

Immigration and Urban Social Problems in Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914

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ARGENTINA and Chile, which had welcomed unrestricted European immigration since the mid-nineteenth century, began to turn against their foreign-born residents as World War I approached. One reason behind this shift in opinion was the growing conviction among the upper classes of both nations that immigration was the principal cause of urban social problems which had begun to appear by 1890. As in the United States, Argentine and Chilean observers used immigration to explain such varied problems as pauperism, crime, labor unrest, and anarchism.¹ At times, the accusations which the native-born upper classes levelled against the immigrants were justified, but more often the foreigner was used as a scapegoat.

The concern which the Argentine elites felt about the impact of immigration was understandable, for the newcomers were rapidly reshaping the nation's economic life and social structure. The first Argentine census, taken in 1869, revealed that only 1.8 million people inhabited the republic's huge area of about one million square miles. Argentina remained a "desert," as Domingo F. Sarmiento had characterized the country in 1845.² But by 1914 the population had increased four-fold, and Argentina had become one of the world's leading agricultural exporters. Basic to this rapid growth were the three million immigrants, primarily Italians and Spaniards, who settled in Argentina between the two censuses. On the eve of World War I, 29.9 percent of the Argentine population had been born abroad, probably the highest proportion of foreign-born residents in any large country.³

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¹ Nathan Glazer, for example, has pointed out that most ills of the American cities were blamed on the foreign-born. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, 1963), 21.

² Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (New York, 1961), 27.

³ Data on Argentine immigration are found in Argentine Republic, *Tercer*

These immigrants provided the labor force for Argentina's expanding economy. For one thing, the foreign-born supplied much of the rural manpower which produced wheat and beef exports. Furthermore, they comprised about sixty percent of the urban proletariat, which was concentrated in Buenos Aires and included railroad workers, draymen, longshoremen, and others who transported and handled the rich agricultural produce.⁴

Other immigrants brought technical skills and entrepreneurial abilities to Argentina. European businessmen prospered and by 1914 owned seventy-two percent of the nation's commercial houses, as well as the bulk of Argentine industry, still in the initial stages of development.⁵ Numerous immigrant professionals and clerical workers also arrived. By 1914 at least twenty percent of employed Argentine immigrants had entered the middle sectors of society, and Europeans held approximately forty-six percent of the republic's middle-sector positions.⁶

Although Chilean immigration was smaller and more bourgeois than Argentina's, the impact of the foreign-born in Chile was also great. Only about 100,000 Europeans, mostly Germans, Spaniards, and Italians, came to stay between the arrival of the first colonists in the 1840s and the outbreak of World War I. The last census before the war, taken in 1907, revealed that 4.1 percent of the population was foreign born.⁷

Attracted by generous land grants in the newly developing southern "frontier" region, thousands of Europeans in Chile built up flourishing small farms. But the bulk of the European-born pop-

censo nacional, levantado el 1° de junio de 1914 (10 vols., Buenos Aires, 1916-1917), X, 399, I, 205-206. For comments on the high proportion of foreign-born residents in Argentina see Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición* (Buenos Aires, 1965), 185-197.

⁴ A careful assessment of the impact of immigration on the rise of Argentine agriculture is James R. Scobie, *Revolution on the Pampas: A Social History of Argentine Wheat, 1860-1910* (Austin, 1964), 27-38. Statistics on the nationalities of the Buenos Aires urban proletariat appear in Buenos Aires (City), *Censo general de población, edificación, comercio e industrias de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires . . . levantado en . . . octubre de 1909* (2 vols., Buenos Aires, 1910), I, 53-60.

⁵ Statistics on the nationality of ownership of Argentine commerce appear in Argentine Republic, *Tercer censo nacional*, VIII, 141-207. For the nationality of ownership of Argentine industry, see *Ibid.*, VII, 195-246.

⁶ This percentage was computed from data in Argentine Republic, *Tercer censo nacional*, IV, 383-395.

⁷ Data on Chilean immigration are in: Chile, Oficina Central de Estadística, *Anuario estadístico de la República de Chile* (10 vols., Santiago, 1914), I, ix; also in Chile, Comisión Central del Censo, *Censo de la República de Chile levantado el 28 de noviembre de 1907* (Santiago, 1908), xix.

ulation entered the middle sectors in Chile's major cities, mining towns, and seaports. By 1914 the foreign-born community owned thirty-two percent of Chile's commercial firms and forty-nine percent of its industrial establishments.⁸ If the urban immigrant did not become a businessman, he often found employment in a commercial or banking firm or as a pharmacist, engineer, teacher, or other professional. Fewer European immigrants became urban laborers in Chile than in Argentina.

Immigration was only one agency of the headlong change which Argentina and Chile experienced during the 1890-1914 period. Foreign trade thrived; exports of Chilean nitrates and Argentine beef and wheat reached unprecedented heights by 1910. This prosperity expanded internal markets and stimulated the beginnings of industrialization. During the same years urbanization was rapidly taking place. By 1914 Buenos Aires contained 1.5 million inhabitants and was one of the world's great metropolitan centers, while in Chile, Santiago's population more than doubled (to 450,000) during the quarter century preceding the First World War.

The working classes that inhabited these growing cities did not share the prosperity which gave a veneer of opulence to Santiago and Buenos Aires. In Chile real wages of urban laborers declined between 1890 and 1914, while according to available evidence those in Argentina rose only slightly.⁹ Housing was generally wretched. As late as 1912 a survey sponsored by the Argentine government found that in Buenos Aires the average immigrant working-class family, which contained five persons, lived in one room averaging twelve feet by twelve.¹⁰ Almost no social or labor legislation existed in either nation before 1914 to brighten the lot of the urban workers, but mobility between the urban working class and the middle sectors did exist, at least in Argentina. Between 1895 and 1914 approximate-

⁸ Statistics on the nationality of ownership of Chilean commerce appear in Chile, *Anuario estadístico* (1914), IX, 131. For nationalities of industrial ownership, see *ibid.*, VII, 10. Data on the national background of the Chilean middle sectors appear in Chile, *Censo . . . de 1907*, 1299-1300.

⁹ Information on real wages in Argentina is found in Luis V. Sommi, *La revolución del 90*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires, 1957), 65; and in Samuel L. Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics in Argentina* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1967), 23. For information on real wages in Chile, see Julio César Jobet, *Precursores del pensamiento social de Chile* (2 vols., Santiago, 1955-1956), II, 66-67.

¹⁰ Donald S. Castro, "The Development of Argentine Government Immigration Policy, 1862-1914," (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1968), Chapter 8, 33. For extended comment on the living standards of the Buenos Aires working class, see José Panettieri, *Los trabajadores en tiempos de la inmigración masiva en la Argentina, 1870-1910* (La Plata, 1966), 58, 69-72.

ly one-fifth of that country's urban working-class population was able to enter the expanding middle groups.¹¹

These rapidly changing nations were still dominated by a few thousand upper-class families, who nearly monopolized social prestige, almost completely controlled politics, and strongly influenced intellectual life. Particularly in Argentina upper-class status before 1914 required a distinguished Castilian lineage. Relatively few immigrants or their offspring had entered the social elites.¹²

The economic base of the upper class in Argentina was possession of the nation's best agricultural and pastoral land. A few hundred families, for example, owned most of the fertile land in Buenos Aires province, perhaps the richest agricultural region in Argentina. The landed elite did not enact a workable homestead law, and by 1914 only about thirty thousand immigrants were rural landowners.¹³ In Chile upper-class wealth was derived from nitrate mining as well as from the ownership of the large estates in the rich Central Valley.¹⁴ The only important nucleus of immigrant landholdings was in the remote southern provinces.

The ruling groups in both countries still generally accepted classical economic liberalism, including the principle that prosperity and growth require maximum international mobility of labor. Powerful interest groups, including Argentine landholders and Chilean mine owners, were convinced that immigration of cheap wage labor was essential to their prosperity as well as to national progress. As a result, the governments of both republics allowed foreigners to enter and settle virtually unrestricted. This created a dilemma, for the Argentine and Chilean elites also feared that immigration was the basic cause of urban social problems, some of which, like labor unrest and anarchism, directly challenged the ruling groups in their monopoly of power.

The crowds of tired, dirty, unemployed drifters and beggars who poured into the major cities of both nations constituted an obvious

¹¹ Information on social mobility is in Gino Germani, "La movilidad social en la Argentina," in Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Movilidad social en la sociedad industrial* (Buenos Aires, 1963), 321, 324.

¹² José Luis de Imaz, *La clase alta de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1962), 13; Raúl Alarcón Pino, *La clase media en Chile, orígenes, características, e influencias* (Santiago, 1947), 81.

¹³ Argentine Republic, *Tercer censo nacional*, V, 837; Thomas F. McGann, *Argentina, Estados Unidos y el sistema interamericano, 1880-1914* (Buenos Aires, 1960), 31-32, 55, 57; Sergio Bagú, *Evolución histórica de la estratificación social en la Argentina, 1870-1910* (Buenos Aires, 1966), 37.

¹⁴ Alberto Edwards Vives, *La fronda aristocrática*, 5th ed. (Santiago, 1959), 16.

urban problem. In Argentina evidence suggests that some of these unfortunates were immigrants. One author in 1910 reported that seventy-three percent of the inmates in the Buenos Aires beggars' asylum were foreigners. Similarly *La Nación* noted during an unemployment crisis in 1914 that over ninety percent of those seeking public assistance had been born abroad.¹⁵

Argentine journalists and sociologists were quick to use such data to support their contention that immigration was the prime cause of rising pauperism.¹⁶ These writers tended to ignore the desire for a decent job and livelihood that had led most of the newcomers to emigrate and instead assumed that many were unprincipled parasites, able to work but preferring to beg. An example of such xenophobic slander occurs in the play *La pobre gente* by Florencio Sánchez. An Argentine woman asks a friend, "Do you remember the *turca* who used to live upstairs? . . . Well, now she is rich, earning all she wants by . . . sending her children out to beg."¹⁷

Writers like Sánchez who equated mendicancy with immigration were not presenting a balanced analysis. Sickness and ignorance had created pauperism since colonial times in Argentina; immigration was only a contributing factor to a complex socio-economic problem.¹⁸ Furthermore, according to travellers' accounts, many of Buenos Aires' paupers were not foreigners but obviously nationals.¹⁹

There was little indication that Chilean paupers included many immigrants. Nonetheless, some journalists and politicians attempted to blame Chile's foreign-born population for the increasing number of beggars visible in the growing cities. Without offering supporting evidence these persons maintained that many foreigners were of such low quality that they avoided work, drifted into pauperism, and made that problem much worse than it would otherwise have been. Accord-

¹⁵ Cayetano Carbonell, *Orden y trabajo* (2 vols., Buenos Aires, 1910), II, 3; *La Nación*, November 19, 1914, 7.

¹⁶ A few examples include: *La Nación*, May 20, 1907, 6; Emilio Zuccarini, "Los exponentes psicológicos del carácter argentino; evolución del gaucho al atorrante," *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, III (1904), 191, 193; E. de Cires, "La inmigración en Buenos Aires," *Revista argentina de ciencias políticas*, IV (September, 1912), 737; Miguel Cané, *Expulsión de extranjeros (Apuntes)* (Buenos Aires, 1899), 112.

¹⁷ Florencio Sánchez, *La pobre gente* (first performed, 1904), in Dardo Cúneo (ed.), *Teatro completo de Florencio Sánchez*, 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires, 1964), 215. Another popular literary work which emphasized the large number of immigrant beggars was Julián Martel (pseud. of José Miró), *La bolsa* (Buenos Aires, 1959 ed.), 11.

¹⁸ Sergio Bagú, *Estructura social de la colonia* (Buenos Aires, 1952), 117.

¹⁹ Jules Huret, *La Argentina de Buenos Aires al Gran Chaco* (2 vols., Paris, 1910?), I, 79.

ing to Senator Vicente Reyes, the beggars of Santiago and Valparaíso had been recruited by Chilean colonization agents in alleged centers of vice like Marseilles, "where the very scum of the emigrants . . . who live in caves and have neither notions of morality nor habits of labor, await passage."²⁰ Newspaper editorialists would add that immigration had brought to Chile hundreds of European Gypsies, a people whom *El Mercurio* likened to "ants, rabbits, or locusts," in their alleged appetite for begging or for extracting money disreputably.²¹

In Argentina a problem more serious than pauperism was the rapidly rising urban crime rate, particularly in Buenos Aires. Between 1887 and 1912 the city's population tripled while the number of crimes reported increased seven times. By 1914 Buenos Aires was notorious for its professional thieves, pickpockets, and racketeers.²² The sudden rise of Argentine crime was at least partially due to rapid social change and urbanization, which were dissolving the traditional bonds of a stable society and leaving a great mass of unattached individuals.²³

The many intellectuals who attempted to explain the causes of urban crime tended to overlook these complex social forces and instead blamed immigration. This was an arbitrary conclusion for which there was little statistical support.²⁴ Argentine writers often mentioned the Buenos Aires census of 1909, which reported that immigrants accounted for slightly less than half the city's population, but for 65.6 percent of the criminals apprehended between 1900 and 1909.²⁵ But the intellectuals did not mention other statistics which invalidated the conclusion they wished to draw. In the segment of the population most likely to commit crimes—that is, males of age twenty and over—77.2 percent (in 1914) were foreign born.²⁶ Thus nearly four-fifths of Buenos Aires' adult males were foreigners, but

²⁰ Chile, Senado, *Boletín de sesiones*. (Hereafter cited as BSS), Sesiones extraordinarias, November 8, 1906, 196. Also see *El Porvenir*, October 29, 1905, 1; *La Lei*, November 29, 1908, 1; *El Mercurio*, February 18, 1913, 3.

²¹ *El Mercurio*, May 21, 1912, 3; Also, *La Lei*, November 29, 1908, 1; *El Mercurio*, March 18, 1912, 15.

²² For comments on the extent of crime in Buenos Aires see M. A. Lancelotti, *La criminalidad en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1914), 13; Domingo F. Casadevall, *El tema de la mala vida en el teatro nacional* (Buenos Aires, 1957), 45, 89; Juan José Sebrelli, *Buenos Aires: vida cotidiana y alienación*, 5th ed. (Buenos Aires, 1965), 126.

²³ McGann, *Argentina, Estados Unidos*, 65.

²⁴ One author who presented a balanced analysis of the causes of crime was Lancelotti, *La criminalidad en Buenos Aires*, 47.

²⁵ Buenos Aires (City), *Censo general . . . de 1909*, II, 300.

²⁶ Statistics from Germani, *Política y sociedad*, 199.

the evidence indicates that this group was responsible for only about two-thirds of the capital's crimes.

Aside from citing statistics, Argentine intellectuals who commented on the causes of crime invoked theories of biological determinism to fix the blame on immigration. Whereas writers of an earlier generation had employed racial theories to argue that immigrants were ethnically superior and would improve the mestizo population, by 1905 sociologists were beginning to uphold the Argentine creole as racially superior to several immigrant groups, including the Italians and the Spaniards. Because they were biologically inferior, the theory continued, these immigrant groups inherited stronger propensities to commit crime than did the creoles. This theory was first and most explicitly formulated in Argentina by Cornelio Moyano Gacitúa, a sociology professor at the University of Córdoba. His *La delincuencia argentina* (1905), the first study devoted specifically to Argentine crime and heavily biased against immigrants, influenced other scholars of the time, including Eusebio Gómez, who became Argentina's best-known criminologist before 1914.²⁷

Relying on the theory that criminal tendencies were biologically transmitted, Argentine writers repeatedly argued that immigration was bringing to Buenos Aires "the anti-social scum of the rest of the world" and permanently instilling strong criminal tendencies in the Argentine population.²⁸ Stereotyped images of immigrant criminals appeared in many articles published in the *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología*, the professional journal of Argentine criminologists. The typical Italian immigrant, wrote one contributor, always bore "his inseparable steel knife," which he was quick to use because of "his volcanic temperament and his excitable, aggressive passions."²⁹

Men of letters joined the sociologists in casting the foreigner as

²⁷ Cornelio Moyano Gacitúa's ideas first appeared in an article, "La delincuencia argentina ante algunas cifras y teorías," *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, IV (1905), 162-181, and then were expanded into his book, *La delincuencia argentina ante algunas cifras y teorías* (Córdoba, 1905); For the influence of Moyano Gacitúa on Eusebio Gómez, see the latter's "La mala vida en Buenos Aires," *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, VI (1907), 437. For an early statement of Argentine biological theories of crime, see Miguel A. Lancelotti, "La herencia en la criminalidad," *Revista nacional*, XXV (June 1898), 402.

²⁸ José Gregorio Rossi, "La criminalidad profesional en Buenos Aires," *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicados a las ciencias afines*, II (1903), 173; Other criminologists who echoed this view included Eusebio Gómez, *Criminología argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1912), xiii; Eusebio Gómez, "La mala vida en Buenos Aires," 436-437.

²⁹ Héctor A. Taborda, "El clandestinismo en las prisiones," *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines*, VII (1908), 708.

a criminal. In a short story, *La venganza del capataz*, Manuel Ugarte portrayed an Italian immigrant who diabolically hatches a plan to torture to death his unfaithful wife and her lover. "His wild and turbulent blood, which united all the atavisms of the Mediterranean, could not be content with a brusque execution," commented Ugarte.³⁰

The Italians received equally cutting treatment in another genre, the *sainetes*, short plays popular during the early twentieth century. Alberto Novión's *La cantina* portrayed the Italians of Buenos Aires' "Boca" waterfront area as drunken vagrants who constantly brandished huge daggers. After witnessing one of these Italians knife another to death, an Argentine army officer bitterly scoffs: "Look at him! . . . They say it is these men who bring progress and civilization."³¹ Equally critical was José S. Álvarez, a short story writer popular around 1910. His *Mundo lunfardo* presented a lurid description of Italian thieves in Buenos Aires.³²

Perhaps because of the middle-sector character of Chilean immigration, fewer writers identified it as a principal cause of crime. But the Conservative Party's newspaper *El Porvenir* nonetheless attempted to convince its readers that foreign-born thieves and vagrants were rapidly increasing Chile's criminal population. This was so, claimed one editorialist, because immigration is a "safety valve the European countries use to release their undesirable social elements."³³

Nicolás Palacios, the most famed Chilean writer of his time, expressed his strong agreement with this indictment of immigration. Palacios, who claimed to follow Gustave Le Bon's racial principles, in 1904 published *Raza chilena*, an immensely popular book which presented racial theories startling to the Chilean reading public. Rejecting nineteenth-century Positivists who scorned the Chilean mestizo as inferior, he upheld the Chileans as a superior race. Palacios asserted that the early settlers of Chile were not Latins but a more "advanced" race, the descendants of the Gothic peoples who had arrived in northern Spain after the fall of Rome. In Chile, the theory continued, these Germanic conquistadores mixed with another allegedly superior race, the Araucanian Indians. Issuing from this

³⁰ Manuel Ugarte, "La venganza del capataz," in *Cuentos de la pampa* (Buenos Aires, 1903), 148.

³¹ Alberto Novión, *La cantina* (first performed, 1908) in *Revista teatral*, No. 29 (Buenos Aires, 1920), 2, 9.

³² José S. Álvarez, *Mundo lunfardo*, in *Cuentos con policías* (Buenos Aires, 1962), 82.

³³ *El Porvenir*, October 9, 1903, 3; Also, March 19, 1898, 1; April 24, 1901, 1; October 20, 1905, 3.

mixture, Palacios continued, was the Chilean mestizo race, a strong people which inherited less tendency toward criminality than Italians or Spaniards, the two largest European immigrant groups in Chile. To substantiate this theory of criminality, Palacios presented only one set of statistical data, which counted (in 1896) one Chilean criminal per 107 citizens, but one foreign criminal per thirty-five foreign-born residents.³⁴ To condemn Chile's small foreign population as a major cause of crime on the basis of this sketchy data was unjustified.

Closely related to the problem of crime were prostitution and the white-slave trade, both of which had made Buenos Aires infamous by 1914.³⁵ The consensus of Argentine writers was that white-slavers, pimps, and prostitutes were predominantly foreign-born. The white-slaver allegedly booked first-class passage to Buenos Aires in order to avoid the immigration inspectors, who examined only second-class and steerage passengers. Once in the Argentine capital, he would deliver his human cargo to some large entrepreneur or would himself set up business. Such was the theme of Pedro Pico's *sainete*, *Así empieza una historia*, in which a nefarious Spanish immigrant agent sends an unsuspecting immigrant girl into a career of prostitution. After studying the problem in his law school dissertation, the brilliant young intellectual Manuel Gálvez charged that foreigners in Argentina were stimulating the growth of a huge industry based on traffic in human flesh.³⁶ Similar complaints resounded both in the newspapers and in Congress.³⁷ But publicists tended to use immigration as an easy explanation for prostitution, which had long existed in Buenos Aires,³⁸ rather than investigate the manifold social and economic factors which might have caused it to flourish.

Prostitution did not trouble Chileans as much as the chronic alcoholism, which appeared in the cities during the 1890s. Hesitating to investigate the poverty and malnutrition which turned Chilean workers to drink,³⁹ several writers argued that the immigrants who produced and sold alcoholic beverages were responsible. The Italians,

³⁴ Nicolás Palacios, *Raza chilena* (Valparaíso, 1904), 4, 32, 48-52, 249.

³⁵ Casadevall, *El tema de la mala vida*, 151.

³⁶ Pedro Pico, *Así empieza una historia* (first performed, 1914), in *Teatro nacional*, No. 35 (Buenos Aires, 1914); also see Manuel Gálvez, *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga; opiniones sobre la vida argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1910), 207.

³⁷ For example, *La Prensa*, August 24, 1911, 8; *La Nación*, September 1, 1913, 11; September 2, 1913, 11; speech of Alfredo L. Palacios, in Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* (hereafter cited as *DSCD*), May 29, 1907, 71; speech of Arturo M. Bas, *DSCD*, September 17, 1913, 324.

³⁸ Bagú, *Estructura social de la colonia*, 125-126.

³⁹ Fredrick B. Pike, *Chile and the United States, 1880-1962* (Notre Dame, 1963), 106, 278.

exclaimed one editorialist, were hardly a civilizing factor, for "they have opened taverns on every corner in Santiago and the other important towns, certainly not to educate or regenerate the people, but to corrupt them, exploit them, and addict them to vice!"⁴⁰ German immigrants, who had introduced modern brewing techniques and who nearly monopolized the industry after 1890, were the targets of other writers.⁴¹

Intense labor unrest and the emergence of a militant anarchist movement deeply troubled many Argentines and Chileans during the quarter-century preceding World War I. Bombings, assassinations, and endemic labor turbulence reminded the upper classes that urban workers were deeply dissatisfied. Troubled by the unrest and the mounting violence which afflicted Argentine and Chilean cities, intellectuals cast about for explanations.

Although a number of investigators suggested that the precarious economic situation which the urban masses faced might explain labor unrest, many writers in both countries attributed it to immigration. They based this belief on inaccurate assumptions about the nature of Argentine and Chilean society, to the effect that social mobility and economic opportunity prevented the emergence of a class struggle as in Europe. According to this reasoning, which assumed that the objective conditions for class conflict were not present, urban social unrest could result only from foreign agitators, determined to revolutionize Argentine and Chilean life.

Social mobility did exist, but not to the extent indicated by intellectuals like Emilio Rodríguez Mendoza, a columnist in *El Mercurio*. He argued that in Chile, "no one is hungry who wants to work . . . Prosperity is within the reach and at the disposition of everyone. It is simply a question of work."⁴² In Argentina no one developed this Horatio Alger theme more thoroughly than the prolific social commentator Lucas Ayarragaray. In a 1912 essay he contended that "the European social problem is absolutely unknown here; we have neither castes, privileges, feudal complexions, nor historical injustices." The class struggle, proclaimed Ayarragaray, can hardly exist "where classes do not exist."⁴³ Seemingly unaware that

⁴⁰ *La Lei*, March 13, 1906, 2.

⁴¹ Palacios, *Raza chilena*, 250-251; Heriberto López, "El germanismo en Chile," *Revista nacional* (Buenos Aires), XXIX (May 1899), 445.

⁴² *El Mercurio*, June 29, 1910, 3.

⁴³ Lucas Ayarragaray, "Socialismo argentino y legislación obrera," *La Nación*, April 26, 1912, 7; For a similar statement by one of the nation's most respected intellectuals, see Joaquín V. González, *El juicio del siglo; ó cien años de historia argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1913), 250.

speculation had pushed land prices to prohibitive heights and that graft and maladministration were making the colonization laws almost ineffective, Argentine intellectuals claimed that a discontented worker could easily escape the city and become a small landowner.⁴⁴ With few exceptions, the articulate classes of both countries stubbornly continued to associate the rise of anarchism with European immigration.

Some factual basis existed to support this conviction, for European anarcho-syndicalist and socialist labor organizers had been arriving in both republics throughout the 1890s. In Chile *El Mercurio* began to note with alarm the arrival of foreign anarchists as early as 1894. Anarcho-syndicalism enjoyed little success during the next two decades, though several Europeans did help Valparaíso-born Luis Emilio Recabarren to found the modern Chilean socialist movement.⁴⁵

When three bloody episodes of urban labor unrest shook Chile in the first years of the twentieth century, upper-class opinion directed its wrath against foreign labor organizers, terming them unscrupulous "agitators" who goaded the usually docile Chilean workers into strikes and protests. This argument first appeared in 1903, when Valparaíso's stevedores and draymen began a protracted strike, leading to several bloody confrontations with the police as well as to massive arson and looting. The author who commented most extensively on this outbreak of violence was Benjamín Vicuña Subercaseaux, the rich, well-travelled scion of two leading families and one of Chile's most respected writers. He claimed that the Valparaíso working class was well paid and had no reason to strike. Only "waves of human scum thrown upon our beaches by other countries" could have caused the turmoil.⁴⁶ Other Chilean writers agreed that the leaders of the Valparaíso affair were "drifters and adventurers" who had migrated from "the most rotten holes of the Old World."⁴⁷

Two years after the Valparaíso bloodshed, organized labor in Santiago called a general strike to protest a new import duty on Argentine cattle which greatly increased meat prices. Again mass violence broke out, and this time the turmoil did not subside until the police

⁴⁴ *La Prensa*, April 11, 1910, 9.

⁴⁵ *El Mercurio*, September 7, 1894, 2; Julio César Jobet, *Luis Emilio Recabarren. Los orígenes del movimiento obrero y del socialismo chilenos* (Santiago, 1955), 102-105; Hernán Ramírez Necochea, *Historia del movimiento obrero en Chile; antecedentes, siglo XIX* (Santiago, 1956), 205.

⁴⁶ Benjamín Vicuña Subercaseaux, *El socialismo revolucionario y la cuestión social en Europa y en Chile* (Santiago, 1908), 235.

⁴⁷ Florentino Abarca, *La decadencia de Chile* (Valparaíso, 1904), 196; The casualties of the Valparaíso disorders are listed in *El Mercurio*, May 13, 1903, 5.

had killed at least sixty people and wounded several hundred more. According to *El Porvenir*, the voice of the agricultural interests which profited from the cattle tariff, the cause of this tragedy must have been professional revolutionary agitators expelled from Europe and Argentina. Vicuña Subercaseaux agreed and added that the real exploiters of the laboring class were not the capitalists, but foreign agitators and labor organizers, who "profit like pariahs at the cost of the hunger and life of the people."⁴⁸

More tragic than this unrest in Santiago and Valparaíso was a massacre of unarmed workers which occurred during a general strike in the nitrate mining center of Iquique. On December 21, 1907, determined to prevent mass demonstrations, the commanding officer of the local military garrison ordered a huge crowd of strikers that had gathered in the main plaza to disperse. The throng refused, the troops opened machine-gun fire, and hundreds fell dead or mortally wounded. The government officially admitted the death of 267, but the real figure was probably much higher.⁴⁹ News of this slaughter shocked all Chile, but several congressmen and intellectuals tried to relieve the government of responsibility by throwing the blame on "professional agitators . . . who are known criminals" expelled from Europe.⁵⁰ After the 1907 tragedy newspapers began to argue that Chile should bar further immigration of urban workers and welcome only agricultural colonists, who presumably would promote development and prosperity, but would not create labor unrest or social problems.⁵¹

Troubled by the unrest and carnage of these years, Chilean intellectuals and journalists began to call for legislation to forbid entry of foreign labor agitators and to expel those already in the country. They reasoned that Chile's long tradition of legal equality between foreigners and citizens was outmoded, since most European countries as well as Argentina (in 1902) and Brazil had enacted laws against foreign agitators. The argument continued that without such a law, Chile was rapidly becoming "what England is in the Old World—

⁴⁸ Vicuña Subercaseaux, *El socialismo revolucionario*, 73; Oscar Álvarez Andrews, *Historia del desarrollo industrial de Chile* (Santiago, 1936), 168-169; *El Porvenir*, October 29, 1905, 5.

⁴⁹ Álvarez Andrews, *Historia del desarrollo*, 169, 225; Guillermo Kaempffer Villagrán, *Así sucedió; sangrientos episodios de la lucha obrera en Chile* (Santiago, 1962), 122.

⁵⁰ Speech of Luis Izquierdo, in Chile, Cámara de Diputados, *Boletín de sesiones* (hereafter cited as *BSCD*), Sesiones extraordinarias, January 4, 1908, 837; *El Mercurio*, December 26, 1907, 3; Vicuña Subercaseaux, *El socialismo revolucionario*, 234-235.

⁵¹ *El Mercurio*, April 22, 1909, 11.

the asylum of all those pursued by justice.’⁵² Newspapers supported the campaign for restrictive legislation by portraying immigrants in the most unflattering terms. One cartoon in the conservative *La Unión* presented a wild-eyed, grubby anarchist debarking in Valparaíso. A notice on his suitcase proclaims: “Graduate of the Old World anarchist university. Arriving to give lessons and courses in Chile.”⁵³ But those who wanted to limit immigration found that liberal economic theories, still widely accepted in Chile, together with the nation’s cosmopolitan tradition, were difficult obstacles to overcome. Congress did not enact antiforeign legislation until December 12, 1918, and then perhaps as a result of the recent triumph of Bolshevism in Russia. The so-called “Residence Law” of that date enabled the government to expel foreigners who had been condemned abroad for crimes, who had no useful occupations, or who preached violent social or political change.⁵⁴

In Argentina a movement also was gathering momentum to quell working-class unrest through restrictions on immigration. And as in Chile, there was some truth to allegations that unrestricted immigration was allowing European labor organizers to proselytize. The militant Italian anarchist Pedro Gori, for example, organized anarchist syndicates and founded working-class newspapers during his sojourn in Argentina between 1898 and 1902.⁵⁵ By the latter year, the anarchists had begun to organize Buenos Aires’ huge unskilled laboring class. Socialist-affiliated unions generally appealed only to railroad workers, skilled laborers, and artisans.

Troubled by the emergence of militant urban workers determined to improve their economic position, some Argentine intellectuals began to criticize the nation’s traditional policies of unrestricted immigration. To convince the public that foreign anarchists were at the root of the unrest, newspaper and magazine writers stereotyped the typical anarchist as a fat, swarthy, and ugly Italian or Spaniard bristling with knives, bombs, and other lethal weapons. The anarchist

⁵² *El Mercurio*, September 24, 1913, 3; similar appeals for legislation against foreign agitators appeared in *El Mercurio*, March 6, 1907, 3; May 2, 1907, 3; May 26, 1908, 1; and June 27, 1909, 3; *BSCD*, Sesiones extraordinarias, November 19, 1909, 563; *BSCD*, Sesiones ordinarias, July 25, 1910, 931; *BSS*, Sesiones extraordinarias, October 29, 1907, 214.

⁵³ *La Unión*, August 22, 1912, 1.

⁵⁴ Chile, *Boletín de las leyes i decretos del gobierno* (2 vols., Santiago, 1918), II, 1558-1562.

⁵⁵ Sebastián Marotta, *El movimiento sindical argentino: su génesis y desarrollo* (4 vols., Buenos Aires, 1960-1963), I, 107; background on Argentine anarchism and labor violence during the period is in S. Fanny Simon, “Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism in South America,” *HAHR*, XXVI (February 1946), 38-59.

was allegedly an unprincipled, shiftless adventurer, anxious only to make trouble in whatever part of the world he chanced to land.⁵⁶ "Today I am in one place. Tomorrow they'll throw me out, and I'll be somewhere else," complains a Spanish immigrant anarchist in *Los fuertes*, a *sainete* by Carlos María Pacheco.⁵⁷

The most persistent backer of restrictive legislation in Argentina was Miguel Cané, a well-known diplomat, essayist, and champion of the aristocracy. After returning from an ambassadorial post in Paris, where French laws against foreign agitators had impressed him, Cané claimed in an 1897 essay that thousands of "criminals and . . . madmen" were arriving in Argentina and were "destined to fill our prisons or to be a slow poison for our society."⁵⁸ From his Senate seat and in a book published in 1899, Cané emphasized that Argentina, defenseless in the face of the anarchist threat, must forbid the entry of undesirable immigrants and expel those already in the country. To this end Cané introduced a "Residence Law" in the Senate on June 8, 1899.⁵⁹

The government hesitated, however, to reverse Argentina's half-century-old tradition of unlimited immigration, which had been a principal cause of national prosperity and growth. Then a huge anarchist-led general strike at the height of the harvest season in 1902 threatened to halt Argentine exports, which would seriously imperil the republic's European credit standing.⁶⁰ President Roca called Congress into special session on November 22 and asked it to act against foreign agitators and declare a state of siege which would force the strike to end.⁶¹

With ill-concealed haste, Congress enacted a Residence Law on the first day of the special session. During the brief debate, most speakers emphasized that sinister foreign agitators were determined to subvert Argentina's economy and were "the only cause of the present

⁵⁶ For example, "Inmigración peligrosa," *Caras y caretas*, XII (June 12, 1909).

⁵⁷ Carlos M. Pacheco, *Los fuertes* (first performed, 1906?) in *Bambalinas*, No. 200 (Buenos Aires, 1922), 6.

⁵⁸ Miguel Cané, *Notas e impresiones* (Buenos Aires, 1901), 135.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 133-134, 190; Cané, *Expulsión de extranjeros*, 7, 125; Argentine Republic, Congreso Nacional, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores* (hereafter cited as *DSCS*), November 22, 1902, 664; *La Prensa*, November 21, 1902, 5.

⁶⁰ Diego Abad de Santillán, *La F.O.R.A. Ideología y trayectoria del movimiento obrero revolucionario en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1933), 105-107; Alberto Belloni, *Del anarquismo al peronismo: historia del movimiento obrero argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1960), 17; *La Prensa*, November 21, 1902, 5.

⁶¹ *DSCD*, November 22, 1902, 415.

strife," as Minister of the Interior Joaquín V. González put it.⁶² The congressional majority brushed aside a few dissenting voices and enthusiastically approved the Residence Law, modern Argentina's first legislation designed specifically to discriminate against the foreign-born. Its principal provisions empowered the executive to expel any foreigner whose conduct the president believed dangerous and to prevent the entry of foreigners the executive branch believed might become troublemakers.⁶³

Many Argentines who agreed that immigration was the basic cause of anarchism nonetheless strongly opposed the Residence Law. *La Nación*, for example, emphasized that unrestricted immigration had been the keystone of Argentine progress and civilization and that the new legislation might discredit the republic in Europe and thus discourage the migration of agricultural laborers upon whom the economy depended.⁶⁴ In 1904 opponents of the law in Congress unsuccessfully tried to repeal it.⁶⁵ The following year Roberto J. Payró, a well-known author of socialist tendencies, wrote his play *Marco Severi* to portray the injustice and hardships inflicted by the Residence Law on immigrants who had become good citizens.⁶⁶

During the years following passage of the Residence Law labor agitation continued, and strikes increased in frequency. The most severe violence occurred in May 1909, when 200,000 Buenos Aires workers called a week-long general strike to protest the bloody police repression of a May Day anarchist meeting. The strike ended only after the government threw five thousand soldiers and armed police into the capital and arrested hundreds of strikers.⁶⁷ Growing class hatred in Buenos Aires was bound to precipitate more violence, which suddenly exploded on November 14, 1909, when a gunman assassinated the metropolitan police chief, Ramón L. Falcón.

The assassin was a Russian worker named Radowidsky, a fact

⁶² Speech of Joaquín V. González, *DSCD*, November 22, 1902, 415; speech of Domingo Pérez in *DSCS*, November 22, 1902, 658; also *DSCD*, November 22, 1902, 379, 427; and *DSCS*, November 22, 1902, 657, 662-663.

⁶³ Carlos Sánchez Viamonte, *Biografía de una ley antiargentina, Ley 4144* (Buenos Aires, 1956), analyzes in detail the provisions and the implications of the Residence Law.

⁶⁴ For example, *La Nación*, January 8, 1903, 5; February 18, 1903, 3; September 27, 1903, 5.

⁶⁵ *DSCD*, May 27, 1904, 195-198; also see: *DSCD*, July 18, 1904, 441-448, 515, 556-559.

⁶⁶ Roberto J. Payró, *Marco Severi* (first performed, 1905) in *Teatro completo* (Buenos Aires, 1956), 131-187, especially 172, 187.

⁶⁷ Jacinto Oddone, *Historia del socialismo argentino* (2 vols., Buenos Aires, 1934), II, 47-53; Santillán, *La F.O.E.A.*, 163, 190-193; Belloni, *Del anarquismo al peronismo*, 25; *La Nación*, May 2, 1909, 8.

which gave the elites a good excuse to start a xenophobic campaign. Soon after the murder several socially prominent young men formed the *Juventud Autonomista*, Argentina's first avowed anti-immigrant society. Although this group was short lived, its intention "openly to combat the ideas of certain immigrant groups, which are the cause of our present social commotion"⁶⁸ foreshadowed the rash of ultra-nationalist groups which began to appear after World War I. At Falcoón's funeral distinguished citizens bitterly attacked radical immigrants and warned that "the exaggerated cosmopolitanism of our laws has brought us to the brink of social disorganization."⁶⁹ Both major Buenos Aires newspapers now abandoned their opposition to restrictive immigration legislation and strongly criticized anarchist and socialist immigrants.⁷⁰

The campaign against foreign labor organizers and anarchists culminated in 1910 during the centennial celebrations of Argentine independence. Hoping to impress the world with Argentina's progress, the government organized elaborate festivities. When the anarchist leadership, still bitter over the repression of 1909, announced plans for a general strike during the centennial festivities, Congress reacted on May 14 by declaring a state of siege.⁷¹

That night, the Buenos Aires police, joined by numerous upper-class volunteers who formed a "citizen militia," attempted to eliminate the capital's working-class leadership. The vigilante mob sacked offices and newspaper plants, while the police arrested and deported scores of labor leaders. The following night the citizen mob, unhindered by the police, struck at Buenos Aires' so-called "Russian district" and destroyed the property of several Russian Jews thought to be sympathetic to the working-class movement.⁷² A few days later the centennial celebrations took place peacefully, but in a grim city whose angry passions were repressed only by thousands of troops and police.

Violence next struck Buenos Aires on June 27, when a bomb exploded during a performance at the luxurious Colón theater, a gathering place of Argentine high society. The police, unable to identify the culprit, finally accused a Russian anarchist named Romanoff,

⁶⁸ *La Nación*, November 15, 1909, 9.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, November 17, 1909, 6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, November 16, 1909, 6; *La Prensa*, November 15, 1909, 8.

⁷¹ Santillán, *La F.O.R.A.*, 213-215; Belloni, *Del anarquismo al peronismo*, 26; Enrique Dickmann, *Recuerdos de un militante socialista* (Buenos Aires, 1949), 185; *DSCD*, May 14, 1910, 124-125, 133-134.

⁷² *La Vanguardia*, September 30, 1910, 1; *La Prensa*, May 14, 1910, 10; Dickmann, *Recuerdos de un militante socialista*, 186; Marotta, *El movimiento sindical argentino*, II, 73-77.

who was probably innocent.⁷³ Congress responded the next day with new antiforeign legislation, the Social Defense Law. The legislators, who vigorously applauded speeches attacking foreigners in the labor movement, were clearly using immigration as a scapegoat for Argentina's worsening social violence.⁷⁴ Aside from repeating the provisions of the Residence Law, the new law specifically prohibited the entry of anarchists and restricted anarchist meetings and demonstrations.⁷⁵ In contrast with the mixed reception received by the Residence Law Argentine upper-class opinion generally applauded the Social Defense Law.

Along with their support of tougher repressive legislation, Argentine writers by 1910 were questioning whether urban-directed immigration ought to continue. Similar to the editorials appearing in Chile's *El Mercurio* at about the same time, the Buenos Aires writers alleged that Argentina neither needed nor wanted more urban immigrants and welcomed only agricultural laborers.⁷⁶ To prevent further agglomeration of the foreign-born in the capital, some journalists urged that the government require immigrant ships to avoid Buenos Aires and dock at Rosario or Bahía Blanca, whence the immigrants would presumably move to the agricultural areas which needed labor. The government hastily rented an immigrant hostelry at Bahía Blanca. But after the first ship docked there in 1910, *La Nación* was dismayed to note that at least one third of the foreigners refused agricultural jobs and promptly entrained for Buenos Aires.⁷⁷ The newspapers seemingly did not realize that immigrants would continue to seek employment in the capital until the government enacted more liberal land policies.⁷⁸

This desire to reduce urban immigration reflected a widespread opinion among the Argentine upper classes that the foreign-born residents of Buenos Aires were responsible for the capital city's social problems and labor unrest. In the neighboring republic of Chile, the ruling groups were similarly troubled by working-class unrest and

⁷³ *La Prensa*, June 28, 1910, 11; Marotta, *El movimiento sindical argentino*, II, 81.

⁷⁴ *DSCD*, June 27, 1910, 297; 306-313; 315; *DSCS*, June 28, 1910, 204.

⁷⁵ *DSCD*, June 27, 1910, 310-311.

⁷⁶ Luis A. Bachini, "El problema de la inmigración," *Revista nacional*, XLVII (1910), 34.

⁷⁷ One journalist who suggested the Bahía Blanca hostelry was E. de Cires, "La criminalidad en Buenos Aires," *Revista argentina de ciencias políticas*, IV (July 1912), 501-502; Also see *La Nación*, November 4, 1910, 11; March 8, 1911, 10.

⁷⁸ Enrique Dickmann, "Inmigración y latifundia," *Revista argentina de ciencias políticas*, X (May 1915), 163, 168.

also established a pattern of blaming foreign-born agitators. The intellectuals and the government in both republics magnified far out of proportion the contribution of the Europeans to the rise of urban social problems. It was simpler for the Argentine and Chilean elites to blame the outsider than to admit that other and more complex causal factors, like the rise of modern cities, the economic exploitation of the working classes, and the decay of traditional social and economic institutions, might have been responsible. So strong was the belief that immigration was at the root of social problems that both governments enacted anti-foreign legislation, controverting policies designed to encourage immigration which Argentine and Chilean statesmen had constructed painstakingly during the previous half century. But neither nation seriously attempted to reduce the flow of immigration. Although the governing classes were convinced that it was a source of crime, agitation, and unrest, they also believed that it was an integral and necessary part of the international economic system upon which their own prosperity rested.