Paris by an International Workers' Congress attended by nearly 400 delegates from 20 countries. French socialists in Argentina were represented by Alexis Peyret, while the German immigrants, unable to send a representative, submitted a report and designated the German Social Democratic leader Wilhelm Liebknecht to represent them. Four resolutions were adopted by the Paris congress,

2 The microfilmed version of the Buenos Aires *Vorwärts* is quite complete, with the exception of the first year. Besides, almost all the *Vorwärts* issues from 1892 to 1901 have been preserved in the archives of the Foundation Friedrich Ebert at Bonn. In all, 2,382 articles are extant, of which 84 have been reproduced in the anthology edited by Zeller, Carreras, and Tarcus (2008).

condemning war and asking for the replacement of standing armies by militias, calling on workers to struggle for protective labor laws and universal suffrage, setting as the International's goal the achievement of the eight-hour working day, and finally asking workers all over the world to jointly celebrate May Day (Joll, 1956, 45–49).

To the external impetus to the formation of a socialist movement in Argentina provided by the Paris congress were joined the devastating effects of the 1890 economic crisis, causing a sharp devaluation of the peso (between 1888 and 1891 prices rose by 98%), the freezing of accounts in the main banks, a default on Argentina's foreign debt, and the contraction of the GDP by an estimated 11% between 1890 and 1891. The country did not fully recover from the crisis until the turn of the 19th century, after a debt workout and more than a decade of monetary and fiscal reforms.<sup>3</sup>

The German socialists played an important role in the critical years 1889–1890. They headed the *Comité Internacional Obrero* (International Workers Committee) created in 1890 to organize the first May Day demonstration, calling for the establishment of a national Workers' Federation, the publication of a "periodical for the defense of the working class," and the handing over of a petition, eventually signed by more than 20,000 people, demanding from Congress the passing of a series of "laws protecting the working class" such as the eight-hour working day, the prohibition of employing children under the age of 14, abolition of night work, etc. A "Manifesto to All the Workers of the Republic" was issued, of which 20,000 copies were printed. Two months later, on June 29, 1890, the *Federación Obrera* (Workers' Federation) was set up, though it began to function effectively half a year later, lasting only two years. As part of this political radicalization process, the weekly *Vorwärts* began to abandon the Lassalleanism of its first editor, José Winiger, for a more clearly defined Marxist world view (Tarcus, 2007b, 136).

It was in this context that Lallemand became the main personality among the German socialists. In 1890 he moved to Buenos Aires, playing a decisive role in the foundation of the Workers' Federation and editing the first seven issues of its Spanish organ, *El Obrero* (*The*

3 The Argentine crisis triggered an international turmoil known as the Baring Crisis of 1890, because it was transmitted to London via the House of Baring, an investment bank holding large amounts of Argentine debt that could not be placed in the London market (Mitchener and Weidenmier, 2007).

*Worker*). In February 1891 Lallemand returned to San Luis, leaving the editorship of *El Obrero* to other German socialists, particularly the typesetter Augusto Kühn (1861–1941). But Lallemand continued to collaborate with *El Obrero* until its demise in 1892, also writing for other organs of the local socialist press, such as *El Socialista* (an ephemeral newspaper published in 1893) and *La Vanguardia*, the official journal of the Socialist Party edited by Juan Bautista Justo. From 1895 until his death in 1910, Lallemand was also the Argentine correspondent of *Die Neue Zeit*, the SPD theoretical journal edited by Karl Kautsky.

### *Lallemand's Views on Argentine History*

Lallemand's article series "Contributions to a Cultural History of Argentina," published in April–May 1890 in the Buenos Aires *Vorwärts*, are the first attempt at a materialist interpretation of Argentine history. The series set out to describe "the development of the social production process in the Argentine provinces since their conquest by the Spaniards" (Avé-Lallemand, 1890). The leitmotif of Lallemand's narrative is a visceral rejection of everything Spanish, which he regarded as a wretched legacy of poverty, ignorance and bigotry. "The race of Hispano-Americans," he argued, "proved to be the most incompetent of all conquerors and colonizers," incapable of "supporting, fostering and disseminating culture." One could "hardly speak of culture, of development, in those districts where foreigners have been unable to settle or have done so only as isolated individuals, and such districts are still very numerous in the vast expanses of the interior of the country." This is a recurrent idea in Lallemand's writings: the notion that Argentina's development could only result from exogenous factors.

The Revolution of May 25, 1810, which started Argentina's independence movement, brought no relief. Independence was declared in 1816 and fought out with Spain, only to be followed by a long period of civil wars among *caudillos* (military chieftains), who disposed of the life and property of the population at will, hindering any significant economic activity. In the meantime, Indians had learned to ride horses, replacing the bow and arrow with long spears and forcing the colonizers to build fenced forts in order to drive back Indian incursions. The introduction of Remington's breech-loading rifle finally made possible the annihilation of Patagonia's natives in the 1870s.

Lallemant vindicated the Native Americans *vis-à-vis* the Argentine colonizers:

The often stated view that the Indians died out because they were a lower race in contact with a higher race — namely the Caucasian — is a fable. The Indians have become extinct, not due to such non-existing natural laws, but because of the better weapons of the Europeans, as well as due to the immoderate consumption of brandy and to diseases, especially syphilis and smallpox. (Avé-Lallemant, 1890.)

According to Lallemant, the political disintegration that followed Argentina's independence was precluded any economic development until the presidency of General Bartolomé Mitre (1862–1868), “the last *caudillo* of the old school.” During Mitre's government, European — particularly British — capital, began to flow into the country, and behind capital moved in European wage workers.

After Mitre, Sarmiento was elected to the post of President (1868–1874). This ambitious and bloodthirsty *mestizo*<sup>4</sup> put on the airs of enthusiastic liberal and progressive, but he actually was nothing but a *caudillo* himself, a butcher in kid gloves. After he procured an army with breech-loading Remington rifles and Krupp cannons, Sarmiento created the new *caudillaje* [*caudillo* regime], the absolute rule of Presidents for the benefit of their friends and henchmen, securing for them the unrestrained exploitation of state power for their personal advantage, and granting them privileges and monopolies of the most unheard-of kind. Popular rights have been trampled underfoot since that *caudillo*, and opposition has been scared away from the ballot box by the force of arms. Everything offering any resistance has been shot down. His three successors [Nicolás Avellaneda (1874–1880), Julio Roca (1880–1886) and Miguel Juárez Celman (1886–1890)] have held up and upgraded that system, which is called here *la política electoral* [systematic electoral fraud enabling Presidents to appoint their successors]. (Avé-Lallemant, 1890.)

Of that trio, Lallemant's *bête noire* was General Julio Argentino Roca (1843–1914), who was later to serve a second term as President from 1898 to 1904. Meanwhile, the influx of foreign capital had

4 *Mischling*. For other derogatory references to persons of mixed race — which Lallemant called “the true Hispano-American people” — in the *Vorwärts*, see the anonymous article “Día de pago!,” *Vorwärts*, No. 609, September 24, 1898.

provided productive work to a large amount of immigrant wage workers, transforming a large part of the country in a culturally progressive sense. The foreigners brought the form of bourgeois society into the country and with it modern conditions of production corresponding to the organization of modern civilization, whose vital principle, free competition, must come into conflict with *caudillaje*. The scandalous economic mismanagement of the *caudillo* party [the ruling *Partido Autonomista Nacional* (P.A.N.)] has ruined the country financially, bringing it into such debt-dependence from English capital that we are actually just an English commercial colony, and we find ourselves in the most absolute subordination. The current monetary crisis has reached an extent that makes state bankruptcy totally inevitable, but for that reason it also makes inevitable the downfall of the *caudillo* economy and the development of the pure capitalist social form, with its concentration of huge riches on one pole, in the hands of a few capitalists, and its accumulation of poverty and misery among the proletariat on the other pole. Out of that capitalist social form must then develop, with fatalistic necessity, the higher cultural form of the communist society through the seizure of political power by the proletariat. The working class can only attain that goal through the awakening of its class consciousness. That is our — the Social Democrats' — task, and we are determined to fulfill it. (Avé-Lallemant, 1890.)

### *Lallemant's Analysis of the 1890 Crisis*

Lallemant's contributions to the first issues of *El Obrero*, written later the same year, analyzed the causes of the 1890 crisis and addressed the political tasks flowing from it. The first article began by characterizing Argentina's political system resulting from the dominant conditions of production and the Spanish colonial legacy:

Up until now the Argentine republic has been dominated by the *caudillaje* regime, a despotism born of the authority wielded by Spanish *conquistador* chiefs with the support of the Catholic priests. This political constitution developed out of the organization of production in the system of *encomiendas* and slavery. Although the revolution of 1810 abolished slavery by law, in actual fact both it and *caudillaje* survived for many years, rooted as they were in popular custom. Slavery, abolished by wage labor in the more civilized regions of the country, still exists in the interior regions, where customs have not yet been altered enough by the activity of foreigners, while *caudillaje*, restored by the system of electoral politics, not only still exists today, regardless of the constitutions drafted on the Anglo-Saxon model, but has reached its highest development in the regime of *incondicionalismo* [servilism



towards government officials] and *unicato* [sole rule, power monopoly of the P.A.N.], the special South American form of absolutism that we all know. (El Obrero, 1890.)

International capitalism, always looking for new outlets, “initiated and carried forward the work of civilization here.” Capital at first used “the oligarchy of *caudillaje*” to penetrate the country, but then that oligarchy began to abuse state power in order “to secure its own members from the consequences of the law of free competition.” The *caudillos* “arbitrarily violated capitalist law, *i.e.*, the laws of bourgeois democratic society,” turning “unconditional *unicato* into an impossible and absurd absolutism.” As a consequence, “international capital declared war on *caudillaje*” through the stock exchange and the money market, leading to state bankruptcy and the insurrection of the petty bourgeoisie led by the *Unión Cívica* in July 1890 — an insurrection which Lallemand supported wholeheartedly, because even though a mere change “in the government machinery” not affecting private property would not change the working class’ fate, a “pure bourgeois democratic regime” granting universal suffrage and the naturalization of foreigners would create the conditions “to form, independently of all bourgeois parties, the workers’ party, and to gather the proletarian class dispersed in the various political fractions, differentiating it from those whose economic interests are diametrically opposed to its own” (*El Obrero*, 1890).

### *Lallemand and the Unión Cívica Radical*

Lallemand believed that the realization of socialist ideals was “impossible without the proletarian class seizing state power, just as the bourgeoisie, in order to govern, overthrew the feudal state [in France] in 1789, and just as it overthrew the power of *caudillaje* here, in this country, in July this year” (*El Obrero*, 1890.) Lallemand refers here to the so-called *Revolución del Parque*, an armed uprising staged on July 26, 1890 by an opposition party called the *Unión Cívica*, which resulted in the replacement of President Miguel Angel Juárez Celman by Vice-President Carlos Pellegrini.

The appearance of the *Unión Cívica*, and later of the *Unión Cívica Radical* (currently one of Argentina’s two main bourgeois parties) took Lallemand by surprise. Describing, in late 1889, the rampant

inflation and near-famine situation in the province of San Luis, he ridiculed Juárez Celman's attribution of the devaluation of the peso to the opposition's activities: "Where exactly might that opposition party be hiding? Here nobody noticed any such thing, and a society of humbler, more fawning subjects than the *puntanos* [inhabitants of San Luis] is hardly imaginable." Government officials behaved like petty tyrants and the people were "excluded from any participation in political and communal affairs." Lallemand's conclusion was that in San Luis "any change is completely out of the question, here nothing can be expected" (*Vorwärts*, 1889).

Yet as this article was being published, on September 1, 1889, a group of young people held a rally in Buenos Aires and set up a new organization called the *Unión Cívica de la Juventud* in order to unify the opposition to the regime of Juárez Celman and the ruling *Partido Autonomista Nacional*. On April 13, 1890, a new mass rally held in Buenos Aires resulted in the formation of a new party called the *Unión Cívica*. Its leader was Leandro N. Alem, but the leadership also included prominent members of various trends opposed to Juárez Celman's *unicato* — notably the influential former President, General Bartolomé Mitre. The economic crisis then unfolding led the *Unión Cívica* to stage the *Revolución del Parque* three months later. A national convention of the *Unión Cívica* then elected as candidates for President and Vice-President Bartolomé Mitre and Bernardo de Irigoyen, respectively.

In the first number of *El Obrero*, Lallemand argued that the revolution of July 1890 had been "the revolution of the Argentine bourgeoisie par excellence," in which the latter, "though unfortunate in the barricades and poorly led, brought down the *caudillo* regime at the first attempt." Though the government party had recovered, it would soon have to give up in the face of "the relentless war waged against it by the stock exchange, inspired by the headquarters of international capitalism at Lombard Street, London." Lallemand's overoptimistic assessment of the prospects of the *Revolución del Parque* led him to conclude that "in this country now begins the era of pure bourgeois domination, until now hampered by Hispano-American *caudillo* traditions" (*El Obrero*, 1890).

But then Julio Roca, the leader of the ruling P.A.N., managed to split the *Unión Cívica*: he agreed with Mitre on a "national unity" formula between the two parties, led by Mitre himself. On January 17,

1891, when the new course became evident, Lallemand denounced it in *El Obrero*:

The *Unión Cívica* has betrayed! After stirring up the people, it now serves as lackey of the class of big landowners [*grandes hacendados*], and nothing remains of a democratic system. The petty bourgeoisie, always cowardly, miserable and *compadrita*, gets carried away by a group of scheming lawyers, and is unable either to make a decision or to defend its own interests. Thus we go by leaps and bounds to execution by the British bankers. (*El Obrero*, 1891a.)

On April 16, 1891, when the agreement between Roca and Mitre became public, Alem opposed it emphatically, triggering the breakup of the *Unión Cívica* and the subsequent withdrawal of Mitre's candidacy. On July 2, 1891, the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR) was founded. Lallemand welcomed this political formation as a progressive development. In the backwater of his adoptive province, he was politically active in the ranks of the UCR, backing the rebellion that briefly placed Teófilo Saá (his wife's nephew) at the head of San Luis' government from July to September 1893, when the province was finally subject to intervention by federal forces (Alonso, 2000, 123–126).

In an article published on June 23, 1894, Lallemand argued that “the Mitre–Roca P.A.N. rests solely upon a military regime,” while “the Radicals' champion, Dr. Barroetaveña, represents public opinion in Congress.” The UCR's program was to actually implement the Constitution. “This Constitution is, in some respects, very much in need of reform, but if the Radicals are serious about their intentions to implement the provisions of the Constitution and its basic principle — Anglo-Saxon *self-government* — over the whole country, that would be a huge step forward which can only be welcomed with jubilation, because in that way a new stage would be reached, allowing us to strive for other, higher goals.” Big struggles were ahead, but economic development, driven by the influx of immigrants, benefitted the UCR. “If the Radicals make common cause with the foreigners in order to lead the course of development in a conscious, planned way, they will achieve their goal” (*Vorwärts*, 1894).

Lallemand felt that his tactics towards Radicalism were vindicated by Engels' letter to Filippo Turati of January 26, 1894, which the socialist newspaper *La Vanguardia* had just published (*La Vanguardia*, 1894a). He summed up his expectations from the UCR as follows:

“From bourgeois democracy we ask, in order to be able to fight, the right of coalition, freedom of the press and universal suffrage. Democracy, realized by the Radicals, will give us those three institutions to a large degree, and that is why we are watching with great sympathy all the stages of the ongoing struggle which Argentine Radicalism is waging, although it is the unconscious party of the purest capitalism” (*La Vanguardia*, 1894b).

Lallemant’s sanguine hopes for a common front of Radicals and immigrants soon gave way to disappointment. In September 1895, he complained bitterly that the UCR had managed to alienate its immigrant supporters by refusing to raise the question of naturalization in its party program. “The best draft available, that of the Radicals from San Luis,<sup>5</sup> was rejected, putting instead a patchwork of commonplaces out of which anything can be read. But to the foreigners it does not offer the slightest relief.” If the UCR was hesitant about attracting immigrants, it had no qualms when it came to accept former supporters of Juárez Celman. Lallemant concluded that “the Radical Party did all the dirty work for its mortal enemy Roca.” His corollary was that “in this country, the work elsewhere accomplished by bourgeois democracy devolves upon us, and this paves the way for us through the fight for civil liberties, for which the local Radical Party no longer seems to have time” (*Vorwärts*, 1895). But this “permanent revolution” scenario failed to materialize, and in any case the *Unión Cívica Radical* did not reach power until two decades later, in 1916. As late as 1908, Lallemant’s name appears in the UCR’s *mesa directiva* (board of trustees) of San Luis. It is evident from his periodical reports to *Die Neue Zeit*, which continued until the year prior to his death in 1910, that he did not regard this political stance as incompatible with his socialist convictions.

### *Marxism and Anarchism*

During his period as *El Obrero*’s main contributor, Lallemant spent a great deal of energy arguing with the anarchists. For those articles to be correctly assessed, we must take into account that, as Gonzalo Zaragoza has shown, when the first issue of *El Obrero* was published, on

5 This suggests that Lallemant was instrumental in drafting the UCR’s draft program in the province of San Luis.

December 12, 1890, the socialists' influence on the Argentine working class was beginning to wane and that of the anarchists was increasing (cf. Zaragoza, 1996). A couple of weeks after May Day 1890, the anarchists began to issue their newspaper *El Perseguido* (*The Persecuted*). Speaking in the name of "anarchistic communism," they derided the socialists' Workers' Federation as an imaginary organization (*federación obrera imaginaria*; see for instance *El Perseguido*, 1891a). On March 23, 1891, at a meeting held in the *Verein Vorwärts* local, anarchists demanded that May Day should be marked not just by celebrations but also by strikes and the looting of stores (*El Perseguido*, 1891b). On April 6, 1891, at another joint meeting, they rejected the socialists' petitions to Congress, arguing that a public demonstration should be held in Buenos Aires' main square even without police permission (*El Perseguido*, 1891c). The following day, the government, facing a collapse of the banking system, closed the three largest banks and froze their accounts. On April 8, 1891, large crowds of small savers gathered in front of the banks, clashing with the police. A state of siege was declared and public demonstrations were forbidden. On May Day that year, socialists held a meeting at the *Vorwärts* club, while anarchists took to the streets and clashed with the police. Thirteen demonstrators were arrested, though according to *El Obrero's* report to the Brussels congress of the Second International, none of them were anarchists (quoted in Tarcus, 2007b, 274; see also *El Perseguido*, 1891d).

As May Day 1891 approached, Lallemand's polemics with the anarchists sharpened.<sup>6</sup> He summarized his criticism of anarchism in a series of articles entitled "Our Tactics," where he advocated a parliamentary road to socialism as opposed to direct action. According to Lallemand, the main difference between socialists and anarchists was the latter's "voluntarism" — *i.e.*, their confidence in the strength of their own individual will to change social conditions. Social Democracy, by contrast, set out "from the study of the laws of development of society and the state, and the analysis of actual conditions. Our goal is in perfect harmony with those laws, and our tactic is to encourage in a consistent and rational manner the process of natural and logical development" (*El Obrero*, 1891f). It would be wrong to assume, Lallemand warned his readers, "that we, as revolutionaries, intend

6 Cf. *El Obrero*, 1891b, 1891c, 1891d, 1891e, 1891f.

to take the road of violent actions, of armed struggle.” That was “the mistake of the anarchists, those fanatics of *revolutionary phraseology* and furious apostles of *propaganda of the deed*, who completely ignore what a revolution actually is and believe it’s nothing but a series of violent and brutal acts.” Actually “violence, the shedding of blood, is not an attribute of revolution, but of despotism” (*El Obrero*, 1891f). Socialism was the revolutionary party *par excellence*, because its goal was to establish communism. But “if our bourgeois enemies allow us to realize our aims by peaceful means, if they let us exercise freely the right of suffrage that bourgeois law guarantees to every citizen, and do not persecute us as outlaws, for our part we will never resort to violence” (*El Obrero*, 1891f).

### “Orthodoxy” and Revisionism

Lallemand’s articles against anarchism appeared simultaneously with the publication in *Die Neue Zeit* of the “Critique of the Gotha Program,” where Marx advocated the historical necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat (Marx, 1891). Finding himself in an awkward position, Lallemand argued that this dictatorship meant

a transitional period, in which the proletariat, having state power in its hands, carries out the socialization of the means of production and establishes institutions in order to regularize this socialization, a process that will naturally take a certain amount of time. And who can say that the big capitalists will not at some point voluntarily relinquish their privileges and monopolies — if not all of them, at least a large number among them? (*El Obrero*, 1891f.)

Socialists had to adapt their tactics to circumstances. Violence was admissible in “uncivilized countries” where the bourgeoisie refused to grant basic democratic rights. But “wherever the system of universal suffrage and bourgeois democracy is in force, *i.e.* in a civilized country, we must take advantage of them.” Lallemand considered Argentina a civilized country, despite the widespread fraud and corruption (*El Obrero*, 1891f).

Lallemand followed the line of the SPD during the first half of the 1890s, when the party, just coming out of the cold of the Anti-Socialist Laws, was ready to go to extreme lengths to preserve its legal status. In 1893, for instance, Kautsky wrote that “a real parliamentary regime

can be just as well an instrument for the dictatorship of the proletariat as an instrument for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie." The idea "that the representative system is indissolubly linked with the domination of the bourgeoisie," Kautsky argued, "is one of those myths that a single look at history suffices to destroy. The representative system is a political form whose content can diverge widely" (Kautsky, 1911, 121–122). The reformist socialist leader Jean Jaurès wrote a special introduction to the French edition of Kautsky's brochure, stressing his agreement with Kautsky (Kautsky, 1900). Engels tried to stem the tide of parliamentarism, but even his 1895 introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France* was censored to make him appear as a believer in a peaceful transition to socialism. Only in 1898, during the revisionist controversy, did Kautsky take up the cudgels for revolutionary tactics (Tudor, 1988).

Lallemand supported the "orthodox" wing of the SPD in the revisionist controversy. When the Argentine delegation to the international socialist congress held at Amsterdam in 1904, headed by Manuel Ugarte, refused to cast its vote in favor of the anti-revisionist resolution, arguing that the Argentine movement was too small to take sides, Lallemand wrote a scathing report to *Die Neue Zeit* accusing the "leading elements of the Socialist Party" in Argentina of "Turatism" (a reference to Filippo Turati, leader of the reformist wing of the Italian Socialist Party) and deriding them as "bourgeois ideologists unwilling to cross a certain Rubicon" (*Die Neue Zeit*, 1905, 454).

### *Splits and Debates among German Socialists (1891–1893)*

Shortly after May Day 1891, a crisis developed in the ranks of the German socialists, who until then had been united in the framework of the Workers' Federation. The *Vorwärts* club announced its separation from the Workers' Federation, and Oswald Seyffert replaced Adolf Uhle as editor of its weekly. This gave rise to a controversy between the weekly *Vorwärts* and Lallemand, writing in the name of the Workers' Federation.

The weekly *Vorwärts* first openly criticized the Workers Federation's policy on August 15, 1891, on the occasion of the much-delayed celebration of its first congress. In an anonymous article probably penned by Seyffert, who had attended the Workers Federation's congress, the author harshly criticized its attempt to build a federation

of as-yet-nonexistent trade unions in “*wild, wild South America*.”<sup>7</sup> The Workers’ Federation wanted “to build the house from the roof down, rather than starting from below, and above all laying firm foundations.” It was impossible to bring under a single roof the heterogeneous and uneducated Argentine workers. “Trade unions or rather professional associations must first be built, which should educate and train their members, and only then, when those associations stand strong and united, will the time come for a Workers’ Federation.” To do it the other way around was impossible: “Without strong trade unions there will never be here a strong general association of workers, because nowhere do workers need union training as much as here” (*Vorwärts*, 1891a).

Lallemant refused to accept that the Workers’ Federation was dead. Its goal was “to bring trade unions into being, and to usher in, in compliance with the decisions of the Paris and now also of the Brussels Congress, a socialist workers’ movement by means of the struggle for protective labor laws” (*Vorwärts*, 1891b). If the economic conditions justifying propaganda work existed, then “other circumstances cannot be opposed to it. They may explain the difficulties we encounter, but these do not frighten us.” Lallemant accused his critic of thinking “that the workers of the *Vorwärts* club are at such a high level of culture that they should not deign to take part in propaganda work” (*El Obrero*, 1892).

The weekly *Vorwärts*’ answer started from the opposite assumption: “Argentina is still not a pure capitalist state, and therefore also the consequences that a purely capitalist country entails cannot exist here.” It was therefore wrong to take Germany as a model. The strong influx of immigrants that preceded the 1890 crisis had brought in many educated workers, who could have rendered “social midwifery services” to the country had rapid economic development continued. But the crisis broke out and immigrants left the country in droves. Since then “everything has gone backwards, including the labor movement, even workers’ clubs and newspapers. . . . The few socialist workers remaining here are mostly German, and they are also the ones who comprise the Workers’ Federation and issue *El Obrero*.” The Federation was only supported by the German section of the printers’ union and by the German-led carpenters’ union. “Each one of those unions has only a

7 In English in the original.



dozen members. Thus we see that the Workers' Federation actually consists of a handful of Germans," who tried to apply, in a mechanical way, ideas learned back home to the much more primitive local conditions. The weekly *Vorwärts'* writer then offered an assessment of Lallemand:

As for the intellectual leader of the *Federación Obrera* and *El Obrero*, without [whom] both would disappear without a trace, the Federation he defends so stubbornly has not yet seen him. He is a highly learned man, but gray is all theory. He judges the world from his theoretical position, from his study room. We cannot compete with his theoretical knowledge, but we think we have more common sense. We do not judge the world from leather-bound volumes or gray theories, we do not hover in the clouds but walk the earth among our fellow men, and we sometimes see odd things happen, quite against all professorial wisdom. And so we see that the zealous efforts of half a dozen German fanatics, who still think they live in Germany, unfortunately do not have the least chance of success. We say unfortunately, because it is a pity when someone does not realize that he is making useless sacrifices. (*Vorwärts*, 1892.)

The *Vorwärts'* prognosis about the Workers' Federation proved correct: on September 24, 1892, the deepening crisis led to *El Obrero's* disappearance. A few weeks later, on November 1, 1892, the second congress of the Workers' Federation approved an "action program" written by Augusto Kühn, setting as its goal "the seizure of political power by the working class." But by then the Federation was no longer supported by any real union: it was kept alive by the efforts of the so-called *Sección Varia* (Miscellaneous Section), made up of individual socialist activists. On December 14, 1892, the Federation was dissolved, and most of the activists grouped around the *Sección Varia* set up a new organization called *Agrupación Socialista de Buenos Aires*. A minority group, led by Gustav Nohke and Esteban Jiménez, opposed that decision and began to publish *El Obrero*, second series, on February 4, 1893. As a consequence, the *Agrupación Socialista* issued its own organ, *El Socialista*, edited by Carlos Mauli and Lallemand, six numbers of which appeared between March and May 1893.

On March 4, 1893, Lallemand described the local Marxists as being "split into three separate and clearly defined societies: the *Vorwärts* club to the right, the remains of the former Workers' Federation with its organ *El Obrero* at the center, and the *Agrupación del*

*Partido Socialista de Buenos Aires*, whose organ is *El Socialista*, to the left.” The Workers’ Federation wanted to be “a federation of trade unions with socialist tendencies, certainly a most valuable institution, which unfortunately, after three years of existence, is still unable to experience a healthy development . . . because local workers avoid it.” The *Vorwärts* club, as “a recreational association,” had separated two years ago from the Workers’ Federation; it carried out socialist propaganda through its newspaper, lectures, etc. Finally, “the still very new *Agrupación Socialista* also consists of elements that separated from the Workers’ Federation.” It opposed both syndicalism and German exclusivism. Lallemand warned that “too wide a dispersal of forces puts into question the existence of the different groups” and called for a joint celebration of May Day, adding: “The foundations upon which German Social Democracy stands today, laid down in the Erfurt program, are increasingly those of the entire international workers’ movement. May Day should provide evidence of that” (*Vorwärts*, 1893; see also Lallemand’s plea for unity in *La Vanguardia*, 1894c). A common celebration was indeed held at the *Vorwärts* local, but without bringing about immediate unity.

The year 1893 marks the nadir of the emerging socialist movement in Argentina. A new period would start in April 1894 with the appearance of *La Vanguardia*, in the context of a revival of industrial struggles. In June 1896, the Argentine Socialist Party held its foundational congress at the local of the *Vorwärts* club, which despite initial reticence contributed two of the seven members of the SP’s first Executive Committee and two of its first five parliamentary candidates. The dominant figure of this new phase would be the Argentine physician Juan Bautista Justo, with German socialists no longer playing the leading roles. Lallemand collaborated with the early issues of *La Vanguardia*, and his name appears in the first socialist electoral ticket of 1896. In addition, he continued to write assiduously for *Die Neue Zeit* and for a local magazine called *La Agricultura*, whose editorial board he joined from January 1896 to 1898.<sup>8</sup> We shall now proceed to analyze Lallemand’s positions on several economic and theoretical

8 *La Agricultura* was not a socialist publication but an offshoot of the bourgeois daily *La Nación*, where paradoxically Lallemand, his fellow socialist Antonino Piñero and the anarchist Alberto Ghirardo played important roles. They even serialized on its pages a Spanish version of Kautsky’s *The Agrarian Question* (translated by Piñero) between October and November 1900.

issues, and finally we will attempt to assess his role in the origins of Argentine socialism.

### *Argentine Industry and Protectionism*

In his first report to *Die Neue Zeit*, Lallemand argued that “Argentina’s economic development, and the pressure its continually increasing agricultural exports exert on world market prices, justify that *Die Neue Zeit* should occupy itself with this colonial country” (Avé-Lallemand, 1894, 422). His views on Argentina’s economy were characterized by a geographical determinism, according to which the country was destined by its natural conditions to play the role of an exporter of agricultural products and importer of industrial goods. Writing as a mining engineer, Lallemand stressed that Argentina lacked mineral resources such as coal, oil and iron, which he considered essential for industrial development. “Argentine soil fertility is the advantageous natural condition upon which its labor productivity must almost solely be based, because the mineral wealth of the country, spoken of so highly by enthusiasts without knowledge, is very limited and of little importance” (*El Obrero*, 1891g). Lallemand pointed out that, according to data provided by the manufacturers in December 1898, the country had 24,000 factories and workshops employing 215,000 workers. He argued that Argentine industry depended completely upon “the consumption of imported English coal, and for that reason large-scale industry has developed almost exclusively in the seaside city of Buenos Aires — at least 95 percent of it, according to official figures” (Avé-Lallemand, 1899, 826). Lallemand therefore condemned protectionism as a policy that lowered real wages by raising the prices of means of consumption, while artificially promoting an inefficient industry (see *El Obrero*, 1891h).

Lallemand expanded on the inflationary consequences of the protectionist system in his first report to *Die Neue Zeit*, written in 1894, where he argued that, together with the appropriation of the soil by large landowners and the exponential growth of the public debt, indirect taxes had skyrocketed. “The duties on import articles amount to up to 300 percent of their declared value. Under this system has developed, since 1876, an artificial industry, which can only survive by increasing prices three- and even fourfold, and whose products, like alcohol, beer, sugar, tobacco, matches, etc. are subject to taxation.

How expensive living must become under such circumstances is clearly evident" (Avé-Lallemant, 1894, 423). Lallemant — like Juan B. Justo and the Second International as whole — supported free trade as a palliative to the high cost of living.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Agrarian Question*

Lallemant's position on the agrarian question in Argentina is one of the most idiosyncratic aspects of his thinking. He vigorously criticized the class of large landowners, "true disgrace of the country," and their wasteful use of land for traditional cattle farming, which left agriculture in the hands of small farmers without enough means to raise its productivity.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, he defended the system of large landed estates. Unlike Lenin, who called for the "clearing of estates" for capitalism by the peasantry (*i.e.*, the confiscation of pre-capitalist estates and the temporary renovation of small farming in order to widen the domestic market for industry), Lallemant was opposed to any form of agrarian reform dividing *latifundia* (large rural estates) into small plots of land, even for colonization purposes.

Lallemant developed these ideas at length in his contributions to the weekly newspaper *La Agricultura*. In 1895, a debate broke out in *La Agricultura* about the economic advantages of large estates as opposed to small farms, with Lallemant emphatically supporting the former. He stressed the importance of distinguishing between criticism of Argentina's landowners and advocacy of large estates. He claimed that "a latifundist society is one thing, and the exploitation of latifundia is quite another." He believed that under capitalism latifundia property became "the mainstay of large-scale capitalist farming and stock-breeding. We will use here the word *latifundio* in this, its modern sense, as a constituent element of the product, as fixed capital, as a portion of constant capital in the process of production." In the interest of capitalist development, Lallemant vindicated the concentration of landed property and rejected the division of estates

9 See, for instance, Otto Bauer's report to the projected International Socialist Congress of Vienna: *The High Cost of Living* (August 1914), as well as the report of Juan B. Justo to the same congress (Justo, 1914).

10 "The 40,362 large landowners . . . rule the country in a purely arbitrary fashion, forming an omnipotent oligarchy, although they are only 1.02 percent of the total population" (Avé-Lallemant, 1899, 826).

into small plots of land to be distributed among farmers. He observed that immigrant farmers paid much more for their land than the big capitalists, working harder for an income that was actually lower than the wages landowners would have paid to their workers (*peones*). Lallemand thought this was due to the extreme “self-exploitation” of the farmers and their families. This resulted in the creation of “a large but extremely poor and backward population, just above the cultural level of the Chinese coolie, a physically and morally degenerate variety of the human species” (Avé-Lallemant, 1895).

It was unacceptable to promote a colonization process with such an outcome, not just because independent farmers would eventually be expropriated by capital and proletarianized, but also because, by then, the population would lack the “physical and intellectual forces” required for the organization of the working class. Consequently, “if colonization works against civilization and is dangerous for the country, and if the settler and his small property will sooner or later have to be expropriated and absorbed by large-scale exploitation of *latifundia*, the sooner the latter are fostered the better.” What the country needed was promoting the management of large estates by modern capitalist methods: “Not *latifundia* property in hands without capital, but great capitalist exploitation of vast amounts land by powerful businessmen, or corporations” (Avé-Lallemant, 1895).

Beyond this idiosyncratic stand against agrarian reform, Lallemand’s writings on the agrarian question provide detailed descriptions of the relations of production prevailing in Argentina at the end of the 19th century. For instance, he documented the prevalence of sharecropping in cattle farming:

The producers of wool, leather and meat, in short our great cattle raisers, are big landowners, producing with large capitals and with very few wage workers, mostly shepherds, who work for a share of the profit according to the system of *medianería* — the Italian *mezzadria*, the French *métayage*. No wage system in the world can possibly raise the degree of exploitation of human labor power to such an extent. (Avé-Lallemant, 1894, 424–25.)<sup>11</sup>

11 The distinction between sharecropping and small farming was taken from Marx’s *Capital*, Vol. III: “Die Metairiewirtschaft und das Bäuerliche Parzellen-Eigentum” (“Share-Cropping and Small-Scale Peasant Ownership”) (Marx, 1991, 938–950).

With the growth of corn exports and the rise in land prices, sharecropping (*Metairiewirtschaft*) was increasingly being employed in agriculture as well: “Recently people have begun to employ the system of *medianería* also in agriculture. Under this system, the large landowners do not sell their parcels of land, but lease them to *medianeros* (sharecroppers) for a certain period of time, in exchange for a share of the crop” (Avé-Lallemant, 1894, 425). We thus see some striking similarities between the relations of production in the Argentine countryside in the late 19th century and the sharecropping arrangement typical of the post-Civil War South in the United States.

*British Imperialism and “Pan-Americanism”*

In 1903 Lallemant published in *Die Neue Zeit* an article called “European Imperialism in South America,” where he provided statistics showing that “without political conquest, without warships and cannons, English capital squeezes out of Argentina more than seven times more value, in relative terms, than out of its Indian subjects” (Avé-Lallemant, 1903a). To this sum had to be added the tribute that peasants and cattle growers paid to exporters, and the high taxes required to maintain a bloated state bureaucracy. “It is thus comprehensible that the exploitation of the proletariat is practically limitless, that immigration stagnates and emigration assumes ever greater dimensions. Poverty and misery grow *ad infinitum*. The country can no longer bear this burden and collapses under the oppression of English imperialism and its own unscrupulous administration” (Avé-Lallemant, 1903a).

On the other hand, Lallemant’s attitude towards Pan-Americanism — the form assumed by American imperialism in Central and South America — was diametrically opposite. In the article “Chile and Argentina,” written in August 1898 (*i.e.*, immediately after the ending of the Spanish-American War), Lallemant claimed that a war between both countries could only be averted by American intervention, and that, in general terms, “South America’s development in the sense of bourgeois liberalism, its liberation from the oppressive rule of all-absorbing oligarchies, will only be possible when Pan-Americanism unfolds its wings over this continent. The Buenos Aires oligarchy ruling here is the mortal enemy of Pan-Americanism” (Avé-Lallemant, 1898, 84).

In another article, published in *Die Neue Zeit* five years later, called "The Expansionist Policy of the United States in South America," Lallemand argued that "the fate of these miserable republics, which are absolutely incapable of governing themselves, will be determined at the White House in Washington. The sooner this happens, the better, because only in that way can South America ever be open to culture and civilization" (Avé-Lallemant, 1903b, 87). He waxed enthusiastic about Theodore Roosevelt's "big stick" policy, proclaimed by "Mr. Roosevelt in his great Monroe Doctrine speech, recently delivered." In Lallemand's opinion, in South America the "*almighty dollar*" could expand its rule even without a strong fleet, because "a large part of the population is so weary of mismanagement that they would greet any change of the existing order with applause" (Avé-Lallemant, 1903b, 87).

This strange combination of hostility towards British imperialism and sympathy towards American imperialism is symptomatic of the lack of a clear theoretical position on this question in Argentine socialism before the outbreak of the First World War. The theory of imperialism would later be imported from Russia after the triumph of the Bolshevik revolution.

### *Conclusion*

During the late 1880s and early 1890s, the German socialist immigrants grouped around the *Vorwärts* club played a key role in the consolidation of the first socialist groups in Argentina. In the context of a deep economic and political crisis, Germán Avé-Lallemant became the main personality of Argentine socialism before the appearance of Juan B. Justo's *La Vanguardia* in 1894. Distancing themselves from Lassalle and embracing a Marxist ideology more closely aligned with the political line of German Social Democracy, the first Argentine socialist groups, under Lallemand's direction, at the same time sketched an analysis of Argentine history that stressed its backwardness and argued that capitalism would play a progressive historical role in the immediate future — hence their originally sympathetic attitude towards the newly created Radical Party.

In the first decade of the 20th century the paths of Lallemand and Justo diverged. Justo played a key role in the construction of the Socialist Party, while at the same time settling on a reformist political agenda. Lallemand, on the other hand, went back to his remote adoptive province, aligning himself with the left wing of the Second

International in his periodical reports to *Die Neue Zeit*, while at the same time developing his own political activity within the ranks of the Radical Party. Where previous historiography (Ratzer, 1969; Paso, 1974) attempted to find an “orthodox” and “revolutionary” current in Lallemand’s Marxism *vis-à-vis* Juan B. Justo’s reformism, we have tried to provide a more balanced account. The important differences between the two leaders — such as their divergent attitudes towards the *Unión Cívica Radical*— should not obscure the fact that their political agendas had many similarities, such as their rejection of anarchist tactics and their defense of free trade. In our opinion, the contrast between the two pioneers of Argentine socialism goes beyond the dichotomy reformism vs. “orthodoxy,” rather reflecting the complex set of political circumstances shaping their political outlooks, such as Lallemand’s immigrant origins, his close alignment with the politics of German Social Democracy, and his remoteness from Buenos Aires, the center of political events. Further research can shed new light on the first stages of Argentine socialism if it moves forward in this direction, historically contextualizing the internal debates among the early pioneers of Marxism in this country.

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