

The Cities of Spanish America 1825-1914: Economic and Social Aspects

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Article abstract

The paper distinguishes three stages in the history of Spanish- American cities in this period. The first (1825-1850) is one of slow and uneven urban growth; it is also one of social readjustment to the new political and economic realities of independence, republic and comparatively free external trade. The urban upper classes are deeply fragmented in the process; the largely peninsular mercantile group is replaced by a much more isolated and smaller one, dominated by the British; the base of political power becomes less urban, and the city elites linked with Church and state suffer in their income and prestige; the progress of egalitarian ideas corrodes traditional deference. The lower groups are affected by the decadence of slavery and in the middle of urban society free trade brings about a crisis of many traditional crafts and the flowering of other artisanal and trade activities. The second stage (from 1850 to the seventies) continues, under a veneer of modernization in the urban lifestyle, the trends of the previous quarter-century. Urban growth quickens, but is again very uneven; the role of the state begins to gain in significance in comparison with that of an expanding trade. During the third stage large cities finally receive the full impact of the development of the new economies, based in the growth of exports and the gradual unification of the internal market: the completion of railway systems, from Mexico to Chile and Argentina, is of course a decisive factor in this change. Demographic growth and a new mode of social differentiation (which includes the creation of a larger dependent middle class and a modern working-class of wage earners in large enterprises, in transportation and services rather than in manufacture) bring about a change in residential patterns and the use of urban space. Even so, Spanish-American cities retain many elements from their past, and are usually quite far from the model of the growing capitals of continental Europe during the same years.

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Résumé/Abstract

Le présent exposé distingue trois étapes dans l'histoire des villes hispano-américaines au cours de la période considérée. La première (1825-1850) se caractérise par une croissance urbaine lente et inégale; elle se signale aussi par une réadaptation social à de nouvelles réalités politiques et économiques: l'indépendance, l'avènement de la république et le libre-échange. Cette évolution provoque de profondes scissions entre les classes urbaines supérieures; la classe marchande, en grande partie d'origine péninsulaire, est remplacée par un autre groupe, plus petit et plus isolé, dominé par les Britanniques; les bases du pouvoir politique se déplacent vers l'extérieur des villes et l'élite urbaine, liée à l'Église et à l'État, voit son prestige et ses revenus diminuer; le progrès de l'égalitarisme érode les marques de déférence traditionnelles. Les classes inférieures sont touchées par le déclin de l'esclavage et, au cœur de la société urbaine, de nombreux métiers traditionnels périclitent, conséquence du libre-échange, propice par contre à l'éclosion de nouvelles activités artisanales et commerciales. La deuxième étape (de 1850 aux années 1870) présente, malgré la touche de modernisation que revêt le mode de vie urbain, les mêmes tendances que les vingt-cinq années précédentes: la croissance urbaine s'accélère, quoique toujours de façon très inégale; le rôle de l'État gagne en importance à l'instar de l'expansion commerciale. Durant la troisième et dernière période, les grandes villes bénéficient enfin entièrement de l'essor des nouvelles économies, fondées sur la croissance des exportations et l'unification progressive du marché intérieur: l'achèvement des réseaux ferroviaires, du Mexique au Chili et à l'Argentine, est évidemment un facteur décisif dans ces transformations. La croissance démographique et l'apparition de nouveaux facteurs de différenciation sociale (par exemple, la création d'une classe moyenne dépendante et plus nombreuse et d'une classe ouvrière moderne, formée de salariés se concentrant beaucoup plus dans les grandes entreprises, les industries du transport et des services que dans les manufactures) amènent des transformations dans le domaine résidentiel et l'utilisation de l'espace urbain. Malgré tout, les villes hispano-américaines conservent de leur passé plusieurs éléments caractéristiques, et leur développement n'a généralement qu'un rapport assez lointain avec celui des capitales tentaculaires de l'Europe continentale à cette époque.

The paper distinguishes three stages in the history of Spanish- American cities in this period. The first (1825-1850) is one of slow and uneven urban growth; it is also one of social readjustment to the new political and economic realities of independence, republic and comparatively free external trade. The urban upper classes are deeply fragmented in the process; the largely peninsular mercantile group is replaced by a much more isolated and smaller one, dominated by the British; the base of political power becomes less urban, and the city elites linked with Church and state suffer in their income and prestige; the progress of egalitarian ideas corrodes traditional deference. The lower groups are affected by the decadence of slavery and in the middle of urban society free trade brings about a crisis of many traditional crafts and the flowering of other artisanal and trade activities. The second stage (from 1850 to the seventies) continues, under a veneer of modernization in the urban lifestyle, the trends of the previous quarter-century. Urban growth quickens, but is again very uneven; the role of the state begins to gain in significance in comparison with that of an expanding trade. During the third stage large cities finally receive the full impact of the development of the new economies, based in the growth of exports and the gradual unification of the internal market: the completion of railway systems, from Mexico to Chile and Argentina, is of course a decisive factor in this change. Demographic growth and a new mode of social differentiation (which includes the creation of a larger dependent middle class and a modern working-class of wage earners in large enterprises, in transportation and services rather than in manufacture) bring about a change in residential patterns and the use of urban space. Even so, Spanish-American cities retain many elements from their past, and are usually quite far from the model of the growing capitals of continental Europe during the same years.

1825-1850

For the first quarter-century of independence, Spanish-American cities show contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, much testimony indicates increasing complexity in urban economic functions paralleled by increasing complexity in urban social structure. On a much more superficial level such testimony inventories the signs of emergence of a new style of urban life involving a widening consumption of hitherto unknown items to which access previously had been limited to a tiny minority. At the same time, the same testimony (or other equally trustworthy) presents a darker picture. They indicate the decay of some dimensions of older urban activity and of the persons and groups identified with them. Furthermore, information on changes in the population of Spanish-American cities is also a doubtful indicator, for the data are both incomplete and diffuse, covering a complex and contradictory reality in the small number

of widely separated urban centres, which were situated in very different geographic environments and were subject to greatly varying changes of fortune. For what it is worth, the available information suggests that if some of the principal cities by 1850 had populations substantially larger than in 1800, growth for most cities was surprisingly modest. Some, like Lima and Caracas, barely had the same number of people as half a century before. The data demonstrate rather clearly that the years following the achievement of independence were not typically ones of urban growth as vigorous as the last years of the eighteenth century or of those of the nineteenth century in so many parts of Spanish America.

There is, then, no sign of striking urban economic prosperity such as might be found in general increase in the population of the cities. Where increase occurred, it was based almost always on expansion of the export sector at a far more rapid rate than

the general economy. In the first quarter-century of independence, unlike later developments, the growth of the export sector led to more rapid increase in the total population than in the urban population. Examples of this phenomenon were Buenos Aires during the expansion of stockraising in the province and Havana in the middle of the Cuban sugar boom.

Comparison between the values for around 1800 and those approximately fifty years later undoubtedly lumps together indiscriminately the effects of war and post-war periods. If Caracas returned to the level of population it had had in 1800 only by the middle of the nineteenth century, part of the reason lay in the greater losses war had brought to it than to other cities. However, our consideration of the two periods together is not completely arbitrary since, between the two, there ran very real linkages.

Both contrast and linkage are particularly clear in one basic aspect of Spanish-American cities, namely, the shock caused by the collapse of the network of the imperial government in which they were the principal nuclei. With Spanish government there disappeared also a bureaucracy which, in its higher levels and even to a surprising extent in its lower ones, was more imperial than local. The bureaucracy which came to replace the older one did not achieve the same political and social prestige. Since it arose in the middle of the needs and fiscal shortages of war (and in the countries that became independent later), even of the immediate post-war years, remuneration was frequently less than in the past and practically never paid on time. In other aspects the position of the bureaucracy deteriorated even more. Political instability adversely affected careers during liberating revolutions which from the start proclaimed in prose and poetry that judicial and administrative posts were to be rewards of victory. The presence nearby of a turbulent political power limited seriously the sphere of action of the new bureaucracy, with the indirect consequence of reducing revenues from graft, which the less than rigorous control of the colonial period had permitted. If such revenues did not disappear completely, the flow had to be shared with the effective masters of political power.

Similar limitations and losses appeared in the positions of the clergy. Even before the tentative anticlerical measures of the 1820s (which varied greatly from one country to another), the position of the clergy had become much weaker, for royalists and revolutionaries moved against high and low clergy on the opposing side, exiling the obstinate and always imposing an obedience unknown in the past. Both sides in the conflicts resorted equally to the patrimony of churches and religious congregations in search of funds for carrying on the war, and that impoverishment could not be overcome easily in the post-war years.

Of the bureaucratic upper class inherited from the colonial period only the military sector gained more weight than before, but its base became less urban than in the wake of the Bourbon reforms, which implanted solidly in Spanish America a military organization of imperial dimensions. Even in Mexico, where the peculiar course of the war for independence assured a more marked institutional continuity between the vice-regal army and the one of the Three Guarantees, the sword that, in the name of the army, so often spelt doom to such varied political ventures was revealingly unsheathed on the rural estate of Manga de Clavo. In Spanish South America the new armies found geographic and human bases that were very different from the colonial ones. In a number of the new states (New Granada, Venezuela, and occasionally those of the Rio de la Plata) the armies even lost military superiority to militias or national guards recruited preponderantly in the countryside.

Thus far I have discussed the disappearance, with only limited replacement, of one of the bases of growth of urban

elites in the period of Bourbon reforms. The other base was the insertion of some of the Spanish-American cities into the new commercial network that resulted from the imperial policy of free trade within the empire, introduced in the years 1778-1782. In this aspect, the leaders of independence undoubtedly proposed to replace amply what they destroyed. Nearly everywhere in Spanish America, complaints against the Old Regime emphasized restrictions on external trade. However, if one sets aside the fact that even here achievements only occasionally matched the hopes of the movements for independence, changes in the structure of external trade were accompanied by a radical replacement of the groups operating in it. Replacement undoubtedly had been planned by the partisans of independence, but the replacement was merely that of the peninsular merchants who, in almost all the urban centres of continental Spanish America, had achieved a position of dominance. They were to have been replaced by their less powerful Creole rivals or by Creoles who entered long-distance trade in the excitement of the new possibilities. The revolutionary governments accelerated the liquidation of the Spanish merchants through deliberately discriminatory legislation which attacked both their capital holdings and their freedom to trade.

But although the liquidation of the holdings of Spanish merchants was carried out nearly to completion, the principal beneficiaries were not those who in 1810 hoped to secure the loot. On the contrary, the gainers were foreign merchants, the British above all in the first years, who, through their connections in the new unequal exchanges of the Spanish-American economies, were able to place themselves at the peak of the new commercial structure. For various reasons the new group did not constitute an elite of dimensions and functions comparable to those of the old one which, half a century before when its members came as immigrants from northern Spain, had managed to make itself dominant. The new masters of the market discovered only slowly that they had inserted themselves permanently in local society, and that their first speculative ventures must give way to regular, continuing trade. In consequence, they began to put down the roots that their position required, from purchase of dwellings appropriate to their high social standing to, in many instances, entering into marriage ties with families of the local elite.

Nevertheless, even then, the foreign merchants zealously clung to their status of foreigners. Trans-oceanic ties offered them too many advantages, not merely economic but also political, in dealing with governments inclined through fiscal need to arbitrary measures but restrained by a healthy respect for British power. The urge toward retention of foreign citizenship was reinforced in most instances by religious difference. Although the merchants did not try to flaunt it, it became a conspicuous reminder of the collapse of the unity of faith prevailing during the colonial period. For these reasons, the emergence of the new mercantile elite did not make them a local elite able to replace that of the Spanish merchants displaced by liberalization of foreign trade and by anti-Spanish legislation.

In addition to the erosion of the prosperity and power of urban elites, there was erosion of their prestige because of the action of factors already mentioned as well as others. A direct influence of the political change came in the adoption of an egalitarian ideology. The new governments, after some tentative measures in the 1820s, tried with notable success to limit the practical consequences of the adoption of the new political faith. Their efforts did not benefit primarily the urban elite but rather those sectors which in the post-revolutionary equilibrium of forces had gained relative influence and prosperity. Thus, it might appear that Pardo y Aliaga¹ of Lima stretches the basic facts of Peruvian reality when he alleges that under the Republic his son was reduced to the political and social level of Negroes

and Indians. Whatever might be found in the Peruvian constitution, neither Negroes nor Indians had gained genuine political influence. Undoubtedly, the author of such bitter lines knew that, but, if he considered the true state of affairs in Peru, he could not find consolation for the discomfort caused by the written clauses. As against the constitution with its statement that sovereignty resided in the people, who in overwhelming majority consisted of Indians and people of colour, the true state of affairs was that control of the country was disputed by generals from the highlands who were equally alien to the old colonial elite.

Distaste did not bring the urban elite to break with the new order, for it was too weak for such a dangerous adventure and, however bitter the dose, preferred to adapt. It may have hoped that adaptation would give it more than existence at a substantially lowered level of power and prosperity, a hope that sometimes came true. The son whom Pardo y Aliaga pitied, for the political environment in which he would have to live, knew how to prosper in it. He was Manuel Pardo, the principal figure in the development of guano exports, an industry in which many Lima aristocrats remade their fortunes after the middle of the nineteenth century. He founded the *Civilista Party*, which used the new democratic ideology as the weapon of the old elite in its quest for vengeance against its upstart provincial and military rivals. He even became president of Peru.

Nevertheless, in the first quarter century after independence, those satisfactions lay in an unforeseeable future. In the earlier years, the Creole elite with its roots in the colonial period enjoyed less influence in urban society than previously and had not been replaced by other elite sectors in an equally stable form. The same instability was evident in the lower levels of society, but for them the balance of gain and loss was less clearly negative than for the elite. The more egalitarian tone of city life can be ascribed only in rare instances to the rise of a new political consciousness, despite the acid comment of one observer in Buenos Aires that riders through the streets of that city, usually rural folk, no longer took care not to spatter mud on gentlemen walking in those streets. In Buenos Aires, however, politicization was intense. In Valparaiso a foreign observer reported indifference on the part of the populace to the radical political change of independence. In Panama the same observer was surprised at the apparent serenity with which the slaves accepted bondage while they chanted hymns to the new liberty that their masters had taught them.²

Still, we must not discount entirely the influence of the new ideology. We have other evidence that the slave owners had doubts about the resignation of their slaves, undoubtedly correct ones. The mere fact of independence created less stable political situations in which the whims of the urban mob carried greater weight. Even in the colonial period the authorities dared not ignore them with impunity.

On the whole, though, the freeing of trade had more rapid effect than political democratization in bringing to urban life a more egalitarian tone. Freer trade brought wider consumption of imported articles by social groups able to pay for them. Such expansion, of course, quickly reached a limit, most of all because the large rural areas, as was discovered too late, did not produce anything that could be sold in the international market. Meanwhile, in the cities, the use of dishes, shoes, changing clothing to meet fashion, and similar usages affected the life style of much larger groups than in the Bourbon period.

This broadening of consumption had an impact on the structure of smaller-scale trade, urban artisans, and in the lives of social groups engaged in such activities. All available evidence indicates that smaller-scale trade enjoyed even greater prosperity than in the colonial period.

Even though the new masters of the market ended by imitating their Spanish predecessors in all respects and did not give up direct retail trade with the public, the widening of the urban market meant that the proportion they handled directly was less than in the past. The number of retail merchants increased, and almost all were Creoles, for the elimination of Spaniards operated with even greater harshness on the less influential retailers. The commercial habits of the Creoles almost drove to desperation the importers who had to give them credit. The widening of the urban market was also apparent in the movement of previously home-based activities into it. In Buenos Aires, bakers, mills and bakeries multiplied, their number testimony to the popular consumption of wheaten bread rather than corn mush or bannocks. Bread, of course, was bought whereas corn for mush or bannocks was usually raised by the householders and ground to meal in the house. However, Buenos Aires, which led the area of Spanish America most drastically given new structure by the sweep of the exporting economies, anticipated the future of other cities. In Santiago, Chile, during the same years, the market preserved a double nature: the higher level controlled by a few import merchants supplied more limited social groups than in Buenos Aires (but far more numerous than in the Santiago of late colonial times), the lower level supporting a much greater number of Creole shopkeepers who sold the dishes and cloth produced by local artisans along with some imported items.

The most intensively adverse effects of freer trade were felt in the secondary sector. While such effects were clearly evident in the economies of the new nations as a whole, their impact was less on the larger Spanish-American cities. The colonial artisans, who produced in greater volume and contributed more significantly to the regional economies did not usually live in the larger cities even though there were some exceptions such as the textile centre of Puebla, in Mexico. They lived in the countryside, where costs were lower, either because recruitment was not entirely voluntary as was true of most the textile industry in the Andes, or because through craft production they could make use of slack periods in the agricultural year, as in the instances of Socorro in New Granada or Córdoba in the Rio de la Plata. Urban crafts were more varied and produced a lesser volume of more expensive products.

Changes in fashions and standards of consumption affected artisans greatly. When furniture and vessels in Spanish fashions were condemned as relics of a barbarous past, the artisans producing them suffered. Undoubtedly, imports alone could not provide full replacement, and even imported items brought new needs for services that created new opportunities for work. For example, the fashion of wall clocks and pocket watches meant that there had to be specialists to repair them. Closer if not more enlightened attention to health favoured increase in apothecaries. The new need to keep up with changing fashions in clothing brought even more rapid increase in the number of tailors and dressmakers.

So, on the one hand, the ruin brought by freer international trade to the artisans came with some countervailing effect; on the other, it wrought havoc in the living of entire groups that could not adapt to the new state of affairs and led to the emergence of others who knew how to profit from it. Among the last, the most prominent were the foreigners, who could frequently prosper rapidly through their temporary monopoly in the use of techniques that were not known locally. These foreigners used Creole workers. Relations between the two had tensions, above all because the workers had the potential to become dangerous rivals if they learned the technology of the processes which gave them employment. Despite all precautions, the feared mastery of techniques came to be. By the middle years of the century, the larger Spanish-American cities not only had

large groups of artisans and shopkeepers who were clearly differentiated from the lowest class, but also, at the head of the group, a few people socially unacceptable to the urban elite, but whose fortunes nevertheless rivalled those of the more prosperous upper class families.⁴

In the 1840s the presence of such groups began to be felt in urban life, even in politics. They were the people who wore jackets, in whom Rosas found firm support, people who disdained the frock coat of the traditional elite but dressed with a neatness that distinguished them from the lower class. In Santiago de Chile and in Bogotá they entered political life in a more usual way when they were brought into it to support the liberal sectors of the elite. Later, in 1870, Manuel Pardo, who already has been mentioned, organized a parade in Lima of peaceful battalions of artisans, dressed in frock coats and stovepipe hats. Such emphasis on dress and the ways that go with it indicates that the challenge by a potential new elite arisen from the prosperous lower class was, from the beginning, wavering and really contained a desire for incorporation in the older and somewhat battered group of the respectable.

The rise of new groups also meant movement toward a division of urban society reflecting economic differences more than in the past. The barriers to such change in the racial legislation of colonial times disappeared with the achievement of independence. Nevertheless, the actual extent of the change is not too clear. Around 1810 there were instances in which appeal to the brutal legal discriminations frustrated the rise of a family of mixed or legally inferior race. On the other hand, there were many more cases in which the legislation could not hinder such rise. Social discrimination continued in any case. After independence popular rumour frequently arbitrarily assigned mixed racial origins to the men favoured by the revolutionary changes.

The erosion of the system of castes among the urban lower class apparently was well advanced even before the wars of independence. John Chance⁵ finds it to have been greatly weakened in Oaxaca, a city in a region of dense Indian population; less detailed studies of other cities bear out his conclusions. Chance goes on to suggest a change from a society of castes to one of classes with a proletariat as in capitalism. His own data do not oblige us to accept his view. It may be that rather than the breakdown of the system of castes, there took place a simplification like the one that David Brading finds for the Bajío. The line that survives in the lower class is the one that separates tribute payers (Indians and mulattos) from those who are not liable to tribute.

That line does not hold up well after independence. What shows up as far more important is the difference between permanent and semi-permanent employees, with relatively regular pay, and a vast under-employed population, whose existence is attested to by innumerable contemporary testimonies. It is this second mass that keeps authorities on the alert. If, as in colonial times, they seldom rise in riots on their own initiative, they nevertheless have a feared ability to join them and make them violent attacks on property. To be sure, this constantly feared potential became a destructive actuality only on rare occasions. In the first quarter-century of independence, despite frequent periods of political vacuum and less frequent moments in which the vacuum took on the form of the collapse of police and urban patrol, Spanish-American cities in general had greater internal peace than eighteenth-century London. The under-employed urban population had access only to very poorly paid work. That fact constituted a sharp boundary between them and the more prestigious artisans. The latter were better paid than in Europe, according to the repeated complaints of European diplomats trying to get their government to understand how scarce and how expensive were good cooks and good coachmen in shockingly primitive countries. This line between

under-employed and permanently employed was less permeable than a lesser one between prosperous wage earners and self-employed artisans.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, then, Spanish-American cities had adapted to the new environment created by their direct incorporation into the world market dominated by the new industrial powers. Thereupon there began an apparently vertiginous transformation of the very texture of urban life. A more careful examination would reveal that the change was less rapid and complete. Only three decades later was the transformation carried through.

1850-1880

In the 1850s new signs indicated the adoption of a style of urban life moving increasingly to the model prevalent in Europe. In that decade gas street lighting spread from Havana to Lima and Buenos Aires; a number of cities began public works aimed at changing their appearance. Even in Buenos Aires under Rosas, there began the construction of the Paseo de Julio on the banks of the Plata, with the purpose of displaying to the arriving traveller a more impressive idea of the city. In Lima the works were more ambitious, but there also the purpose was to improve the impression of the city and of the state which used it as political centre. Urban improvements (aside from public lighting, which almost everywhere was handled by private concessionaires) still consisted in paving of streets and so continued an effort begun in the Bourbon period but interrupted during the following years.

The effort of the state to present a better image through the testimony of monumental works was paralleled in the semi-private and private sphere. In resumption of an effort under way in the Bourbon period, new theatres were built, more sumptuous edifices than those of the late eighteenth century. Residential architecture began to show equal magnificence. Until the mid-century the innovations appeared more in the adornment than in the architecture of the houses of the wealthy. Thereafter they built new residences, abandoning in many instances the plan of the Creole great house with its central courtyard, in favour of European models which might include luxurious grand staircases and great expanses of marbles and imported woods.

The new building was one of the first signs that the developing export economy was showing an upward trend. Whether the new wealth from trade centred in the cities or primary activities centred far from them, it was exhibited and consumed primarily in urban centres. The change in urban layout and buildings, still limited as it was, nevertheless was accompanied by a more detailed transformation in the style of life in imitation of Europe. Luxury hotels no longer presented an awkward aping of European ways but a faithful reproduction. The menus of ceremonial banquets from Havana to Santiago or Montevideo — and the very abundance of this kind of evidence is a sign of the change of the times — all list dishes, wines, and liquors secured in large measure by importation rather than imitation.

At popular levels, the change, although necessarily less complete, was considerable, even though it affected collective life only to a limited extent. Spanish-American cities were to wait decades more for the new public transportation and sanitary services. In short, progress came about through expansion of the export sector, the structure of which began to be modified but much more slowly. Countries began to develop networks of railroads which almost everywhere returned to the capital cities the metropolitan function they were beginning to achieve in the late Bourbon period — only to have it upset in the following years. Cuba led the way in railroads to be followed in the decade of the 1850s by capital cities like Lima, Buenos Aires, Santiago.

Only some years later did the building of railroads create dense enough networks to change the economic relationship between the capital city and its territory.

The support for urban transportation came, then, more from intensive continuation of the basic tendencies which prevailed in the economy and society of the previous period than from any modification of those tendencies. The predominant role of foreign trade in supporting urban growth is revealed in the modifications in the ranking of cities. Around 1870-1875 Mexico City was still the largest city in Spanish America, with 270,000 inhabitants, but Havana had gone well beyond 200,000, was growing more rapidly than the other two and soon was to pass them. Lima, with upwards of 100,000 inhabitants, was smaller than Montevideo (125,000) and Santiago de Chile (130,000).⁷ Still, the relationship between foreign trade and urban growth was primarily indirect. Only in regions where increase in foreign trade and urban growth was modest did increase in population show up most prominently in cities specializing in foreign trade. Thus Barranquilla grew faster than Bogotá and Guayaquil faster than Quito. With acceleration of both trends, the differential advantage reverses. In Chile, Valparaiso never managed to rival Santiago.

The beneficent effects of foreign trade did not come because it gave employment to a large number of people. Rather they came through expansion of the state, which brought with it increase in the number of its servants, or through the modernization of means of transport, which tended to concentrate the fewer people it needed, in the cities, as when railway workers, for example, replaced carters and muleteers.

The superficiality and limited extent of the transformation led to frequent incongruities. Buenos Aires, wishing to show the arriving traveller a more Europeanized façade, merely displaced to another zone on the coast the washerwomen, who gave the city a picturesque aspect, if one rarely appreciated. Washerwomen continued to use the water of the Plata despite rising pollution at least until 1910. In the same city, the Exchange (*Bolas de Comercio*), that monument to the new style of urban life, was surrounded even in the 1860s by horses tethered in the sun as though in front of a store in the countryside for their owners to finish their business.

One such incongruence assured a more rapid pace of urban growth. Whereas export trade, which was relatively rationalized, needed few workers, retail trade as it grew at the same pace as the cities yet kept an antiquated structure, multiplied the number of independent shopkeepers and their employees. Similarly, even if the building of a railroad that reached a city ended the system of long-distance transportation by animal traction centred on the city, it also multiplied use of rails within the urban radius to assure connections between different lines, between railroad terminals and ports, or between them and consuming centres. Carters and muleteers had not been tied to urban residence but the new wagoners came to form a rising proportion of the less skilled work force within the city.

Urban growth also favoured an enlarged range of economic activities. A large part of what was called industry was carried on in workshops rather than factories and still kept to forms more typical of artisan production. However, the new advances in the market economy led to development of a number of industrial forms of enterprise. The new forms still kept the two levels of employees. In the first level were those of special qualification because of skill or those tied to traditionally prestigious occupations. Both groups received relatively high wages. Traditional activities included those connected with the meat salting plants of Rio de la Plata, which increased in number and dimensions but without technological innovation; or others using new

technology like beer brewing, which spread through the larger cities together with consumption of a drink that earlier had had to be imported. The second level of workers, receiving low wages, recruited women and children (for example, factories for matches and cigarettes) or people with less specialization. Not technological innovation but the sweat shop and the putting out system were the basis for expansion of the manufacture of clothing. Garment making, too, employed women at low wages in activities that were traditional to them.

This transformation of urban society, under the influence of changes in trade and the growth of the cities, tended to have greater effect in the highest and lowest levels of society rather than in the middle ones. Growth of bureaucratic apparatus, which would have had effect especially on the middle levels, was merely beginning. Also in the initial stage, the expansion of the new industry and the new forms of transportation still affected the structure of the lower sectors only to a very small extent. That structure still kept essentially the sharp division between the relatively prosperous and the ill-paid and under-employed: on the one hand, small independent entrepreneurs (artisans and small-scale shopkeepers) and workers on salary or in business for themselves, with regular income, and on the other hand, a vast under-employed lower class with access only to the less remunerative forms of trade (insignificant in volume, for that matter) and poorly paid forms of work.

1880-1914

The next period showed much more effect on the urban structures through full consolidation of the export economy. That impact took multiple forms. On the one hand, it favoured the merging with metropolitan functions of the principal urban centres; on the other, it encouraged more rapid expansion of secondary cities, which served as centres for zones in rapid economic expansion. The first came about because of the growth of the state apparatus, the development of genuine networks of railroads centred on some of these cities, and the growing complexity and reach of centralized financial operations in the form of banking systems, securities, etc. The growth of the state apparatus meant the multiplication of state employees, and expansion due only in part to the increasing complexity of governmental activities. Even in a period in which political power lay in the hands of small groups and representative democracy was more formal than real, there was genuine advantage in keeping the potentially restless middle sectors on the side of the government. In Mexico, Porfirio Díaz, according to his posthumous critic, Francisco Bulnes, "was the savior of the middle classes, their rescuer from age-old want." On the restoration of the Republic in 1867, the middle class "had determined to live on the government or see the country perish. In 1867 salaries of government employees cost 7,700,000 pesos a year; in 1910 the federal treasury alone earmarked 62,000,000 for such salaries." In other words, "In 1868 barely 12 per cent of the middle class derived its livelihood from government employment; in 1876 the trough fed 16 per cent; and under General Díaz 70 per cent of the middle class lived on government service. That was the vaunted peace."⁹ We need not take the figures and percentages as literally exact, but the tendency nevertheless is very clear. The benefit from this creation of enlarged bureaucracy accrued to the urban centres and, most of all, the capital in each country.

The process of bureaucratic expansion was slow and uneven. It was bound to favourable change in the financial base of the state, a development that took place very unevenly among the various Spanish-American countries. Perhaps nowhere was it fully under way before 1890.

As late as 1895, the figures of Joaquín Capelo, again approximations, show a Lima in which state employees other

than teachers and military people, came to five hundred in an economically active population of perhaps a hundred thousand.¹⁰ We may judge that the proportion was higher than Capelo's values indicate in that the economically active population undoubtedly was smaller. Even so, Capelo's figures indicate that despite the fact that Peru had left behind the ordeals of foreign and civil war and under Piérola was trying to construct the "scientific state," it still had a long road to travel. Other countries, by no means solely the smaller ones, since they included Colombia and Venezuela, for example, had even longer roads to travel. In Colombia, the central government had been brought nearly to impotence, and the Regeneration of Núñez was just beginning to reverse the former trend.

The impact of railroads was also uneven. In the first place, in this period not even all of the larger countries were able to construct unified railroad networks centring on the capital. In fact, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela do not have them today, and their capitals have achieved prime city status and metropolitan functions only with the development of motor transportation. In the second place, even in countries where such unified networks were developed, as in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Mexico, they come about as the relatively late consolidation of previously ununified lines and routes. In Chile the national railroad never reached out to the new north. In Mexico consolidation in the interests of the capital was hampered by the rising economic pull of the United States on northern Mexico. In Argentina, where consolidation was most nearly complete, it only began in substantial measure in the 1890s through union of the network centring on Buenos Aires with the one that centred on the river port of Rosario and through the building of a direct connection between Buenos Aires and the central Andean provinces.

Despite uneven impact and pace of construction, full entrance into the railway age had massive and deeply felt effects. Mexico City assumed again in heightened form the commanding position in national trade it had had in the Bourbon period but had lost in large measure after Independence. Buenos Aires emerged to unchallenged supremacy in the same way. In Chile, Santiago began to grow more rapidly than Valparaíso, which had never been able to become a genuine rival. The creation of national rail networks meant that, at least as far as import trade, the capital served as national centre. Wholesale firms supplying zones brought within reach of the railroads multiplied. Of course, the concentration of wholesale trade was less complete. Even in Argentina, where Buenos Aires is both capital and the most important port, its position as export centre is far from being completely dominant. In Uruguay, Montevideo was in a parallel situation. On the other hand, since exports covered a much smaller range of products than imports, it needed only much simpler commercial arrangements at the points of exit. Accordingly, they were far less likely to create non-manual jobs. As the management of enterprises active in export trade became more complex, it installed its headquarters in the capitals. To cite Argentina again, it was the case of export houses specializing in grain. Jules Huret¹¹ has written an impressive account of the feverish activity in a branch of one of the largest houses, Bunge y Born, in Rosario. His account is not surprising since Rosario was the largest port for grain, but even so the headquarters of the firm was in Buenos Aires.

The growth in size of the larger cities obviously was bound to affect their structures. From the 1850s on, Mexico City experienced speculation in opening new subdivisions outside of the old urban core. The first tentative beginnings were followed after a rather long while by substantial expansion of the urbanized zone.¹² This delay was due in part to the upsets of civil war and foreign intervention, but may have had other causes as well. After 1890 the Mexico City of Porfirio Díaz

expanded notably through the development of working class suburbs and others earmarked for the upper classes. In Buenos Aires, the process began somewhat later, in the 1870s, but was more sustained, undoubtedly because growth in population was more rapid.¹³

In the years 1880-1914 expansion of the urban, built-up territory had become easier, thanks to the development of systems of public transportation. The first railroads had shortened travel to cities from outlying areas. After 1870 horse-drawn streetcars increasingly linked the old urban centre with the previously vacant spaces and lesser centres that the railroad was turning into suburbs. Growth of the urban territory and changes in transportation permitted changes in spatial distribution of social groups. The former zones of country houses were brought into the centre of urban activity thanks to railroads and streetcars. They took on more functions; most of all they became the areas of residence of less prosperous members of the *gente decente*, who did not wish to live cheek-by-jowl with the lower classes but could not afford residences they regarded as suitable for their social level within the old city. This development took place in Buenos Aires with the change in San Isidro; in Montevideo, with the change in the district of country houses around the Prado. It also took place in the much less dynamic city of Caracas and, of course, in Lima and Santiago. Within the old urban core in some cities there arose a new residential distribution of distinct social groups. In Buenos Aires the wealthy "moved to the north," to what had been environs, they built a district modelled on the Plaine Monceau. The old centre was left to administrative and commercial uses and to less pretentious residences. In Santiago, Chile, where the wealthy began to build sumptuous houses outside of the centre, nevertheless the old urban core kept its former prestige as a place of residence. The same situation prevailed for decades in Lima.

Even where the upper class continued loyal to the old urban centre, that loyalty did not prevent the development of slum conditions there. The deterioration was more rapid in Buenos Aires, where, in the 1870s, an epidemic of yellow fever made manifest to a city, which would have preferred not to know, the dreadful conditions in which the poorer classes lived. Their numbers rapidly increasing through immigration, they huddled in the tenements of the Barrio Sur in part of the old urban centre, either in buildings which had once been occupied by a single wealthy family or in others built for speculation.

The growth of urban population created problems of sanitation which multiplied the functions to be handled by urban authorities. In general, the authorities handled such problems badly indeed. A supply of running water and a system of sewers are much more expensive expressions of civic pride than public buildings. Provision of water and sewers did not come, in almost all instances, until the first decade of the twentieth century. Even paving and lighting streets almost always came more slowly than expansion of the urban space. In capitals which grew more slowly, failure to provide such urban amenities was equally apparent. The picture given by Miguel Samper in 1867 in *La miseria en Bogotá* remained true for the Colombian capital until the opening years of the twentieth century.

Yet transformation did come and began to affect in new ways the equilibrium among social groups. One effect was to lessen in substantial measure the weight of small-scale independent shopkeepers who fell between the middle class and the prosperous sector of the lower class. Again, I describe a gradual process. Retail trade in foodstuffs remained fragmented to the point of atomization for a long time; in some large cities it remains so today. But in some of the larger cities, there appeared department stores in imitation of those in Paris and London. They brought under one management the sale of clothing, cloth, furniture, and furnishings. Many founded by

Spanish immigrants in Mexico City still have their original names. Those established by local or British capital in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, or pre-revolutionary Havana have come through less well. It is true that these advanced forms only showed up in this period in some cities that were changing rapidly. Even in Havana, the era of the department store began only after the First World War, and there, as in Caracas and Lima, the influence and capital were from the United States.

Equal unevenness and slowness of adoption showed up in urban industry and transportation. In our period only some of the larger cities, such as Mexico City, Lima, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo, were marked by substantial industrial expansion. The branches of industry which sought urban location were mostly those who found their market in those cities and in the nearby zones served by railway networks centred on them. The exceptions were Buenos Aires and Montevideo in relation to meatpacking, for the successors to salting plants chose locations in smaller centres with easy access to ocean shipping. The branches of industry which did fit the rule were a number already established in previous periods, such as beer brewing, tobacco products, and matches, textiles, and new food products, such as milled flour and vegetable oils. The technology of the new industries lent itself to greater concentration of work force. Even though in those too there arose a multitude of small factories, there also came into being factories employing hundreds of workers.

All in all, it was not in urban industry that concentration of the work force in great establishments appeared in most clearly marked form. That occurred rather in the new public services like railroad and urban transportation, gas, running water, and after the turn of the century, electricity and telephones. Particularly notable were services under municipal administration, such as public lighting and street cleaning. Even in large-scale enterprises, the largest concentrations of workers appeared also at one time and in one category in the sector of services. They were labourers hired by the day in cities that were also ports, from Havana to Buenos Aires and Montevideo; and the wagoners, whether they owned their own wagon or not. In the rise of an urban proletariat, large-scale industry played poorly the role that the traditional image assigns, but then for that matter, the development of the great European capitals also does not fit it too well. The rise of an urban proletariat, whatever its origins, obviously had an influence on the history of the first stages of the working class movement. From the first, labour disputes threatened the modes of interchange of the economic system more decisively than if they had been concentrated in industry. The authorities could not ignore them, but intervention too had its dangers. Repression might be especially brutal, as in Chile, where the parliamentary republic abandoned its normal passivity to repress with deadly efficiency the dockworkers' strike in Valparaiso. But a position of arbitration and conciliation was more frequent than later writers have thought, and that not only in Uruguay, where political democratization under President Batlle converted Montevideo workers into an important source of support. In Montevideo, in the first decade of the twentieth century, lack of regular work in the port was solved by turning recruiting and assignment of work over to the longshoremen's union. It was thus given complete control. The urban workers' movement which undoubtedly suffered continuing and arbitrary repression, benefitted on the other hand from distinctly better enforcement of legal rights and observance of legal forms in the largest cities than in the rest of the country. Even in Uruguay under Batlle a rural workers' movement as militant as the urban one would be unthinkable. In the authoritarian Mexico of Porfirio Díaz, the very existence of the notably ineffective unions of the Federal District would be hard to conceive of outside of that relatively favourable environment.

The new working class came into existence divided, like its predecessor, into two distinctly different levels. This division tended to be reflected in a kind of militancy: on the one hand was a working class aristocracy, including the more skilled of the new railway workers and, among more traditional groups, the printers. Such workers held to union tactics that used strikes with restraint and showed both real revulsion in theory, and infrequent use in practice of violence (though less so of sabotage). On the other hand was a mass of unskilled workers who used violent strikes as their most effective tactic. At times this difference in tactics found expression in ideology. The appeal of anarchism and later of anarcho-syndicalism for the latter group was clear. But the difference also was evident in events. In 1913, in order to break a stubborn strike of railway workers, Italian operatives were brought to Argentina at high cost. Even though there might be plenty of local would-be strikebreakers available, the companies were not willing to entrust their expensive machines to untrained men. Any unemployed man with strong shoulders could replace a stevedore or a wagoner, so that in these occupations a strike could be successful only if the strikers could convince potential strikebreakers that they ran grave risks.

This more violent style of labour dispute did not exclude all resort to arbitration by the government. In Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, the shift from anarchism to the anarcho-syndicalism of Sorel took place, in an apparent paradox, while the working class movement found place in a political order which was far from being dominated by labour. One need look merely to the Mexico of Obregón and Callas, the Argentina of Yrigoyen, the Chile of the first Alessandri, and the Uruguay of Batlles constitution. The development was clearly under way before 1914.

The mildness of the challenge by the new working class movement came in the end from its failure to find more than a narrow base. Outside the larger cities, repression not only could be harsher and more certain of success but also, the social conditions favouring growth of labour unions were less likely to exist. Only the mining regions of northern Chile and northern Mexico were favourable to growth of unions before 1914. Even within the larger cities, the base for labour unions was still relatively narrow. They could make little headway in the large fringe of crafts carried on by artisans and in small workshops. Further, a vast floating population was not only impossible to organize but also could be the most stubborn obstacle to the organization of workers with regular employment. The phenomenon was present everywhere in the largest cities; Havana, whose attraction grew in a country ravaged by the second War of Independence; Mexico City during the Díaz period was another illustration; Lima, according to Joaquín Capelo had more than 25 per cent of its economically active population in minor services. Montevideo found itself flooded with people that modernization of agriculture and stockraising had driven to the city; in Buenos Aires, where differentiation of occupations faded away in the lower levels of workers, many of them alternated according to season between urban and rural employment.

The great cities of Spanish America obviously differed considerably from the model they wished to imitate and, despite vertiginous growth, conserved many vestiges of a past with which they might have been thought to have merely an historical connection. One reason, as Richard Morse writes sagely,¹⁴ was that modernization of collective systems of value, which seems to be an essential aspect of the process, remained far more superficial than the protagonists themselves believed. The modernization which so radically changed the cities came in economic life. Yet, in stressing this undoubted fact, one may risk exaggerating the extent to which urban evolution in Spanish

America was anomalous relative to the western world. Spanish-American cities of the time appear even more anomalous if one fails to compare them with concrete European or North American examples, the latter to show the interplay of imperatives of socio-economic change and the resistance of previous cultural traditions. The abstract model of the industrial city corresponds rather poorly to the occupational and social structure of the great cities of the late nineteenth century.

Together with the emergence of the great metropolitan centres, changes appeared in other levels of the urban network. Secondary centres as a whole did not grow as rapidly as the largest cities, and, in most instances, had a slower pace of development. To be sure, the expansion of the export economy did bring vertiginous expansion to some. Thus Rosario, the centre of trade and navigation for the Paraná River, grew more rapidly for some decades than Buenos Aires. In Chile, Antofagasta and Iquique, suddenly became major centres for nitrate exports, and led urban expansion that country. In Colombia, a new centre, Manizales, led urban expansion in that country while Barranquilla, the Atlantic port, again grew more rapidly than Bogotá.

Those secondary urban centres whose growth was based on a high degree of specialization in economic activity, came nearer, as happened in Europe as well, to the model of cities whose occupational structure and collective system of values reflected most directly the economic function. There were, however, other secondary centres whose growth came from more indirect effects of economic changes. In Argentina, Córdoba, the old economic capital of the interior, was able to reaffirm its hegemony there thanks to the new railroad network, but despite the far reaching urban renewal that the new development brought, the city remains the Church and university centre that it was in the past. Other secondary centres benefited from the growth of the governmental apparatus, the effect of which was felt beyond the national capitals, especially in those countries where federal structure had some meaning. In Mexico, according to Francisco Bulnes, the benefits of the peace imposed by Porfirio Díaz were felt by the middle class as much in state capitals as in Mexico City. Díaz forced the state governors to pay state employees their salaries on time, behaviour that was even more revolutionary for them than for the national government. In Argentina, also, the growth of the provincial capitals was partly independent of their economic functions. After 1880, the financial largesse of the central

government began to compensate those provinces which had been left behind in the expansion stimulated by the export trade.

The impact of economic change was more limited and uneven in the lowest levels of the urban network. There, benefit or lack of it depended in last analysis upon the specific effects that each kind of export might bring. Stockraising, mining, and plantation agriculture could not furnish the base for a complex structure of minor urban centres, which discharged urban functions for large areas. So in Chile, Punta Arenas, capital of the pioneer zone of sheep raising, was a southernmost replica of the nitrate ports. On the other hand, agriculture carried on by peasants and farmers favoured the development of more complex and differentiated urban networks. This point may be seen in Colombia in coffee raised by small peasant units, or in Argentina, where the pampa was farmed for grain even though the increasing tendency was to leave farming to tenants and sharecroppers; not the most favourable stimulus. In Argentina, a first period of growth in pre-existing secondary centres, above all, ports, gave way to one of less rapid expansion, except for the secondary centres existing or built on railroads.

NOTES

1. Felipe Pardo y Aliaga, *A mi hijo en sus días*, cited in José Luis Romero, *El pensamiento político de la derecha latinoamericana* (Buenos Aires, 1970), p. 62.
2. Basil Hall, *Extracts of a Journal Written on the Coast of Chile, Peru and Mexico in the Years 1820-21-22* (Edinburgh, 1824), II, p. 124.
3. Jan Bazant, "Evolución de la industria textil poblana," in *Historia Mexicana*, XIII, no 4 (abril-junio 1964), 473-516.
4. On these developments in Santiago de Chile, see Luis Alberto Romero, *La sociedad de la igualdad. Los artesanos de Santiago de Chile y sus primeras experiencias políticas, 1820-1851* (Buenos Aires, 1978).
5. John K. Chance, *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford, 1978).
6. David Brading, *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío, León 1700-1860* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 47.
7. Figures from Richard M. Morse, *Las ciudades latinoamericanas. II. Desarrollo histórico* (Mexico City, 1973), *passim*.
8. T. Woodbine Hinchcliff, *Viaje al Plata en 1861* (Buenos Aires, 1955), p. 83.
9. Francisco Bulnes, *El verdadero Díaz y la Revolución* (Mexico City, 1920), pp. 41-42.
10. Richard M. Morse/Joaquín Capelo, *Lima en 1900. Estudio crítico y antología* (Lima, 1973), pp. 22-23.
11. Jules Huret, *De Buenos Ayres au Grand Chaco* (Paris, 1914), pp. 108 *et seq.*
12. María Dolores Morales, "Francisco Somera y el primer fraccionamiento de la ciudad de México," in Ciro F.S. Cardoso, ed., *Formación y desarrollo de la burguesía en México, siglo XIX* (Mexico City, 1973), pp. 188-230.
13. James R. Scobie, *Buenos Aires. Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* (New York, 1974), chapter 5.
14. *Ibid.*, n. 10, p. 43.