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## Political instability in post-independent Argentina. 1810-1827

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**UNIVERSIDAD TORCUATO DI TELLA**

**WORKING PAPER N° 25**

**POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN POST-INDEPENDENT ARGENTINA  
1810-1827**

**Klaus Gallo \***

July 1995

**ABSTRACT:**

After independence from Spain was partially achieved in 1810, the different political experiments of self-government in the River Plate were marred by continual internal and external conflicts during the two decades that followed. As a consequence, the role of the military became an essential component in the process of the consolidation of independence, both on the battlefield and in the political arena. The first Governments were mainly controlled by Army Officers with too much on their hands, and therefore the development of local politics and institutions suffered a great deal in these early stages. This paper focuses on three different stages of the political process in the River Plate during the 1810-1827 period which culminated with the failure of Rivadavia's presidential experiment.

**RIVER PLATE INDEPENDENCE, EVOLUTION OF LOCAL POLITICS, ROLE OF THE  
MILITARY AND CIVILIAN POLITICIANS**

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POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN POST-INDEPENDENT ARGENTINA 1810-1827

By Klaus Gallo<sup>1</sup>

The first sixteen years of independent existence in the River Plate were overshadowed by continual internal turmoil in the region, mainly as a result of the wars of independence and the political and economic rivalry between Buenos Aires and the provinces. The effect of these disturbances was clearly reflected in the diverse and unsuccessful attempts to build national institutions during this period.

Nevertheless, when Bernardino Rivadavia was elected as first President of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata by the Constituent Congress in 1826, it seemed to many as if a new era of national unity and political stability was about to commence. This was to be a false illusion, however, as most of the provinces regarded both Rivadavia's Government and the Constitution created by the Congress that same year as clerally representing the

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<sup>1</sup> Paper written for the Workshop on the history of the nineteenth century Latin America: RETHINKING THE INDEPENDENCE OF SPANISH AMERICA, at the Institute of Latin American Studies, School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 19 May, 1995. The author would like to express his gratitude to Ezequiel Gallo, Mercedes Guiraldes, Francis Korn, and Natalio Botana for their comments and suggestions in reference to this article, and most especially to Eduardo Posada and Victor Bulmer-Thomas for inviting me to the Conference at the Institute of Latin American Studies in London.

centralist interests of the Unitarios. Nineteen months later Rivadavia was forced to resign and the presidential system was abruptly eliminated, thus paving the way for the imminent appearance on the scene of Juan Manuel de Rosas and stabilized dictatorship for the next quarter of a century.

In 1847 Juan Bautista Alberdi, whilst in exile from the Rosas government, reflected on the first thirty seven years of independence in Argentina. In one very emotive passage of his article, the future architect of the 1853 Constitution sustained:

.... Tiene [Argentina] tantas banderas arrancadas en combates victoriosos, que pudiera ornar su frente con un turbante compesto de todos los colores del Iris; o alzar un pabellon tan alto como la Columna de Vendome, y mas radiante que el bronce en Austerlitz.

Pero esto a que conduce, sin otras ventajas, que, la pobre ¡ha menester todavía en tanto número ?  
Ha hecho ya demasiado para la fama: muy poco para la felicidad. Posee inmensas glorias; pero, que lástima! no tiene una sola libertad.<sup>2</sup>

The present work focuses on the difficulties and complications of establishing a national government in the River Plate, and intends to analyze the different political trends and ideologies that dominated the period, which ranges from the installation of the first revolutionary government in 1810 up to the presidential experience of Rivadavia in 1826-27.

The period involved can be divided into three distinct

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<sup>2</sup> J.B.Alberdi, "La República Argentina, 37 años despues de su Revolución de Mayo." Article in Obras Completas de J.B.Alberdi, Vol.3, (Buenos Aires, 1886), pp. 236-237.

chronological phases from a political point of view.

The first one stretches from 1810 to 1814, and corresponds to the formation of the different types of governments that emerged as a consequence of the May Revolution: the Junta Grande, the two Triunvirates, leading on to the Assembly of the year XIII and the subsequent creation of the Directory in 1814.

A second phase consists in analyzing the Directory Governments period which begins in 1814 and ends in 1820. Other important events of these years are, the Congress of Tucumán of 1816, the appearance of the 1819 Constitution and the internal problems which eventually led to the so called "anarchy of the year 20", when, after the San Nicolás agreement, Buenos Aires ceased to be the capital of the United Provinces.

The third and last phase will be referred to as the "Rivadavia years", as it was dominated by the influence of this statesman. These were the years of the Buenos Aires government of Martín Rodríguez, and of the Constituent Congress of 1824 which culminated with the creation of the Presidency.

#### The first attempts of establishing republicanism.

Political instability and insecurity persisted in Argentina, with alarming consistency, throughout the first decade of its independence. This was, in many respects, a direct consequence of the almost systematic and continual improvisation of the central

government of Buenos Aires. Various were the factors that contributed to this permanent state of unrest during those years.

Achieving independence from Spain was not exactly as traumatic an experience for the River Plate creoles as it was, at exactly the same time, for the revolutionaries in Caracas, and as it would be, later on, for other leaders of South American revolts which split loose from the Spanish Crown. Although confrontations with the Spanish army commenced the same year independence was declared, these took place far away from Buenos Aires which had been the center spot of the revolution and therefore gave more latitude to the Primera Junta, the River Plate's first national government.

A traditional and enduring explanation in Argentine historiography for the almost total lack of violence within the Buenos Aires districts in 1810, has been associated with the successful expulsion of the British forces, by mainly creole soldiers, four years earlier. It is evidently true that those events helped to consolidate the formation of creole armed forces and an awareness about the feeble condition of the Spanish garrison in the River Plate Viceroyalty.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Spanish Crown failed to reinforce her garrisons in the River Plate after the invasions - either a consequence of the blindness and inability of Charles IV, or the impossibility of effecting this much needed military reinforcement- seems the most appropriate explanation for the lack of resistance encountered by the Porteño rebels.

In spite of this significant advantage encountered by the

Buenos Aires Junta, the menace of imminent Spanish reaction in other areas of the old Viceroyalty, and strong dissension towards the revolution in some of the provinces, immediately created the need to confront the Royal armies on the battlefield. In this way leading creole characters involved in the government, but who also sustained military positions, were, for the time being, forced to leave aside their quest for immediate political activity.

These were the cases of characters such as Manuel Belgrano and Juan José Castelli, who were prominent in supporting plans for the installment of new independent monarchies based on British constitutional models. This could mean, however, supporting embarrassingly ridiculous schemes, such as the Carlota Joaquina project.<sup>3</sup>

The loss of some of the leading political creole figures to the revolutionary armies was a handicap for the Junta, and, to a certain extent, marks one of the origins of early political instability in the River Plate. According to Halperín, a firm presence of the military in political affairs was inevitable for institutional organization in the River Plate during this period.<sup>4</sup> It is also as a result of this situation that the first political debate, in the new era of independence, was almost entirely restricted to the two leading characters of the government, who

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<sup>3</sup> The standard biographies of these two characters are B.Mitre, Historia de Belgrano, 4 Vols., (Buenos Aires, 1887), and J.C.Chaves, Castelli, el Adalid de Mayo, (Buenos Aires, 1934).

<sup>4</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, Revolución y Guerra. Formación de una élite dirigente en la Argentina Criolla, (Buenos Aires, 1972), p.174.

were not obliged to enrol in the early revolutionary struggles: Cornelio Saavedra, President of the Junta, and Mariano Moreno, Secretary of this government throughout the first year of independence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the rivalry which emerged between these two men set the tone for the first serious ideological debate in the incipient political life of the emancipated River Plate provinces.

As Bushnell has sustained, there was no leadership in the River Plate equivalent to that of a Miranda or a Bolívar, who combined both military and political expertise.<sup>6</sup> Neither Saavedra nor Moreno were that type of revolutionary leader. Nevertheless, Moreno certainly seemed to exploit his crafty political manouvering to much more effect than Saavedra's undisputed popularity amongst the Army ranks. More specifically, of the two men, Moreno was much more inclined towards experimenting with political models received from different European governments of the late eighteenth century which contained certain elements and ingredients of the Enlightenment tradition. The French revolutionary governments of the 1789-99 period were, not surprisingly, more popular in this respect.

An early example of the above was the wise use of propaganda

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<sup>5</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, De la Revolución de Independencia a la Confederación Rosista, (Buenos Aires, 1972), pp. 82-86. This author vividly describes the differences of style and general attitude towards revolutionary politics that existed between these two characters.

<sup>6</sup> D.Bushnell, "The Independence of Spanish South America", in L.Bethell (ed.), The Independence of Latin America, (Cambridge, 1988), p.116.



techniques implemented at this time by the incipient patriotic clubs and especially by Moreno, notably the diffusion of his republican and pro-French Revolution ideals through the Gaceta, the Junta's official newspaper, which he himself created.<sup>7</sup> This takes us to the examination of the effects of European political ideologies in the River Plate during this period.<sup>8</sup>

It has been recently suggested by Guerra that the first revolutionary Spanish American governments were, in almost all cases, entirely dominated by the political principles of the French Revolution.<sup>9</sup> Safford seems to agree, adding that traces of republican models based on the example of the United States were also prevalent.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there did not seem to be a conscious attempt to imitate any particular model of government from more advanced nations in the early independence days of River Plate politics. There were, however, certain trends and attitudes, which reveal the importance of foreign models amongst some of the leading creole politicians.

It is not exaggerated to sustain therefore that there was a certain prevalence of French and, in some ways, even British

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<sup>7</sup> The most recent work on Moreno's role and discourse, and the influence of French Revolutionary ideals in the River Plate around 1810, is N. Goldman's Historia y Lenguaje: Los Discursos de la Revolución de Mayo, (Buenos Aires, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.117. T. Halperín Donghi, De la Revolución, p.83.

<sup>9</sup> F.X. Guerra, "The Spanish-American Tradition of Representation and its European Roots." In Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol.26, no.1, (February 1994).

<sup>10</sup> F. Safford, "Politics, Ideology and Society". In L. Bethell (ed.), Spanish America after Independence, (Cambridge, 1987), p.58.

influences, rather than a penetration of the North American example.<sup>11</sup>

Among the French influences, the works of Montesquieu were apparantly the most read in Buenos Aires.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Rousseau seemed to be more oftenly quoted by revolutionaries such as Moreno who translated and published fragments of Rousseau's Social Contract (although he was careful enough to omit passages referring to religion) -which put in evidence his support for some sort of "General Will" and a society consisting of equal individuals with a sufficient attachment to ancient civic virtues:

...No es tan difícil establecer una ley buena, como asegurar su observancia: las manos de los hombres todo lo corrompen; y el mismo crédito de un buen gobierno ha puesto muchas veces el primer escalón a la tiranía que lo ha destruído. "Pereció Esparta" dice Juan Jacobo Rousseau, "qué estado podrá lisonjearse, de que su Constitución sea duradera?" Nada es más difícil que fijar los principios de una administración libre de corromperse; y ésta es cabalmente la primera obra a que debe convertir sus tareas nuestro Congreso; sin embargo, la suerte de los Estados tiene principios ciertos, y la historia de los pueblos antiguos presenta mas lecciones seguras a los que desean el acierto.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> P.González Bernaldo. "La Revolución Francesa y la emergencia de nuevas prácticas de la política: La irrupción de la sociabilidad política en el Río de la Plata revolucionario (1810-1815)". In Boletín de Historia Argentina y Americana. "Dr.E.Ravignani, 3 era.Serie, Nro.3, pp.7-27, 1991. This work essentially analyzes the role of Clubs and Patriotic Societies during the first years of River Plate independence, and up to what extent did they participate in the revolutionary political process.

<sup>12</sup> C.García Belsunce, Una Ventana al Pasado, (Rosario, 1994), p.167.

<sup>13</sup> M.Moreno, "Sobre las miras del Congreso por Reunirse". Article published by Moreno in La Gaceta, Published in J.L.Romero and L.A.Romero (ed.), Pensamiento Político de la Emancipación (1790-1825)., 2 Vols., (Buenos Aires, 1977), p.279.

Moreno also unashamingly justified the whole process of the French Revolution, including the period of Jacobin terror.<sup>14</sup> These influences were also to be evident in the nominations and compositions of the first government models such as the Triummvirates and Directories.

When it came to defending the Revolution, the pressence of Girondin and Jacobin paranoia towards any kind of Ancien Regime remnants was quite undisguisedly present in the attitude of the Junta towards internal opposition, as a document pressumably written by Moreno certifies:

...La moderación fuera de tiempo no es cordura , ni es una verdad; al contrario, es una debilidad cuando se adopta un sistema que sus circunstancias no lo requieren; jamás en ningún tiempo de revolución, se vio adoptada por los gobernantes la moderación ni la tolerancia; el menor pensamiento de un hombre que sea contrario a un nuevo sistema es un delito por la influencia y por el estrago que puede causar con el ejemplo, y su castigo es irremediable.<sup>15</sup>

This tendancy was present in the campaigns of repression in those provinces where opposition against the May revolution had been voiced out. The case of Córdoba, for example, which ended with the execution of former Viceroy and hero of the British Invasions, Santiago de Liniers, being the most notorious. One of the

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<sup>14</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, De la Revolución, Note on p.83. Also, N.Goldman, Historia y Lenguaje.

<sup>15</sup> In J.L.Romero and L.A:Romero (ed.) Pensamiento Político, p.258. This extract belongs to the Junta Government's Plan de Operaciones. of 1810, and has been attributed by many historians to Moreno.

Commanders of this expedition was Castelli, a precursor of the River Plate revolutionary set-up along with Belgrano, Vieytes, and Rodriguez Peña, a group which was active in advocating liberal ideals in favour of independence.

Nevertheless, when time for action came, Castelli, like Moreno, adopted a more radical and Jacobin-style approach. This was evident when Castelli's expedition marched on to Salta and the Upper Peru, where he persecuted not only dissidents and Spaniards but also members of the church.

Moreover, revealing in some ways the spirit of 1789-91 in France, Castelli introduced a series of measures, such as the complete liberation and integration of the Indians of these areas, by way of the suppression of the Tributo Tax. This type of French-styled radical approach was viewed with a great deal of distrust in the provinces, which in turn contributed to endure and increment these early stages of instability in the region.

The described situation forced Saavedra to make full use of his position as military commander, and march northwards to supervise and enmend the excesses of Castelli. In this way, yet another political leader of the River Plate government was absorbed into the revolutionary battlefield leaving aside his duties as political administrator. This fact, with the addition of Moreno's death earlier on, contributed to further increase the ever-expanding political vacuum of the Buenos Aires government.

A very significant factor we have not yet mentioned which is decisive for the understanding of this quest for internal stability is, no doubt, the conditions under which independence was being sustained in the ex River Plate Viceroyalty. The creoles allegiance towards Prince Ferdinand of Spain had been a most convenient device, which helped to somewhat contain radical desires of full independence which might have prompted even more internal and external reaction. However, it was clear from the outset that this situation would not be permanently accepted by the more radical factions of the revolution. By late 1811 this group, which identified itself with the ideals of Moreno, was led by Bernardo de Monteagudo. It would not take too long for this faction to oppose the Triumvirato government which had replaced the short-lived Junta experience during that same year.

The reasons for this opposition were mainly due to the leniency of the new government towards a series of vital issues, such as the Portuguese continual menacing presence in Uruguay, the reluctance to adopt more innovative political reforms and, most significantly, lack of decision to proclaim full independence from Spain out of fear of British annoyance.<sup>16</sup>

However, the Triumvirate proved as systematic in its persecutions as the previous government when dealing with Spanish and creole dissenters. Evidence of this was the killing of the

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<sup>16</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, De la Revolución, p.91.

Spanish resident and leading merchant Martín de Alzaga, accused of heading an anti-revolutionary conspiracy.

The attempts of this government to secure a more stable existence were marked by the efforts of its chief ideologue, Bernardino Rivadavia, who, from his position of War Secretary, rapidly got rid of the feeble legislative branch called the Junta Conservadora, which had veto powers over the Triumvirate, in order to make way for the installment of a Constituent Congress. Rivadavia clearly visualized the need to strengthen the government's executive powers in the midst of the continual revolutionary strife.

The opposition, however, viewed this as a sign of his centralist ambitions and his desires of concentrating more authority. Buenos Aires, as Lynch points out, was being accused of re-installing the policies of the old metropolis.<sup>17</sup> Monteagudo, now conveniently assisted by military officers with European battlefield experience and masonic persuasions, such as San Martín and Alvear, rapidly put in practice his propagandistic skills in an attempt to attract public opinion against the aims of the government's chief minister.<sup>18</sup>

There clearly seemed to be no room, at this stage, for smart whitty politicians such as Rivadavia, with very little grasp and practically no control of the military organization in the midst of

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<sup>17</sup> J.Lynch, The Spanish American Revolutions 1808-1826, (London, 1986), p.67.

<sup>18</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, De la Revolución, p.92.

continual warfare. As Halperín sustains, military virtues were more fully appreciated than civil duties amongst a large section of River Plate society.<sup>19</sup> It is no wonder that, as the wars of independence in the region increased, the arrival in the River Plate of creole military officers from Europe, thriving for military glory but also with pretensions of taking part in the political organization of the National State, was well received by society at large.

Evidence of this is the immediate insertion of San Martín and Alvear in the political arena and of the new secret political groups and lodges, the most well known being the Logia Lautaro and the Sociedad Patriótica, which were re-invigorated by their presence. This again illustrates the almost inevitable tendency of Rioplatense society to claim for the presence of military men at the highest levels of political participation.<sup>20</sup> However, the alternation of political and military duties was still an unresolved dilemma, as San Martín would soon realize.

Once the group ideologically led by Monteagudo managed to provoke the fall of the First Trimvirate towards the end of 1812, with the help of San Martín and Alvear, a new Triumvirate was set up with the mission of calling up a Constituent Assembly, with which it would remain directly connected. This was regarded as

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.222.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.212., P.González Bernaldo in "La Revolución Francesa", pp.19-22, comments on the close-knit tendency of these secret societies and their scarce contacts with a wider audience given their elitist cultural nature.

being a major step towards the achievement of National organization, which in other words basically meant definitive independence from the Spanish Crown.

In spite of Monteagudo's association with such eminent military men, he would make it clear that political organization should take precedence over military affairs:

...Alguno me dirá que siendo éstas las causas del peligro, no debemos pensar sino en la organización de un buen sistema militar; convengo en ello y no dudo que el suceso de las armas fijará nuestro destino, pero también sé que los progresos de éste ramo dependen esencialmente del sistema político que adopte el pueblo para la administración del gobierno; éste es el eje sobre el que rueda la enorme maza de fuerzas combinadas en que se funda la seguridad del Estado. El que prescinda de él en sus combinaciones, encontrará por único resultado de sus cálculos la insuficiencia y el desorden.<sup>21</sup>

The Assembly decreed a series of measures tending to consolidate national sovereignty, such as the adoption of a national flag, creation of a national anthem plus a series of military, social and economic reforms, which marked the re-emergence of Jacobin ideals in the region as some historians have suggested.<sup>22</sup> Although these measures did represent a return to more radical reforms they did not succeed in achieving significant political transformation, namely, the complete separation from the Spanish Crown.

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<sup>21</sup> Article written by Monteagudo in March-April 1812 which appeared in his Periodical Mártir o Libre, entitled "Observaciones Didácticas". In J.L.Romero and L.A.Romero (ed.) Pensamiento Político, Vol.1, p.302.

<sup>22</sup> For example, D.Bushnell, Reform and Reaction in the Platine Provinces 1810-1852, (Gainsville, 1983), p.10.



The ultimate failure of the Assembly of the year XIII, as it has been called since, was, evidently, that it was unable to sanction a constitution, which was the crucial element for achieving political and social stability in the area. The reasons for this situation seem to have been various. A lack of more genuine national representation was one of the causes to have delayed this issue, and as Halperín has sustained, the prospect of Ferdinand VII's release was enough to instill fear in many delegates not completely at ease with the republican experiments adopted so far.<sup>23</sup> The same author also suggests that internal strife within the Lautaro group, especially that which arose between Alvear and San Martín was another significant factor.<sup>24</sup>

The nature of the debate between these two leading military commanders poses an interesting insight of the complexities already mentioned in reference to the inconveniences of sharing political and military duties during revolutionary wars. San Martín became disenchanted with the way in which Alvear used the Logia apparatus more for the achievement of personal political ambitions rather than for the achievement of independence on the battlefield; whilst Alvear, became more pessimistic about the prospect of defeating the Spaniards, and became obsessed with using the Logia for consolidating the government's specific political aims.<sup>25</sup> External

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<sup>23</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, De la Independencia, p.94.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.95.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. And also T.Halperín Donghi, Revolución y Guerra, p.240.

and internal convulsions, paradoxically, allowed both these military men to concentrate and, eventually, take command of the decisions in both these fronts.

The situation in the interior provinces was becoming almost uncontrollable for the Second Triumvirate as many local caudillos, under the general political leadership of Artigas in Uruguay, began to rise against Buenos Aires claiming some sort of federational status for their provinces. This, as Lynch has correctly indicated, was proving to be the main impediment for political unity between Buenos Aires and the provinces.<sup>26</sup> To complicate matters more, the Portuguese were on the brink of taking possession of Montevideo, in spite of the warnings of The British Government's Envoy in Rio de Janeiro, Lord Strangford, against this action. Artigas, with his control of the local militia's, was therefore an essential pawn for the River Plate governments because of his role in the defence of that area. Nevertheless, Alvear regarded that a government with a stronger executive was essential to begin to tackle these problems. Therefore, and this is an indication of the extent of his powers at the time, he succeeded in removing the Triumvirate and replaced it, with the Directory in 1814, a uni-personal government.

On the other hand, San Martín, after abandoning the Buenos Aires political scene, was to be handed the command of the Northern Army, with which he would shortly confront the menace of Spanish penetration through the west.

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<sup>26</sup> J.Lynch, Spanish American Revolutions, p.64.

### The Directorial experiment.

The creation of the Directory marks the beginning of our second phase, and signified a most dramatic attempt to consolidate the situation of Buenos Aires as head of the revolutionary government. Alvear rapidly installed his uncle, Gervasio Posadas, as first Director, although it remained clear that he himself would remain as its mastermind. Very soon it became obvious that achievement of stability depended significantly from European governments, most especially Great Britain. Probably as a consequence of his previous residence in that country, Alvear at first seemed determined to structure the Directory on the lines of the British political system. However, when he himself took over the Directory, after successfully fulfilling his military duties in Uruguay, he quite astonishingly proposed His Majesties government to take full command of the government, as his own words clearly reflect:

Estas provincias desean pertenecer a la Gran Bretaña, obedecer su gobierno y vivir bajo su indujo poderoso. Ellas se abandonan sin condición alguna a la generosidad y buena fe del pueblo inglés, y yo estoy resuelto a sostener tan just solicitud para de los males que la afligen.<sup>27</sup>

This letter is now part of Argentine historical folklore, as

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<sup>27</sup> In B.Mitre, Historia de Belgrano, Vol.2, p.347. Had Alvear's envoy, Manuel García, not been so prudent and decided to hand this letter to the British authorities in Río de Janeiro as he had been instructed to, this might well have been more than just an astonishing anecdote.

it did not eventually reach the hands of Lord Strangford in Brasil as it was supposed to. It certainly serves as evidence of the lack of political unity and cohesion of the men in power in Buenos Aires to consolidate stability by proper means.

Another sign of the urgent necessity to obtain the attention of European governments had been clearly reflected before when, still in the days of Posadas, the Directory sent a diplomatic mission to this continent. Entrusted to Belgrano and Rivadavia, at around 1814, this mission's objective was to achieve guarantees of national independence from the recently restored Spanish monarch Ferdinand VII.<sup>28</sup> If this venture was to fail, as it was certainly doomed to, they were asked to "find" a European prince somewhere in either Russia, France, Germany or, preferably, Britain, to act as monarch in the River Plate, with the protection of the nation of the monarch-to-be, and therefore neutralize the menace of a Spanish military re-conquering expedition.<sup>29</sup>

These desperate attempts to obtain foreign protection clearly indicate the extent of impotence of the government to restore some type of order and confidence. However, the Directory's monarchic schemes were taking place at a rather inappropriate moment, as Napoleon's downfall was imminent at around the same time, and the Vienna Congress was beginning to operate as the guiding force of post-Napoleonic Europe. The Belgrano-Rivadavia mission, therefore,

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<sup>28</sup> For full details and the correspondence of this mission, see: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Comisión de Bernardino Rivadavia, (Buenos Aires, 1933-36).

<sup>29</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, De la Revolución, p.97.

proved completely futile.<sup>30</sup>

The Vienna Congress also made it clear that it would not even remotely sympathize with recently formed independent nations with republican governments, but on the contrary, it would help European Monarchies to restore their full powers as soon as possible. In this way, the River Plate governments would, from now on, mainly look towards Britain for assistance, when this nation gradually began to move away from Metternich's system.<sup>31</sup>

It was not at all surprising that after these diplomatic misfortunes the days of Alvear's regime were numbered. More unfortunate than those failures was the gradual disintegration of the Assembly, on which so much hope had been placed, and the continuing internal and external difficulties. The situation of unrest in the interior during the 1814-16 period increased even more, and, in spite of the military victories in Montevideo, the course of the revolutionary war was far from over.

Economic aspects were obviously a significant factor of the Buenos Aires-interior confrontation, as well as of the conflicts between some of the other provinces. The effects of free trade very much connected to the ever-increasing British commercial presence

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<sup>30</sup> M. Belgrano, Rivadavia y sus gestiones diplomáticas en España (1815-1820), (Buenos Aires, 1945), offers another interesting account of this diplomatic venture.

<sup>31</sup> For an account of European policies towards the Spanish Colonies during the Congress of Vienna system years, the works of W.W. Kauffman, British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, (New Haven, 1951), and D.A.G. Waddell, "International Politics and the Independence of Latin America", published The Independence of Latin America, are extremely useful.

in the area was constantly on the forefront.<sup>32</sup> However, the persisting inconsistencies of the political system -what Chiaramonte has referred to as the "provisionalidad permanente" which marked the first experiences of independent government- seemed at this stage to be the main burden of the entangled River Plate independence process.<sup>33</sup>

Alvear's fall did not mark the end of the Directory government model. However, after the short term governments of two more military commanders, Rondeau and Gonzalez Balcarce, by mid-1816 the persistent menace of a Spanish re-conquering expedition and the internal instability made desperately clear the need for a meeting of a new National Assembly. This Assembly duly met in Tucumán, in an attempt of the Porteño government of decentralizing the political structure. More significantly it declared the much needed proclamation of full independence from the Spaniards.

Complete separation from Spain was a vital and very necessary step to be taken to enable a more steadier course in the development of the much hampered state of internal politics in the Platine provinces. Nevertheless, another main issue at stake at this Congress -the pending federalization issue- had to be left aside as the litoral provinces refused to attend this Congress, in

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<sup>32</sup> D.Bushnell, Reform and Reaction, p.14. For a detailed account of comercial aspects during this period, M.Burgin, Aspectos Economicos del Federalismo Argentino, (Buenos Aires, 1969), is an essential source of reference.

<sup>33</sup> J.C.Chiaramonte, "El Federalismo Aregentino en la primera mitad del siglo XIX.", p.82. In R.Carmagnani (ed.), Federalismos Latinoamericanos: Méjico, Brasil, Argentina, (Mexico, 1993).

repudiation of Buenos Aires's persistent status as capital of the River Plate provinces.<sup>34</sup>

The Directory surprisingly survived as the accepted political model of government, and Pueyrredón was named new Director, confirming once more the tendency in Rioplatense society of placing military heroes as heads of State. The Congress itself was to remain in Tucumán, although shortly afterwards its residence was considered inconvenient due to its proximity to the Upper Peru region, where the most violent battles were taking place. As a consequence, it was removed to Buenos Aires to the dismay of the leading caudillos of the interior.

One of the most intriguing features of the Tucumán Congress, however, was the monarchical project put forward by Belgrano as an indispensable alternative for achieving the much needed stability. Belgrano had clearly perceived, on his European mission, the tacit unwillingness of the European Courts to acknowledge any type of recognition or assistance to far-from-stable emerging republican governments. He therefore became convinced that if a monarchy was created in the River Plate the chances of obtaining some sort of European approval might increase.<sup>35</sup> Belgrano was, of course, no newcomer to monarchic schemes; he had been a leading figure of the grotesque Infanta Carlota fiasco, and like many River Plate military Commanders, notably San Martín, favoured a monarchical solution rather than experimenting uneasily with republican models.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. pp.94-95.

<sup>35</sup> F.Safford, "Politics, Ideology and Society", p.61.

The complex technicalities involved for the creation of a monarchy had been the main reason for the abandonment of such a solution in the past. Inevitably, Belgrano's new scheme, in spite of the novelties attached to it, was doomed to end in the same way. What was new in Belgrano's monarchic proposal was the establishment on the Throne of a native of the Americas, probably a descendant of the Incas, instead of acquiring the services of a European import of Royal descent:

...que conforme a estos principios [of moderate government systems preferred by European powers], en su concepto la forma de gobierno más conveniente para estas provincias sería la de una monarquía temperada; llamando a la dinastía de los incas por la justicia que en sí envuelve la restitución de esta casa tan inicuaamente despojada del trono por una sangrienta revolución, que se evitaría para que en lo sucesivo con ésta declaración y el entusiasmo general d que se poseerían los habitantes del interior, con solo la noticia de un paso para ellos tan lisonjero, y otras varias razones que expuso.<sup>36</sup>

The idea was probably picked up by Belgrano from a similar project presented by Miranda to the British government a couple of decades before. The influences of a British political model are reasonably visible, as Belgrano had in mind a Constitutional Monarchy with a bi-cameral chamber very much framed on the parliamentary system.

The new Directorial government was eminently more conservative, not only because of the fact that half the members of

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<sup>36</sup> Transcription taken from a report of the secret session of the Congreso where Belgrano put forward these ideas entitled: "Informe al Congreso de las Provincias Unidas sobre el establecimiento de una monarquía." of 1816. In J.L.Romero and L.A.Romero (ed), Pensamiento Político, p.209.



the new Congress were priests, as Bushnell ironically remarks, but because it now became even more centralist than before.<sup>37</sup> The Congress allowed the Executive to be responsible for the nomination of governors in the provinces, and voting was now reduced to a more limited franchise compared to that established by the year XIII Assembly.<sup>38</sup>

A federal system or some sort of policies favouring more direct political participation of the provinces, were absent during the Pueyrredón Administration, which was to last from 1816 to 1819. As a result, naturally, tensions between the interior and Buenos Aires intensified considerably during this period, and national union seemed extremely remote.<sup>39</sup>

These internal complications surely derived from a peculiar incapacity of the members of the governments to view the provinces as an integral political and administrative component of the new structure of the River Plate State. It seems, as Chiaramonte suggests, that for the members of the central government the term "provincias" was more a reference to the administrative divisions of the Spanish Viceroyalty, than to the composition of a new independent nation.<sup>40</sup>

At a time when Paine seems to have been more read than Burke in Porteño literary circles, the tendency of Directorial policies

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<sup>37</sup> Bushnell, Reform and Reaction, p.124.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp.124-125.

<sup>39</sup> J.Lynch, Spanish American Revolutions, p.68.

<sup>40</sup> J.C.Chiaramonte, "El Federalismo Argentino", pp.94-95.

became, paradoxically, more conservative.<sup>41</sup> In terms of the development of local politics during Pueyrredon's Directory, this process became considerably stagnated as a result of the lack of initiatives for institutional and economic reforms. This trend was most strikingly confirmed when, eventually, the Congress presented the new constitution in 1819, which clearly ratified the centralist and conservative nature of the Directory.<sup>42</sup> The appearance of the 1819 Constitution was, to a certain extent, to mark the beginning of the end of this political system.

As a result of this further tendency towards centralization, internal unrest increased and Pueyrredón sent armies to suppress revolts organized by the leading caudillos of the Litoral provinces. However, his military commanders were outmastered by López (Santa Fé) and Ramírez (Entre Ríos), and a series of humiliating armistices, accepting the withdrawal of porteño troops from the area followed. Further embarrassment was to await the Directory, shortly after Pueyrredón resigned in mid-1819, López and Ramírez defeated the forces of new Director Rondeau at Cepeda, and imposed on Buenos Aires the Treaty of San Nicolás, which established a half-baked federal structure for the nation.<sup>43</sup>

This new state of affairs implied that Buenos Aires was, in theory, no longer head of the National Government, and that it had

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<sup>41</sup> C.García Belsunce, Una Ventana, pp.177-178.

<sup>42</sup> D.Bushnell, "The Independence of Spanish South America", pp.124-125.

<sup>43</sup> J.Lynch, The Spanish American Revolutions, p.71.

to form its own autonomous government. More significantly, this city lost its control of commerce as freedom of river navigation was now established. Nevertheless, in spite of the political turmoil and confusion which prevailed in Buenos Aires during a few dramatic months of the so called "anarchic year 20", this structural change proved to be a blessing in disguise for the future development of porteño politics.

What followed were the "Rivadavia years", and the introduction of a more stabilized form of political practices motivated, to a great extent, by the expertise of one of the River Plate's most skillfull revolutionary statesmen.

#### The Rivadavia Years.

Bernardino Rivadavia became chief Minister of the Buenos Aires government formed as a consequence of the San Nicolás Agreement, which was led by yet another military figure, the respected Martín Rodríguez. However, in spite of this continuing military pressence in the government, the conditions for more active political life in Buenos Aires started to emerge. Two factors had contributed for this new state of affairs. On one hand, the wars of independence where close to coming to an end, in South America, and this, as explained before, had been a source of

considerable distraction for the various revolutionary governments.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, after the events of the year 20, internal disputes arose between the caudillo leaders, and by 1821 both Artigas and Ramírez had vanished from the scene leaving López, who now established a peaceful link for a few years with the Buenos Aires Government.

There was now, for the first time since the outbreak of independence and the revolutionary wars, not such an urgent need for external or internal military mobilization. As Romero sustains, there now emerged a kind of new spirit where the prevalence of peace constituted an indispensable agent for political and institutional order.<sup>45</sup>

Rivadavia's arrival on the scene also contributed to this new era of political and institutional order in the River Plate. He succeeded, for a few years, in drawing the attention of a large sector of River Plate society towards the benefits to be obtained from political stability and institutional reform. Administrative reform would be his main ambition in order to reduce state bureaucracy. Therefore, political, economic, religious, military and social reforms appeared immediately as a significant element of his programme.

In this way, he hoped to contribute to gradually displacing military affairs as a main source of obsession of Porteño society.

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<sup>44</sup> L.A.Romero, La Feliz Experiencia. 1820-1824, (Buenos Aires, 1976), p.213.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. pp.211-212.

As a consequence, he thought, a more consciensous awarness of democratic life and social harmony would be achieved.

The years spent as diplomatic envoy in Europe during 1816-19, had a considerable effect on Rivadavia, and put him up-to-date with European politics and the main ideologic trends prevalent at that time. Meeting up with prominent politicians in France, England, and Spain, and establishing connections with influencial political thinkers, such as Destutt de Tracy and Bentham, no doubt helped to expand his own political scope.<sup>46</sup>

Rivadavia's abrupt and thundering introduction of reforms reflected his undisguised identification with the incipient utilitarian spirit which was having such effect amongst a vast range of politicians of different ideological persuasions in Europe. His correspondence with Bentham, which took place between 1818-1824, further emphasizes the extent of this ideological allegiance. Bentham quite proudly considered Rivadavia, along with Del Valle and Bolívar, as some sort of South American disciple.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, his attempts to define more clearly the limits of the Executive, Legislative and the Judiciary, and the declaration of Universal Suffrage by the new "Junta de Representantes" of the province, were evidence of the amendments being made in order to achieve republican credibility among European radicals.

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<sup>46</sup> Piccirilli, Rivadavia y su Tiempo, (Buenos Aires, 1943), Vol.1, p.267.

<sup>47</sup> M. Williford, Bentham on Spanish America, (Baton Rouge, 1980), p.20.

A more specific demonstration of his attempt to be consistent with these Utilitarian beliefs is reflected in Rivadavia's ambition to put in practice a series of reforms to reduce the existing bureaucracy, and which, in some cases, considerably affected some institutional remnants of the traditional colonial structure. The suppression of the Cabildo, viewed as a continual source of political disturbance, and the ecclesiastical innovations (abolition of "Fueros", Tithes and a series of other Church privileges) which aimed towards the secularization of the Church, are a clear example of this.

More daringly, reform was also to be extended to the military establishment, which was regarded by the government as a major source of the administrative chaos of the state. Halperín sustains that the need for military reforms were essential for the achievement of the political model this government wanted to adopt.<sup>48</sup> These reforms basically consisted in reducing the armies number to 2.500 soldiers and 125 officers, and enforcing an earlier retirement for officers with several years service. Amongst these "forced" to retire were notables such as Pueyrredón, Azcuénaga, Saavedra and Marcos Balcarce. This measure, plus his dislike for other "heroes of independence", notably San Martín, emphasizes, Rivadavia's obsession to keep these military leaders on the sidelines of the political process.<sup>49</sup>

This spirit of reform was also reflected in the economic

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<sup>48</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, Revolución y Guerra, p.374.

<sup>49</sup> L.A.Romero, La Feliz Experiencia, pp.198-199.

changes that Rivadavia and Finance Minister Manuel García implemented. The Emphyteusis Law, an agrarian reform bill which allowed government to lease land for the effects of stimulating colonization, and the creation of the first National Bank are evidence of this. The strong commercial links established with British Banking firms such as Baring Brothers, in order to obtain loans for public works and the modernization of the city of Buenos Aires, are other examples of the above mentioned.

The emphasis on education evidenced, for instance, in the creation of the University of Buenos Aires and the introduction of the Lancastarian system, as well as further stimulus given to freedom of speech, are also an indication of Rivadavia's desire to modernize Porteño society.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of bitter opposition encountered as a result of the ecclesiastical reforms, and the existence of political groups closely connected to military men with a profound disgust for Rivadavia's reforms, the Government managed to survive a few attempts to overthrow it -the conspiracy of General Pueyrredon's associate Tagle being the most renowned.<sup>51</sup> However, it was the political community in general which was responsible for sustaining the government against these conspiracies, as even the opposition factions inside the new Buenos Aires Assembly, now called Junta de Representantes, also reacted vigorously whenever a menace of this

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp.221-229.

<sup>51</sup> T.Halperín Donghi, Revolución y Guerra, p.368.

type appeared.<sup>52</sup>

The need to attract Great Britain's attention towards the successful developments taking place in Buenos Aires, was another of the main goals of Rivadavia. Apart from the commercial connections already established with that nation, recognition of Argentine independence by the British Government was considered as an indispensable requirement for the successful continuation of the new political model. It became too obvious for Rivadavia that the other European governments were very much identified with the conservative order imposed by Metternich and the Holy Alliance, which, off course, involved supporting Ferdinand VII's attempts to re-conquer his colonies.<sup>53</sup>

Britain was however, under the diplomatic leadership of Castlereagh, gradually attempting to split from this ideological trend. By the time this Minister was replaced by Canning in 1822, this separation became more clear. It was Canning who eventually decided that time was ripe for Spanish American recognition, and the River Plate was amongst the first Latin American nations to receive a British Consul. The favourable reports of the River Plate Consul, Woodbine Parish, on the state of affairs of events in Buenos Aires under Rivadavia, surely had a lot to do with Canning's

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp.229-234.

<sup>53</sup> K.Gallo, De las Invasiones al Reconocimiento. Gran Bretaña y el Río de la Plata 1806-1826, (Buenos Aires, 1994), pp.166-199. W.W.Kauffmann, British Policy, and D.A.G.Waddell, "International Politics", as mentioned before are very useful on this point.



decision to grant recognition in early 1825.<sup>54</sup>

One of the factors that had delayed Canning's recognition of the River Plate provinces, was to become, eventually, a cause for the eventual downfall of the Rivadaviean era.<sup>55</sup> The fact that Rivadavia was only a representative of the government of Buenos Aires, and not of the whole nation had always caught the attention of Canning. Rivadavia's popularity, especially amongst the British community in the River Plate, was not enough to persuade Canning that this was sufficient for Britain to consider the whole of Argentina as a "safe" enough nation which deserved recognition in spite of its dubious Republicanism.<sup>56</sup>

Eventually, by the time Rodríguez's government had been replaced by that of Las Heras in 1824, Canning was persuaded by Parish that a National River Plate Government was imminent. García, the strong man of the new government had assured the British Consul that a National Congress would soon be conveyed and from it a National Government would emerge.<sup>57</sup> Shortly afterwards,

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<sup>54</sup> K.Gallo, De las Invasiones, pp.204-237. For a detailed survey of Castlereagh's and Canning's policies respecting recognition of the Latin American republics, C.Webster's, Great Britain and the Independence of Latin Amrica 1812-1830, (London, 1938), includes the most significant British Official diplomatic correspondence in reference to these events.

<sup>55</sup> K.Gallo, De la Invasión, pp. 216-236.

<sup>56</sup> The doubts and uncertainties of Canning and the British Government with respect to the River Plate recognition question, are described by H.Ferns, Great Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century, (Oxford, 1960). Also in K.Gallo, De las Invasiones, pp. 203-237.

<sup>57</sup> Parish to Canning, 24 October 1824. Published in C.Webster, Great Britain, Vol.1, pp.116-119.

the 1826 Congress elected Rivadavia as first President of the newly named United Provinces of the River Plate.

### Conclusions.

When Rivadavia became President of the re-unified Argentine Republic, it seemed that the consolidation of civil government and national unity had been finally achieved. However, a series of events which took place during the traumatic 1826-27 period, eventually contributed to Rivadavia's and the presidential system's early downfall.<sup>58</sup>

Largely due to Rivadavia's continued emphasis on political and administrative centralization and other Unitario principles, amongst them the "Unitario" Constitution of 1826, the leading provincial caudillos waved the Federalista banner and reacted against a Buenos Aires based government once again. Peace, an essential component in the first stages of the Rivadavean, experiment was lost in the internal front.

Moreover, international war reappeared violently with the outbreak of the Argentine-Brazilian War in July 1826. Military events once again took over the central stage, and Rivadavia proved somehow incapable to deal with this double challenge. To make matters worse, the handling of the diplomatic affairs connected

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<sup>58</sup> For this period, E. Ravignani, "El Congreso Nacional de 1824-1827. La Convención Nacional de 1828-1829", In Academia Nacional de la Historia, Historia de la Nación Argentina, 1949, is probably still the most useful work on this specific period.

with the Brazilian War, were inappropriately conducted by Manuel García and, in consequence speeded the downfall of the Rivadavean government, of the Presidential system and, more significantly, of the recently recovered National unity.

The years which immediately followed this event, were marked by the daunting presence of General Rosas on the Porteño political scene, as Governor of the Buenos Aires province. He was to rule from 1829 to 1852, with an interruption in 1832-35 eventually adopting "Extraordinary Faculties" which practically granted his control of the whole country. This device enabled him to remain in power for so long, forcing political opposition to exile, and transforming him as the fearful and undisputed guarantor of political and social order. Rosas's rule was a de-facto one. In his three decades in power, Argentina lacked not only a National Constitution, but also crucial national institutions in both political and economic fields.<sup>59</sup>

A possible explanation for the abrupt culmination of the Rivadavia system and the "feliz experiencia"<sup>60</sup> might be connected to Lynch's thesis that he achieved his objects too soon and proved to be "fifty years ahead of his time".<sup>61</sup> However, as Alberdi dramatically suggested, the ever-present urge for military

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<sup>59</sup> The latest biography on Rosas is J.Lynch's, Argentine Dictator, Juan Manuel de Rosas, 1829-1852, (Oxford, 1981).

<sup>60</sup> This term in reference to the Rodríguez Government of Buenos Aires of 1821-24, is attributed to General Las Heras in a speech delivered in to the Buenos Aires Legislature in 1825. L.A.Romero, La Feliz Experiencia, p.7.

<sup>61</sup> J.Lynch, Spanish American Revolutions, p.77.

endeavours in the River Plate, seems to have been an even more powerful motive to prevent a more consistent development of political institutions and civil governments capable of replacing those established during the Viceroyalty. Alberdi pointed to two aspects. The already mentioned of the pre-eminence of military factors and pursuit of military glory, and the presence, in some stages, of ideological radicalism. In relation to the second one, pointed out:

... Por fortuna, ella [Argentina] sabe ya, á costa de llanto y de sangre, que el goce de este beneficio [liberty] está sujeto á condiciones difíciles y graduales, que es menester llenar. Así, ai en los primeros dias fue ávida de libertad, hoy se contentaría con una libertad mas que moderada.

En sus primeros cantos de triunfo, olvidó una palabra menos sonora que la de libertad, pero que representa un contrapeso que hace tenerse en pié a la libertad: el orden.

Un orden, una regla, una ley; es la suprema necesidad de su situación política.<sup>62</sup>

Both these aspects, according to him, substantially conspired against a stable political solution that could eventually conduct society satisfactorally towards the benefits of security and liberty.

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<sup>62</sup> J.B.Alberdi, Obras Completas, p.237.