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The Background of the Revolution of May 25, 1810 at the Port of Buenos Aires

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**THE BACKGROUND OF THE REVOLUTION
OF MAY 25, 1810 AT THE PORT
OF BUENOS AIRES**

by

Sister Mary Robert Reis, C. D. P.

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Among the many and diverse factors which caused the Revolution of May 25, 1810, in the port city of Buenos Aires none stand out so prominently as the economic. The roots of the conflict were deeply embedded in the forces at work on both sides of the Atlantic during the colonial period; on the one side was the economic defensive policy of the mother country; on the other, the economic survival of Buenos Aires. In order to understand the genesis of revolutionary attitudes, it will first be necessary to enter into a short historical review of the trade of Buenos Aires and of the policy and regulations of Spain.

In a direct economic sense colonies were valuable to Spain as sources of raw materials and of revenue. The products of the Indies had high commercial value to a Europe which was beginning to industrialize, but of this value Spain was not the ultimate beneficiary, since she remained backward in manufacturing. To the countries of northern Europe, thoroughly committed to private capitalistic enterprise, the benefits of the wealth of the Indies eventually flowed, either through the normal channels of trade or through their plundering expeditions. As the theory of mercantilism came to dominate the statecraft of Europe, Spain was thrust into mercantilistic competition with her European rivals. Mercantilism became a means of building up a nation's power for political purposes and of making it stronger than

its neighbors; but Spain was a poor nation, sparsely populated, and backward in manufacturing as compared with her rivals. Since she was unable to supply her own domestic requirements; obviously she could not meet all the requirements of her colonies. Besides, the merchants of Seville and Cádiz, who were the principal beneficiaries of Spain's imperial system, did not encourage an abundant flow of manufactures to America because they preferred a regime of scarcity and high prices. By means of heavily convoyed voyages Spain sought to keep all trade with her colonies in her own hands and from it she rigidly excluded all foreign vessels. Spanish economic policy from first to last was preoccupied with the production and acquisition of bullion, and with the maintenance of an exclusive monopoly.

Of all the Spanish colonies none was less adapted to the commercial policies which formed the basis of the Spanish colonial system than Buenos Aires. Founded in 1580 after the already established imperial trade routes, poor in mineral resources, insignificant as a source of revenue, Buenos Aires was of little interest to Spain; but at the same time owing to its strategic geographical position, it posed a constant threat to the integrity of Spain's colonial policy. From the very beginning Buenos Aires was made to serve as little beyond a convenient highway to Chile and gold-bearing Peru. Retained as an inferior colony, she was kept at the beck and call of the western and northern viceroyalties.

Buenos Aires had difficulty in establishing commercial contact because of the law of 1561, which prohibited all overseas commerce through ports

other than those expressly designated for the purpose. It was not only imperative for the survival of Buenos Aires that Spain reroute official trade going into Peru, but interests of the interior had for some time recommended the southern approach to Peru in place of the lengthy, cumbersome, and dangerous Panama route. The products that came from Spain by the routes laid down in accordance with the monopolistic regime did not satisfy consumer needs. The new city was not only an available port, but its vast plains were adaptable to the breeding of livestock, which laid the foundation of a new wealth that permitted the exportation of wool, lard, and hides. Moreover, the principal advantage of Buenos Aires lay in its greater proximity to Spain.

As a beachhead on the plains and as an Atlantic port from Peru, Buenos Aires attracted the attention of Spain. Although Spain rejected the southern-route proposals, she recognized the importance of the suggested route as a potential gap in her economic defense through which smugglers could undermine the trade monopoly and draw off the wealth of Potosí. In effect, her policy of economic defense was closely linked to the problem of the economic survival of the bonaerense; who, cognizant of their importance to the defense of the viceroyalty of Peru, demanded concessions from Spain.

True, permisos were granted from time to time, but these unwittingly played into the hands of smugglers and failed to satisfy either Spain or the immediate needs of the port. The contraband trade carried on with the Portuguese,

British, Dutch, and French exceeded legal commerce in value and hurt the vested interests of the merchants of Seville and Lima.

Therefore, this permiso trade was temporarily checked by the protesting merchants of Peru and the resultant cédula of 1601 which prohibited the trade of the port of Buenos Aires.¹ In 1602 the severity of the earlier cédula was modified to allow Buenos Aires to export flour, meat and tallow valued at about 12,500 pesos, in exchange for clothing, shoes, ironware and other necessities.² This arrangement was extended for a similar period in 1608 and for five more years in 1614, but when don Manuel de Frías, the procurador-general, asked for an increased Brazil-Buenos Aires trade, the petition was rejected on the grounds that existing laws forbade commerce with Peru by way of Buenos Aires and that trade in the port of Buenos Aires jeopardized the prosperity of the provinces of Tierra Firme.³

1

"Real cédula de 6 de abril de 1601," Documentos del Archivo de Indias (Buenos Aires, 1901), I, 116.

2

"Real cédula de 6 de agosto de 1602," ibid., p. 127.

3

Memorial del procurador general de las provincias del Río de la Plata, don Manuel Frías, "Correspondencia de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires con los reyes de España," ed. Roberto Levillier (Madrid, 1918), III, 66-77.

After the official Brazilian trade was suspended in 1622, Buenos Aires was limited to a yearly traffic with Spain by a registro or licensed trade of two ships, but smugglers soon found ways to continue their activity. Since very few licensed ships appeared at Buenos Aires between 1618 and 1675, it was the navíos de arribada, ships that could legally enter a port under conditions of distress, that kept the port of Buenos Aires open to trade. The arribada technique had numerous possibilities, but above all it provided an opportunity for ships to frequent Buenos Aires.

The prohibitions by which Spain tried to enforce the economic isolation of Buenos Aires were revoked in the first half of the eighteenth century. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries throughout Europe were marked by profound changes in attitude. Locke's ideas began to develop; Rousseau and Montesquieu cried out against the European ruling system; and Adam Smith and the physiocrats attracted attention. At the close of the seventeenth century the insane Charles II of Spain died, willing his kingdom to the Duke of Anjou and bringing on the war of the Spanish Succession. France poured all its power into the conflict, and succeeded in settling the war in its own favor. Thus the era of the Bourbons began in Spain. Enlightened and progressive, the Bourbons had assimilated some of the new economic and administrative principles of the age. The early Bourbons in an attempt to improve communications with the colonies and to increase trade abolished the fleet system in 1740 and by piecemeal decrees aimed at eliminating the restraints on

trade.

By 1759 it was evident that the early trade reforms did not solve the Spanish colonial problems because through Buenos Aires had developed one of the most extensive contraband trades in America. Two factors made this possible: first, by the treaty of Utrecht in 1713, England obtained the asiento de negros, the slave traffic right, and naturally such an entering wedge into Buenos Aires presented untold opportunities for the introduction of goods; second, by the same treaty, Spanish official recognition was given to the Portuguese contraband outpost of Colonia del Sacramento conveniently located just across the river from Buenos Aires.

This was the situation that confronted Charles III at his accession to the throne in 1759. In addition, three factors persuaded him to take action: the influence of economic theorists, fear of British competition, and pressure from France. Statesmen motivated with the desire to raise the economic level of Spain gathered around him: the Conde de Floridablanca, the Marqués de Campomanes, the Conde de Aranda, and Jovellanos. Up to this point, reform had been merely an abrogation of the past; now more positive action began. In 1764 nine Spanish ports were opened to colonial trade; in 1767 four mail ships a year were licensed to sail to Buenos Aires. Nine years later the crown created the viceroyalty of La Plata and put Buenos Aires on a par with Lima. In 1788 Buenos Aires could trade with the interior and at long last goods could pass from Buenos Aires to Chile and to Peru.

These reforms were meant to strengthen and reaffirm the bonds between the colonies and the mother country, but the results were just the contrary. Factors in Buenos Aires working toward revolution received new strength from the Bourbon reforms. We must refer to the creation of the new viceroyalty of La Plata and its resultant effect: the organization of an economic and political region that tended to be orientated toward Buenos Aires. The irreconcilability of the crown's centralizing policy with Buenos Aires' requirements made Spain's control increasingly ineffective. The system of intendancies set up in 1782 as a means of strengthening royal authority was used by the colonists to reinforce localism. The intendant was made the spokesman for local interests and local aspirations. It may also be asserted that the same result was produced by the free-trade reform. During the period when commerce was under control of the fleet, there was economic unity; now that the entire empire was opened up to a commerce in which she could partake, Buenos Aires could acquire a certain economic autonomy. Ingenieros emphasizes this point:

La creación del Virreinato del Río de la Plata senala el momento crítico de nuestra evolución colonial; en veinte años se producen transformaciones más substanciales que en los dos siglos precedentes. La hegemonía peruana es suplantada por la rioplatense; Buenos Aires deja de ser la puerta falsa del Alto Peru y tiende a convertirse en metrópoli natural de las Provincias Unidas del nuevo virreinato. El cambio de intereses coincide con un cambio de espíritu: la libertad de comercio trae consigo una creciente liberalidad en las ideas; todo pensamiento de reforma y de progreso

encuentra una resonancia o una simpatía, cada vez menos tímida; y cuando la torpeza o la mediocridad de los virreyes que sucedieron a Vértiz hizo pesar más fuertemente la coyunda peninsular, fué naciendo en todos los rioplatenses cierto espíritu de autonomismo liberal, que en algunos llegó a convertirse en deseo de independencia política cuando la oportunidad le fué propicia.⁴

The commercial progress of Buenos Aires was marked by the foundation of the customs house in 1778 and the consulado in 1794. After the creation of the viceroyalty the introduction of merchandise into the districts to the east of the cordillera was effected more easily and rapidly by way of Buenos Aires than through Callao. The shipments on mule back which had to cross the very high and difficult mountain ridges of Peru in order to supply these regions with overseas goods, were replaced by way of Buenos Aires, so that even Potosí, Chuquisaca, and Santa Cruz, as well as all the towns around them, filled their shops with goods introduced from Buenos Aires.

The Bourbon reforms contributed to a sudden increase in population and prosperity in the new capital. Buenos Aires, which in 1744 had slightly more than ten thousand inhabitants, reached a population of forty thousand at the end of the century. The average annual export of hides from Buenos Aires increased from 150,000 in the 1750's to 700,000 in the 1790's.

4

José Ingenieros, La Evolución de las Ideas Argentinas (Buenos Aires, 1961), I, 68.

Economically the towns in the interior witnessed a notable, energetic growth of farming and ranching; but Buenos Aires' progress was reflected in much more modest terms there, sharpening the division between the interior's small local industries and crop production and the coast's commercial and livestock economy. Although Charles III liberalized the mercantilist system, he did not open the port of Buenos Aires to international trade; therefore, not until after the Revolution of May were the effects of such a divided economy really felt: "one region seeking to import its consumer goods from abroad in exchange for its agricultural products, the other demanding internal markets for the output of its industries and farms."⁵

In the last decade of the eighteenth century it soon became evident that what Buenos Aires needed above all was direct contact with world markets. The necessity of trade through Spain seemed unreasonable and unrealistic since not Spain but England was the greatest consumer of the colony's produce. This abnormal situation became more evident; for even under the free-trade reform, contraband continued to be extremely profitable to both native merchants and foreigners.

Had it been possible to confine the problem to its economic aspects alone, the solution might have been possible without disrupting the political unity of the empire. In reality, however, the social and political aspects of the struggle for

free trade were inseparable from the economic ones. First, the opening of the port of Buenos Aires to all commerce meant the abolition of the outer ring which held the imperial economy together. Second, it was a direct threat to the economic and social security of those who had already occupied a privileged position with respect to overseas trade. Consequently, what the advocates of free trade at first conceived as a mere change of economic policy, was gradually transformed into the problem of economic autonomy, and from this it would be a short step to the problem of political independence.⁶

This thesis deals with the role of a cosmopolitan Buenos Aires which skirted the effects of the Hapsburgs and Bourbons of Spain to keep it within the overall pattern of the mercantile policy and emerged as a center where commerce and profits were the decisive elements that led to revolution. Economic studies show that even Spain's imperial policy contributed to what Belgrano considered the advantages accruing to the Plata from the cooperation between merchants and landowners that resulted in the free-trade struggle; rather than the usual close association of merchant and craft guilds that predominated elsewhere in Latin America. It, too, will account for the cleavage with the cities of the interior which was not healed until the late nineteenth century.

6

Miron Burgin, The Economic Aspects of Argentine Federalism
(Cambridge, 1946), pp. 12-13.

Although in all Latin America industrial activity had been restricted at first, in the seventeenth century it developed as a consequence of the failure of Spain's industry and also because of the slowness of communication. Unlike the incipient manufacturing movements in Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere, few industries unfolded in La Plata. The linen and woolen industries of Corrientes, Catamarca, and Córdoba were soon ruined by the active commercial interchange which began in 1778, and the infant industries disappeared completely after the British invasions.⁷

The history of the guilds in Buenos Aires followed a similar pattern. There were few artisans in Buenos Aires before 1810. As early as 1606, the acuerdos reveal a concern for admitting foreign artisans because they were desperately needed.

The tailors of Buenos Aires were the first artisans to establish a guild and succeeded in having their charter approved in 1733.⁸ The first formal attempt to charter guilds in La Plata was initiated by a promulgation of Viceroy Vertiz in 1780 to establish guilds for all classes of artisans, but the plan failed to materialize. When the silversmiths applied for a charter in 1797, Julián de Leiva

7

Ricardo Levene, Lecciones de la Historia Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1937), pp. 272-273.

8

See: Acuerdos del estinguido cabildo de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires, 1928), Serie II, Tomo VI, Libros XXI, XXII, y XXIII, anos 1729 a 1733, pp. 713, 714, 718, 720, 726, 727 y 739.

refused because of the abuses of the porteño silversmiths. Finally, after a stormy struggle with the shoemakers of Buenos Aires, Cornelio Saavedra, as syndic of the cabildo refused to register any guilds. Thus ended the attempts at guild organization which had been frustrated from the start in La Plata.

The Revolution of May 25, 1810, was a revolution for a free port; the leader of independence was not a soldier, said Alberdi, but an economist, Dr. Moreno. Trade had been a precious term in Buenos Aires since the very beginning of its history as a Spanish possession. Under the impact of contraband dealings, the arbitrary measures of Spain, and influences from Europe, there was developing in Buenos Aires, by a process of elimination and selection, a sense of independence which was to manifest itself when the occasion demanded.

CHAPTER II

CREOLE ACTIVITIES

The movement for independence in Buenos Aires made little noticeable progress until the last decade of the eighteenth century when there was behind the practical economic problems a body of opinion and thought forming the intellectual-economic background of the Revolution of May 25, 1810. Into this movement of intellectual preparation for emancipation strode the economist Manuel Belgrano.

A wealthy creole from the merchant class in Buenos Aires, Belgrano became interested in economics and political science while at the University of Salamanca in 1786. When the first news of the French Revolution reached Spain, he was getting his law degree at Valladolid. He was active in economic circles at Madrid in 1793 when he received his appointment as secretary of the consulado of Buenos Aires from the minister Gardoqui.¹

On his return to Buenos Aires Belgrano expounded the ideas of European authors from whom his eclectic nature had derived inspiration. Through Campomanes' Educación popular, he penetrated the thought of the Spanish economists, Moncada, Martínez de Matta, Osorio, and Ward, who had criticized Spain's

¹Manuel Belgrano, "Autobiografía," Documentos del Archivo de Belgrano (Buenos Aires, 1913), I, 177.

ancient economic and colonial policy. Campomanes besides, directly inspired Belgrano with a desire to establish economic societies to debate and look for a solution to the economic problems of the time, and also to erect schools to instruct and train people to carry on the task for economic betterment.²

Belgrano's economic ideas were not only gleaned from the Spanish writers. One can prove that his theories, and even their verbal expression, were derived from the encyclopedists and physiocrats, especially Adam Smith. He very pointedly explained Smith's doctrine on value, prices, money, capital, and land as they were applicable to the problems of Buenos Aires.³

The immediate causes of the Revolution of May, came into play when the consulado at Buenos Aires, pushed along the path of progress by Belgrano, took an active part in public affairs. The consulado was set up for a twofold purpose: first, it had jurisdiction over trade; second, it had the character of an economic junta, whose main purpose was to promote agriculture, industry, and trade. The first session met on June 2, 1794, and in his autobiography Belgrano recorded his impression of the members:

. . . no puedo decir bastante mi sorpresa cuando conocí a los hombres nombrados por el Rey de la Junta, que había de tratar de agricultura, industria

²Manuel Belgrano, Escritos económicos (Buenos Aires, 1954), pp. 121-127.

³Ibid., pp. 114-120.

y comercio, y propender a la felicidad de las provincias que componían el virreinato de Buenos Aires; todos eran comerciantes españoles; exceptuando uno que otro, nada sabían más que su comercio monopolista, a saber, comprar por cuatro para vender por ocho con toda seguridad; para comprobante de sus conocimientos y de sus ideas liberales a favor del país, como su espíritu de monopolio para no perder el camino que tenían de enriquecerse . . .⁴

If great was Belgrano's cynicism during the first meeting of the consulado, greater would be his disillusionment in the next session between the monopolist merchants and those merchants engaged in the slave trade. Royal decrees of 1784 and 1791 permitted the traffic of Negroes to Buenos Aires and granted to foreign ships the privilege of exporting the frutos del país on their return voyage, a competition which alarmed the monopolists. Since hides were the most valuable product for export, they did not want them considered frutos del país. Of course, as Belgrano says, the monopolists declared by a great majority that "los cueros no eran frutos."⁵

The disappointment Belgrano felt in having Buenos Aires lagging behind in economic reforms had an outlet in the publication of his first economic work in 1796. Principios de la Ciencia Económico-Política, translated from the French, played a vital part in Buenos Aires thinking and won Belgrano loyal

⁴ Belgrano, "Autobiografía," p. 177.

⁵ Ibid., p. 178.

followers.⁶ However, it was Article XXX of the cédula for the erection of the consulado that gave him an opportunity to express the ideas that would agitate the creole mind. It defined the duty of the secretary of the consulado "escribir cada año una memoria sobre los objetos propios de su instituto."⁷

Belgrano's yearly memorials preached self-study for the three branches of commerce, agriculture, and industry, and in the light of that self-examination, the making of future plans. Each paints a picture of the needs of the people, seeks the root of the difficulties, and gives the remedies that reason recommends. Among Belgrano's published writings the first three memorials deserve most attention. These are the distilled essence of European thought applied to the solution of the problems of Buenos Aires.

The day came when Belgrano had a chance to outline publicly his economic ambitions for Buenos Aires. In the consulado session of July 15, 1796, he read his first Memoria, "Medios generales de formentar la agricultura, animar la industria, proteger al comercio en un país agricultor." The tenor of his arguments was faintly reminiscent of Campomanes. He pointed out that it was a common practice for governments to aid the economy, Spain being no exception, for "Pocos son las ciudades y villas de nuestra Península que no tengan una sociedad

⁶Belgrano, Escritos, p. 24.

⁷"Cédula de la creación del consulado," Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional (Buenos Aires, 1941), V, 14-15.

económica, cuyo instituto es mirar por la agricultura y artes, premiando a cuantos se destinan con aplicación a cualquiera de estas ramas. . ."⁸

The subject of Belgrano's Memoria in 1797, was the restoration of the linen and flax industry which he prophesied would eventually become one of the most valuable for the country, especially if the king would continue favorable legislation: "como son la real cédula de comercio de negros, la real orden sobre el comercio con las colonias extranjeras y particularmente la que declara esta misma para que se haga con el Brasil; la real orden del la libertad de derechos a las harinas, la que concede para que tengan buques propios . . ."⁹

The consulado was gradually becoming a battleground between the conflicting interests of the creole hacendados and the Spanish merchants, so Belgrano read his third Memoria on June 14, 1798, in an effort to effect a reunion between the merchant guild and the hacendados, whose guild he had admitted to the consulado, because his economic studies had shown him that the greatness and power of his native land would depend on agriculture. He advanced the need for a great expansion of education to study the causes that produce wealth, increase in commerce, and progress. Noting that England was the first to form societies to deal with agriculture, the arts, and commerce, followed by Italy, Switzerland,

⁸Ibid., p. 66.

⁹Ibid., p. 96.

Germany, Sweden, and others; and that Spain had many economic societies working and studying industriously for the improvement of the economy, he advocated their erection in Buenos Aires.¹⁰

In a later day, what he said in these memorials would come to have a vital part in the revolutionary thinking of Buenos Aires, but in those years, they were the means of gaining for him a coterie of supporters in the consulado, all young men of the caliber of Cerviño, a famous creole teacher and engineer, and Castelli, the renowned creole lawyer.

The royal order of March 4, 1795, which authorized trade between Buenos Aires and foreign colonies,¹¹ ended in a continuous struggle in the consulado which not only reflects the economic life of the epoch, but puts in relief the growing antagonism, the first dissonance among the Spanish and creoles in Buenos Aires in which personalities stand out.

The powerful Spanish monopolists headed by Alzaga, Anchorena, Santa Coloma, Agüero, Villanueva, and members of the registreros, wholesale merchants who were really intermediary agents of Cádiz, tried to have the free-trade reform of 1795 abolished.¹² They were not only subjected to stormy sessions

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 104-110.

¹¹ "Cédula de 4 de marzo de 1795," Documentos para la Historia Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1916), VII, 89.

¹² Bartolomé Mitre, Historia de Belgrano y de la Independencia Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1947), I, 135.

with Belgrano but had to listen to the fiery insinuations and solid convictions of Escalada, a member of the consulado and an admirer of Belgrano, who read the "Representación del conciliario don Francisco Antonio Escalada," which stressed the necessity of maintaining in all their vigor the royal decrees that permitted free trade on a trial basis. He condemned the Spanish commercial interests in Cádiz, Lima, and Havana, and all merchant guides that tried to retain privileges of commercial exclusiveness. The most Belgrano-like part of his argument was the assertion that the problems of Buenos Aires were caused by lack of freedom and, therefore, the promotion of free trade must be the end and only aim of the sovereign.¹³

In 1797, in response to an appeal from Buenos Aires, a royal order was issued which permitted trade in neutral vessels but only on condition that they should return to the ports of Spain and pay the usual duties.¹⁴ As Spain at the time was virtually blockaded by England, the new regulations were impracticable. There followed a great scarcity of foreign manufactures, and the value of exports from Buenos Aires, which had amounted to 5 1/2 million pesos in 1796, fell to 335,000 pesos in 1797. Because of this the cabildo urgently demanded permission to carry

¹³ Ibid., pp. 132-135

¹⁴ "Cédula de 18 de noviembre de 1797," DHA, VII, 89.

on trade with neutral vessels without restriction and to export native products to any country that wanted them.

This appeal was advanced in the consulado by Juan Gonzales de Volañós, who pointed out that the viceroy, confronted with the restrictions of the royal order to the free commerce of neutral vessels, was at a disadvantage. He defended the viewpoint of Angel Izquierdo, the administrator of customs to allow the viceroy to adopt measures to fit the circumstances in Buenos Aires in order to re-establish commerce, agriculture, and industry.¹⁵

It would be a serious error to think of Belgrano and his followers as being satisfied with legislative solutions alone to the problems of Buenos Aires. One of his main projects was an award system for work and study to promote economic progress. The formula which the consulado accepted in 1798 would award:

1. Al labrador . . . hiciese constar haber introducido un cultivo provechoso, con arreglo el clima y circunstancias de la provincia . . . y haga ver en una Memoria las ventajas que traería al comercio in particular de su país y general de la nación, se le asignarán cincuenta pesos.
2. Al individuo . . . constar haber establecido una huerta y monte

¹⁵"Acta del 3 de noviembre de 1798," Archivo General de la Nación: Consulado de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires, 1947), III, 293-301.

de árboles útiles en el puerto de la ensenada de Barragán . . . cincuenta pesos.

3. ¿ Que medio se podría adoptar para hacer grandes plantaciones de árboles útiles en la jurisdicción de esta capital sin necesidad de poner cercos ? Al mismo tiempo, díganse las utilidades que resultarían . . . cincuenta pesos.

4. Al que manifieste el modo de tener aguas permanentes en la campana . . . cincuenta pesos.

5. ¿ Cómo podrán preservarse los cueros de la polilla ? . . . quinientos pesos por ahora, al que con la experiencia manifestare las ventajas . . . una pensión de quinientos pesos al año por el discurso de su vida.

6. Quien manifieste el estado de población de cualquiera de las provincias de este virreinato, con la distinción de clases, sus ocupaciones, ya por el cultivo, ya por la industria, los productos de estos ramos, sus consumos, etc., . . . cien pesos.¹⁶

At the same time Belgrano's Escuela de Dibujo was established with the approval of the viceroy but subject to the king's consent; and shortly after, the Escuela de Náutica. The Escuela de Dibujo was founded to give instructions in designing not only to artists but also carpenters, tailors, surveyors, etc. The purpose of the Escuela de Náutica was to model the spirit of a nucleus of youths in the severe disciplines of mathematical science and astronomy. Its mission was

¹⁶"Acta del 17 de marzo de 1798," Ibid., pp. 214-216.

to be far vaster than forming simple pilots, for Belgrano envisioned it as an institute for an interesting exchange of ideas on the orientation of teaching and experimentation. At the end of three years both schools were suppressed by the crown as being mere luxury, and the consulado was severely reprimanded for having established them.¹⁷

In his autobiography Belgrano summarizes his years of frustration and defeat in the consulado before the time of the British invasions when he was trying to awaken Buenos Aires to the need of free commerce and to the necessity of a vast educational plan.

Otros varios objetos de utilidad y necesidad promoví que poco mas o menos tuvieron el mismo resultado y tocara al que escriba la historia consular dar una razón de ellas; diré yo, por lo que hace a mi propósito, que desde el principio de 1794, hasta julio de 1806 pasé mi tiempo en igual destino, haciendo esfuerzos impotentes a favor del bien público; pues todos, o escollaban en el Gobierno de Buenos Aires, o en la Corte, o entre los mismos comerciantes, individuos que componían este cuerpo, para quienes no había más razón, ni más justicia, ni más utilidad, ni mas necesidad que su interés mercantil; cualquiera cosa que chocase con él econtraba un veto, sin que hubiese recurso para atajarlo.¹⁸

During these same years when Belgrano was gaining renown, the other great creole leader, Mariano Moreno, was literally in training for the role

¹⁷Mitre, Historia, I, 156.

¹⁸Belgrano, "Autobiografía," p. 179.

he was destined to play with Belgrano in the Revolution of May.

Born in Buenos Aires in 1778 of a poor but aristocratic family, Mariano Moreno, received his education in the university at Chuquisaca, an important center from which new ideas spread. There, in the Academia Carolina, the school within the university devoted to the study of Roman and Indian law, Moreno with the other student lawyers debated the new theories of political economy while they prepared in a practical way for the tribunals of the royal audiencia. At Chuquisaca Moreno's most influential contacts included Felipe Antonio Iriarte, a priest and revolutionary propagandist; the canon, don Matías Terrazas, whose private library of enlightenment authors he used; and Dr. José Antonio Medina, an ultra-radical propagandist.¹⁹

In addition to his study of law and the political economists, Moreno developed his revolutionary bent by participating in a great political controversy which had been raging in Alto Peru between Victorían de Villaba, fiscal of the audiencia of Charcas, an alleged precursor of the revolution, and Francisco Paula Sanz, an intendant at Potosí. In his "Discurso sobre la mita de Potosí," published in 1793, Villaba had defended the Indians; the next year, Sanz in support of the policy of the mita attacked him; and from then on, everyone took sides.²⁰

¹⁹ Ricardo Levene, Ensayo Histórico Sobre la Revolución de Mayo y Mariano Moreno (Buenos Aires, 1960), I, 40-43.

²⁰ Levene, Ensayo Histórico, pp. 95-97.

Moreno heard Villaba in a lecture and fell deeply under the spell of his teachings. In his dissertation in 1802, "Sobre el servicio personal de los Indios en general, y sobre el particular de Yanaconas y Mitarios," Moreno cited Villaba's opposition to the mita and his attack on the arguments given by the miners of Potosi.²¹

Moreno returned to Buenos Aires in 1805 as a lawyer and relator of the audiencia. Probably, because of lack of personal contact with the cohesive followers of Belgrano playing an active role in the public life of Buenos Aires, Moreno gained his reputation in his private law practice and was not to become predominant in politics until 1806, when his economic ideas would be sharpened in frequent contacts with Belgrano, whose disciple he became. From that time on our study of Moreno will throw light on the inner nature, the juridicial-economic institutional essence of the Revolution of May.

The press was a potent factor in accelerating the new creole ideas, and was wisely used by Belgrano, Moreno, and the other creole leaders as an efficacious instrument of propaganda; therefore, in its early history one can discern symptoms of the dawning of the Revolution of May.

In 1800 when Francisco Antonio Cabello y Mesa came from Lima to establish a newspaper in Buenos Aires, Belgrano influenced the consulado to

²¹ Mariano Moreno, Escritos, ed. Ricardo Levene (Buenos Aires, 1956), I, 29-33.

promote his proposition. On April 1, 1801, appeared the first issue, headlined el Telégrafo Mercantil, Rural, Político, Económico e Historiográfico del Río de la Plata, through the initiative of Francisco Antonio Cabello, native of Extremadura, lawyer, colonel, and former editor of el Mercurio Peruano.²²

From the outset Cabello praised the work of the Sociedad de Amantes del País in Lima and revealed his proposal to establish a similar patriotic-literary and economic society in Buenos Aires which the consulado was going to take under its protection. Belgrano and Cabello were designated to draw up the statutes of the society for which the viceroy had given approval, but when the royal order of approbation arrived it sanctioned only the newspaper.²³

The Telégrafo Mercantil, usually published weekly, lasted until October 17, 1802. The news was generally about navigation, price levels on local market, European matters reported from the gazettes of Madrid, and isolated data about commerce; at times, diverse articles and contributors discussed education, agriculture, commerce, industry, and the port of Buenos Aires. Manuel Belgrano wrote for it, and so did the lawyer, Juan Castelli; the engineer, Pedro Cerviño;

²²"Carta de Don Francisco Antonio Cabello al Ministro de Estado y Hacienda de 22 de agosto de 1801," DAI, III, 141.

²³"Cara de Prior y Cónsules de Buenos Aires al Secretario de Estado de 14 de agosto de 1801," ibid., p. 145.

and the naturalist, Tadeo Haenke.²⁴

The Telégrafo was not, as has been pretended, a newspaper deaf to the voice and demands of the public. Actually, the paper had developed a program to diffuse useful knowledge for agriculture, industry, and commerce, and to stimulate new industries such as the salting of meat, the codfish plants, the tanning of leather, and canvas making.²⁵

One of the most difficult questions to clarify is the suppression of the Telégrafo Mercantil by express order of the viceroy, Joaquín del Pino, who had "quitado las licencias al ver el abuso de ellas y pericia en la elección de materias para el desempeño de las atenciones que había ofrecido al público."²⁶

Most authors are of the opinion that the article, "Política, Circunstancia en que se halla la provincia de Buenos Aires e Islas Malvinas y modo de repararse," appearing Thursday, October 8, 1802, precipitated the paper's suspension because it "sublevó el amor propio de todos los vecinos de Buenos Aires, tanto peninsulares como nacidos en el país."²⁷

²⁴ Juan Pablo Echague, "El Periodismo," Historia de la Nación Argentina, ed. Ricardo Levene (Buenos Aires, 1960), IV, sec. 2, 54-56.

²⁵ Levene, Ensayo Histórico, I, 35.

²⁶ "Carta del Prior y Cónsules de Buenos Aires al Secretario de Estado de 11 de diciembre de 1802," DAI, III, 154-155.

²⁷ José Toribio Medina, Historia y Bibliografía de la Imprenta (La Plata, 1892), pp. 146-147.

However, Carlos Correa Luna, Agosto S. Mallie, and Rómulo Zábala established in accord with Zinny that this article was only a pretext used by the viceroy to stop the controversial issues and propaganda disseminated through the paper. Moreover, Cabello had also become involved in the wheat controversy raging in the consulado between the merchant guild and the hacendados over the arbitrary regulation of commerce. The hacendados claimed that it was impossible to make calculations based on stable situations because prices depended on the greater or lesser flexibility of the regidores, and on the mild or harsh character of the governor or viceroy who adjusted them. "Se consiguió comer en los seis primeros meses del año con equidad; pero . . . dice el redactor de El Telégrafo, temía la carestía, que todos saben sucedió . . . el pueblo se aflige y con razón cuando pasa de seis pesos el valor del trigo."²⁸

An extra-special undated issue of the Telégrafo Mercantil announced that Juan Hipólito Vleytes would start a newspaper entitled el Semanario de Agricultura, Industria, y Comercio. El Semanario presented a more far-reaching program and was more national in its scope.²⁹

The issues of the Semanario from 1802 to 1807 displayed an interest

²⁸Juan Agustín García, La Ciudad Indiana (Buenos Aires, 1953), pp. 252-254.

²⁹Medina, p. 146.

in science, commerce, and education. An article on education stressed the fact that men in America living in fertile regions with large populations were nevertheless poor, and since only education could improve the situation, it was unfortunate that there was no agricultural school to serve this purely agricultural people. Another issue stated that the arts and crafts in America should be confined exclusively to free men; therefore, not only should slaves be barred from crafts, but the slave traffic should be ended, since it not only caused misery to the slaves, but helped perpetuate poverty in America by making the arts and crafts unenticing.³⁰

In the forefront of the editorial staff was Belgrano who argued not only in favor of production and of industry to promote the riches of the region, which was in great part the policy of the Telégrafo, but also to integrate their indispensable complement, the opening of the ports to the frutos del país and thus assuring trade and prosperity. Belgrano also managed through the pages of the newspaper to advance against the colonial bureaucracy those economic criticisms that would be tolerated from the peninsular point of view and would awaken a reasonable public opinion in Buenos Aires.³¹ The chief characteristic of Belgrano's journalism was the attempt to apply to local needs and problems the doctrines of

³⁰ Robert Jones Schafer, The Economic Societies in the Spanish World (Syracuse, 1958), p. 242.

³¹ Ingenieros, I, 79 80.

European writers. Although these problems were almost exclusively economic, there is no doubt that whoever was touched by the influence of this liberal thought would soon extend his inquiry into political views, confronting them with the same point of view that he took toward economic data.

The problem as Belgrano saw it was essentially economic; the program that he advocated was one of economic development; the help that he needed was economic freedom because Spain's prohibition of direct trading with foreign countries handicapped the utilization of Buenos Aires' natural resources. As leader of a small determined creole faction in Buenos Aires, he formed a nucleus of economic ideas and convictions which he tried to inculcate in the new generation. The most transcendent fact in the life of Buenos Aires was precisely the imposition of liberal policies by the crown and their reception by the enlightened creoles who tried to carry these ideas to their logical conclusion. The result was that progress would be made in the economic field, and also to some extent in social action and education; but the advantages of Spain's imperial controls were almost entirely monopolized by the Spaniards from the mother country. As the movement of protest against Spain gained momentum one of the principal grievances of the creoles was their exclusion from high office in Buenos Aires. In addition the creoles were almost entirely excluded from big business, for the Spanish commercial houses found it to their interest to be represented by the Spanish merchants.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was needed some jarring event to tear Buenos Aires away from the crown. What the créoles opposed was not so much Spain's abusive exercise of power over them as the possibility of its exercise.

CHAPTER III

THE BRITISH IN BUENOS AIRES

In truth, the economic and administrative reforms of the Bourbons breathed new life into the city of Buenos Aires. Their effects on the value of trade were striking, but they did not go far enough. They stimulated a greater economic autonomy and a sort of regional nationalism; they contributed like the American and French revolutions to a freer play of ideas and a greater intellectual activity; they assisted the development of an increasingly self-conscious, wealthy, educated creole bourgeoisie for whom the control of trade by a relatively small group of Spanish monopolists became yet more unbearable.

But what chance these reforms might have had of arresting foreign pressures in Buenos Aires was ruined when Spain went to war with England in 1796. From that time on, blockades nullified the Spanish attempts at reform. Buenos Aires was then thrown upon its own resources; and New England, New York, and Pennsylvania merchants saw their opportunity and sent ships to Buenos Aires without benefit of treaty.

By reason of the location of its ports, the number of its merchant marine, and its policy of neutrality toward France and England, United States' trade with Buenos Aires increased after the neutral trade decree of November 18, 1797; but no relaxation of the laws had been authorized for the enemy British. At

the same time, numerous English vessels flying the American flag, aroused Spanish jealousy that the supposedly neutral trade would actually be strengthening her enemy, thus causing her to revoke the neutral trade decree of November 18, 1797.¹ To repeal neutral privileges would be largely a paper action, impossible to enforce; so this play of circumstances helped United States merchants to keep up the flow of Buenos Aires' imports and exports even in times when royal permission was lacking.

So lax was the enforcement of the new decree, however, that on July 18, 1800, the king addressed a vigorous reprimand to the viceroy insisting on more effective compliance with the law.²

This admonition was eventually heeded, for sporadically the ban on neutral trade was enforced with considerable vigor. While during the years 1801 and 1802 there were at least forty-three United States merchant vessels in the various ports of the Río de la Plata, some of which had remained there for over a year, there do not appear to have been more than ten or twelve during the year 1803, and during the year 1804 the number was still further reduced.³

¹"Real Orden de 20 de abril de 1799," DHA, VII, 158.

²"Real Orden de 18 de julio de 1800," ibid., pp. 181-182.

³Charles Lyon Chandler, "United States Merchant Marine Ships in the Río de la Plata (1801-1809), as shown by Early Newspapers," HAHR, II, No. 1 (February 1919), 26-27.

Stagnation of trade burdened landowners, merchants, and exporters in Buenos Aires. Necessity undermined Spanish mercantilism and overcame fears of penalties as United States ships disposed of Buenos Aires products.

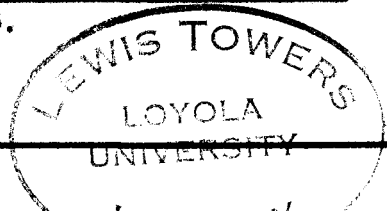
In an editorial in the Telégrafo Mercantil, June 1801, Cabello wrote that Spain should suspend its mercantilist laws since European wars, blockades, and drought had ruined commerce. He urged that since Spain could not supply its colony, the remedy was apparent even if it should help American, English, or French merchants.⁴

For nearly two centuries the British commercial interest in Liverpool and Manchester had been engaged in clandestine trade with Buenos Aires, but after the loss of the colonies in the American Revolution it was imperative that Spanish American ports be open to English trade. To fully understand the reasons for this transformation one must turn to a consideration of British policy after 1804.⁵

By 1804 the Industrial Revolution had already worked its magic upon English industry so that the market of Buenos Aires seemed particularly attractive. Furthermore, the rumors of dissatisfaction emanating from Buenos Aires gained

⁴Harry Bernstein, Origins of Inter-American Interest: 1700-1812 (Philadelphia, 1945), p. 42.

⁵William W. Kaufmann, British Policy and the Independence of Latin America: 1804-1828 (New Haven, 1951), pp. 1-6.



additional importance with the activities of Miranda. In 1803 he had struck up a friendship with Sir Home Popham, a naval captain, whose conduct was being investigated for alleged financial misdemeanors.⁶

Popham soon became a convert to Miranda's cause, and in a memoir dated October, 1804, the two promoters outlined to the British ministers their project for the liberation of Spanish America.⁷ Execution of the plan, accepted in principle by successive cabinets in England, was delayed so long that in the meantime Popham had gone with a fleet to gain control of the Cape of Good Hope. Soon after the fall of the Cape, Popham determined on his own responsibility to make an attack on Buenos Aires having learned that the city had become the repository for a large amount of specie from Peru.⁸

On April 14, 1806, Popham set sail for Buenos Aires with a regiment of soldiers under the command of Sir William Beresford. They were soon followed by a grand concourse of merchants eager to pour a mass of British goods into Buenos Aires.⁹

⁶William S. Robertson, The Life of Miranda (Chapel Hill, 1929), I, 257.

⁷Ibid.

⁸H. S. Ferns, Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford, 1960), p. 23.

⁹R. A. Humphreys, Liberation in South America: 1806-1827 (London, 1952), p. 2.

Although the Spanish authorities had been warned, the English victory came with astonishing ease. The viceroy, Sobremonte, fled to Córdoba at the approach of the enemy, and on June 27, 1806, Beresford's troops entered Buenos Aires. Manuel Belgrano gave his version of the events in his autobiography:

Sabida es la entrada en Buenos Aires, del general Berresford con mil cuatrocientos y tantos hombres en 1806 . . . El marqués de Sobre Monte, virrey que entonces era de las Provincias, días antes de esta desgraciada entrada me llamó para que formase una compañía de jóvenes del comercio, de caballería, y que al efecto me daría oficiales veteranos para la instrucción: los busqué, no los encontré; porque era mucho el odio que había a la milicia en Buenos Aires con el cual no se había dejado de dar algunos golpes a los que ejercían la autoridad, o tal vez a esta misma que mainfestaba demasiado su debilidad.

Se tocó la alarma general, y conducido del honor volé a la Fortaleza, punto de reunión; allí no había orden ni concierto en cosa alguna . . . allí se formaran las compañías, y yo fué agregado a una de ellas . . .

Fué la primera compañía que marchó a ocupar la casa de las Filipinas, mientras disputaban las restantes con el virrey de que ellas estaban para defender la ciudad y no salir a campana, y así sólo se redujeron a ocupar las Barrancas . . .¹⁰

To revive the feelings of the stunned porteños, Beresford immediately issued a proclamation guaranteeing the administration of justice, the rights of private property, the right of worship of the Roman Catholic Church, and

¹⁰Belgrano, "Autobiografía," pp. 179-180.

freedom of commerce.¹¹ However, he also required an oath of British allegiance; whereas, Popham did not intend to subjugate, merely liberate.

The decree opening the port of Buenos Aires to free trade made possible the exportation of great quantities of hides and other products destined to perish due to lack of commercial possibilities. Besides, the English had reduced the duties on imports from 34-1/2% to 12-1/2%; had abolished the state monopoly on salt and tobacco; had suppressed the customs on trade with the interior provinces, thus opening the eyes of the porteños to the disadvantages of the colonial system under which they lived.¹²

Popham and Beresford had mistaken both the temper and the capabilities of the people of Buenos Aires. United in fury against the English, both creoles and Spaniards joined in planning their expulsion. A great deal has been said about the heroic resistance of the people of Buenos Aires to the English invasions, but another fact has been sufficiently stressed -- the spontaneous and willing support offered to Buenos Aires by the inhabitants of the interior.

The minutes of the cabildo meeting for December 22, 1806, record proof of this sort:

Se recivio un oficio de don Juan Gomez Roldan,
escrito desde la ciudad de Cordova en que ofrece

¹¹S. H. Wilcocke, History of Buenos Aires (London, 1807), p. 352.

¹²S. Samuel Trifilo, La Argentina Vista por Viajeros Ingleses: 1810-1860 (Buenos Aires, 1959), pp. 39-40.

costear dos soldados de infantería de los que alisten para defensa de la patria . . .

Se recibió un oficio de don Ramon Tadeo Delgado, en que expone estar pronto a bajar con las milicias de su mando al primer aviso que se le dé . . . para defenza de la Patria.¹³

While these and similar offers of aid were being read, the porter announced the arrival of ten Indians from the pampas who came personally to discuss the way in which they could help:

. . . os ofrecemos nuevamente reunidos todos los grandes casiques que veis, hasta el numero de veinte mil de nuestros subditos, todos gente de guerra y cada qual con cinco cavallos; . . .¹⁴

For the first time the word "patria" is heard, and it crystallizes around the commercial center of Buenos Aires accentuating it as the political pivot of the nation.

Led by Santiago Liniers, the French-born captain of the port of Enseñada, a volunteer army routed the British on August 12, 1806, capturing General Beresford and 1,200 of his troops. Hysterical applause followed this achievement, and the people wanted to set up Liniers as viceroy. In the meeting of the cabildo abierto the junta of notables named Liniers as civil and military

¹³"Acuerdo de 22 de diciembre de 1806," Archivo General de la Nacion: Acuerdos del extinguido cabildo de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires, 1926), Serie IV, Tomo II, Libro LXI, 363.

¹⁴Ibid.

governor of Buenos Aires.¹⁵

At first Sobremonte refused to assent, but convinced by the attitude of the cabildo that opposition was useless, he delegated the military command to Liniers and the civil government of Buenos Aires to the audiencia.¹⁶ However, Sobremonte's attitude laid the foundation for a conflict with the cabildo. The repercussions resulting from this disagreement had a great influence on the role Mariano Moreno would play as the pueblo took the initiative in 1810. It can be said that August 14, 1806, signaled the beginning of the destruction of the colonial regime and was the unsuspected prologue of the Revolution of May.

In his Memorias on the first English invasion, Moreno points out the sufferings to which Sobremonte's imprudence exposed the people of Buenos Aires and recalls their triumphs through the centuries:

En tan triste situacion no quedaba otra esperanza que nuestro fiel y numeroso vecindario. Esta ciudad há fundado los titulos de muy leal y guerrera con que se vé condecorada, en repetidos y brillantes triunfos que há conseguido sobre sus enemigos. Pocos pueblos hân sufrido tantos ataques, ni los hân resistido con tanta gloria . . .¹⁷

¹⁵"Carta del Cabildo de Buenos Aires al Virrey Marqués de Sobremonte de 14 de agosto de 1806," DAL, III, 229.

¹⁶"Cabildo del 2 de septiembre de 1806," Acuerdos, Serie IV, Tomo II, Libro LXI, 294.

¹⁷Moreno, Escritos, I, 59-60.

Buenos Aires, a city of some 40,000 inhabitants soon had the appearance of an armed camp. In September Liniers had issued a dramatic call for the foundation of a people's militia. Ten infantry battalions were formed: five of European Spaniards; three of porteño creoles known as Patricios; one of Negroes and mulattoes; and one of natives from the interior provinces. The creoles, at the suggestion of Belgrano, selected Cornelio Saavedra as their commander. From then until May 25, 1810, little could be done in Buenos Aires without counting on the support of Saavedra who in turn depended on the Patricios.¹⁸

The British government failed to understand that Beresford had been defeated not by the machinations of a few Spanish monopolistic merchants and bureaucrats but by an uprising of the people themselves. The successive arrival of reinforcements numbering some 11,000 men by the beginning of 1807, suggested the seriousness of the approaching effort to recapture Buenos Aires.

Expectantly the city awaited the day of the assault and speculated where the first blow would fall. The answer was given in January when the British laid siege to Montevideo. Liniers' expedition to help the city soon returned, their march interrupted by the news of the surrender of Montevideo on February 3. For this disaster Sobremonte was again held responsible.¹⁹

¹⁸ Guillermo Furlong, S. J., La Revolución de Mayo (Buenos Aires, 1960), p. 48.

¹⁹ "Informe de Liniers," Memorias de los Virreyes, pp. 557-558.

Turbulent crowds gathered on February 6 before the doors of the cabildo to depose Sobremonte. Strange as it may seem, the first popular movement was directed by the Spaniards under the orders of Alzaga, whose irreconcilable and undaunted hatred of the rebellious creoles would later cause the end of his own career. But Alzaga was also not of a temper to put up with an imbecilic rule, even on the part of the king's vice-regal representative. A junta of notables, mostly Spaniards, agreed to arrest Sobremonte. Bowing to the popular will, the audencia decreed the suspension and arrest of Sobremonte and appointed Liniers as commander of all the troops.²⁰ The action against Sobremonte had an unmistakable revolutionary significance because "por la primera vez se vió en las colonias americanas al representante legal del soberano, destituido y reducido a prisión. Era que en efecto el poder colonial habia caducado de hecho y la revolución seguía su camino."²¹

It was under this mixed semi-royal, semi-republican government that the defense of Buenos Aires against the invasion of General Whitelocke was organized. On June 28 eight thousand British landed at the port of Ensenada and advanced on Buenos Aires. Koebler adds, "Simultaneously with the forces of war arrived the messengers of commerce. Convoyed by the frigates, merchants and

²⁰J. P. and W. P. Robertson, Letters on South America (London, 1843), II, 78-80.

²¹Mitre, Historia, I, 201.

clerks sailed out in shoals, bearing samples of bales and beers, cutlery and cloths."²²

Alzaga caused fortifications to be erected on all sides of the city; soldiers took positions at the windows and housetops on the streets through which the invaders passed. As the British troops advanced under Whitelocke and Crawford, they were met by firing from every window and roof. On July 6, Whitelocke accepted Liniers' terms of surrender, and for the first time in months the merchants of Buenos Aires could trade again.²³

For Britain, the invasions of Buenos Aires were little more than an unfortunate episode in the opening of Buenos Aires to British trade. Ferns remarks, "Popham's professed economic liberalism never went very deep, nor was it based upon the confidence that in a genuinely free market British products and mercantile enterprise would show to the advantage of the nation."²⁴ The British mercantile community was even less enthusiastic about commercial freedom than Popham and Beresford. Castlereagh wrote to Whitelocke that he disagreed with opening the port to neutrals for wine and spirits for eight months because the speculations of the British merchants seemed to deserve every encouragement. Conquest by liberals,

²² W. H. Koebler, British Exploits in South America (New York, 1917), p. 149.

²³ Bernard Moses, Spain's Declining Power in South America (Berkeley, 1919), pp. 362-363.

²⁴ Ferns, pp. 50-51

thus appeared to differ not at all from conquest, and the creoles and Spaniards of Buenos Aires knew what was the real character of the enterprise set on foot by Popham.²⁵

In 1807 and 1808 other invasions were hoped for, and other expeditions were planned to Buenos Aires, but their aim was emancipation not subjugation. Britain's true interests were commercial not imperial.²⁶

A British officer described the effect of the invasions on the sensible and well-informed men of Buenos Aires: "They begin to feel their strength, and with a strong inclination to employ it in an interest more immediately connected with themselves, than what was theirs in the last contest, which only decided upon which of the two European powers they were to be dependent . . . These sentiments they made no hesitation in openly avowing before the British officers in the Castle, and it is problematical whether Buenos Aires, and perhaps all South America will not be more irrecoverably lost to the Spanish nation, by the issue of the English invasion, than if it had fallen under our subjugation at this moment."²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁶ Humphreys, p. 12.

²⁷ Anon., An Authentic Narrative of the Proceedings of the Expedition under the command of Brigadier-General Craufurd, with an account of the operations against Buenos Aires under the command of Lieut. Gen. Whitelocke by an officer of the expedition (London, 1808), pp. 196-197.

At this time Liniers was acting as military and civil governor in place of Sobremonte. He was appointed interim viceroy by the king in December, 1807. From that time on, British vessels were never absent, in actual fact, from Buenos Aires. English merchants relied on the enlightened views and easygoing ways of Liniers who tolerated the extensive trade that sprang up, as departing English merchants dumped their goods on the market at Buenos Aires. He even released from prison the North American adventurer, William P. White, who had openly collaborated with the British.²⁸

Indeed, Liniers' interest in the clandestine trade seems to have been one of the factors in the bitter quarrel between him and Alzaga, the wealthy merchant leader of the Spaniards in Buenos Aires. Robert Staples, a British merchant who participated in this trade, reported to the Foreign Office that between 1808-1809 thirty-one British vessels arrived at Buenos Aires bearing cargoes valued over a million pounds. On the foundation of this trade a British community began to grow up in Buenos Aires.²⁹

The experience of the British invasions left a permanent impression on the history of Buenos Aires. In the struggle, they had gained knowledge of their strength and a vigorous sense of nationality; they had indeed tasted power and would

²⁸Dorothy B. Goebel, "British Trade to the Spanish Colonies, 1796-1823," AHR, XLIII, No. 2 (January, 1938), 308-309.

²⁹Ferns, pp. 67-68.

not willingly relinquish it again. Why couldn't they direct this same force against Spain?³⁰ Moreover, the presence of a British community in Buenos Aires and its trading activities became one of the pivotal points of political tension between the creoles and the Spanish merchants who would have liked to see the British expelled.³¹

Although the popular movement which led to the Revolution of May had begun in earnest with the English invasions, a conversation between Belgrano and Crawford reveals the fact that the creoles still felt independence was remote:

. . . desplegó sus ideas acerca de nuestra independencia, acaso para formar nuevas esperanzas de comunicación en estos países, ya que habían salido fallidas las de conquista: le hice ver cuál era nuestro estado, que ciertamente nosotros queríamos el Amo viejo o ninguno; pero que nos faltaba mucho para aspirar a la empresa, y que aunque ella se realizase bajo la protección de la Inglaterra, esta nos abandonaría si se ofrecía un partido ventajoso a Europa, y entonces vendríamos a caer bajo la espada española, no habiendo una nación que no aspirase a su interés, sin que le diese cuidado de los males de los otros: convino conmigo y manifestándole cuánto nos faltaba para lograr nuestra independencia difirió para un siglo su consecución.³²

In December, 1807, the cabildo of Buenos Aires conscious of the prestige it had earned in the recent defense of the region petitioned the crown to

³⁰Trifilo, p. 39.

³¹Ferns, p. 68.

³²Belgrano, "Autobiografía," p. 185.

grant it the title of "Conservador de la America y Protector de los demas Cabildos del Virreynato." In requesting the title, Buenos Aires posed as leader of municipal life in the viceroyalty, the benefactor who could help its poor neighbor, "el organo por donde los demas Cabildos dirijan sus recursos á V.M. Tribunales de la Corte, y Gefes superiores de estas Provincias en solicitud de las gracias ó de la justicia."³³

The petition was written by Marian Moreno, the legal adviser of the cabildo.

The passage of the year 1807 marked a turning point in the history of Buenos Aires. The rancor toward the English intruders hardly survived their departure; dissatisfaction with Spanish rule became by contrast, widespread. Buenos Aires was already prepared for its role in the Revolution of May.

It is worth noting that the English invasions of 1806 and 1807 caused the creoles of Buenos Aires to move to the forefront of society and the pueblo to recognize them as the authentic ruling class. A notion of nationality based on the principles of birth in the colony and adherence to its way of life was slowly forming. The Spaniards were indifferent to the fate of Buenos Aires while the creoles were concerned with its future.

³³ Moreno, Escritos, I, 162-163.

CHAPTER IV

PRELIMINARIES OF REVOLUTION

Hardly had the echoes of the clash with the British died down, when the creoles entered on the long and tortuous course that ended in the Revolution of May 25, 1810. The immediate occasion for the pronouncement against economic and political maladjustments between Buenos Aires and Spain was attributed to European politics, and not to any particular crisis in colonial administration. Loyalty to the Spanish monarchy was probably the one bond that held the porteños to Spain and that bond was severely tried by events after the Napoleonic occupation of the mother country.

The invasion of Spain by Napoleon proved two points to the expectant creoles in Buenos Aires: the first was the debility of the mother country; and the second, the unwelcome fact that they might suddenly find themselves subject to an even more despotic ruler. By the summer of 1808 the affairs of Spain were in crisis, and in Buenos Aires formidable factions prepared to contend for the mastery of this commercial heritage of the Spanish crown.

Fleeing the approach of the French invaders, the Portuguese Prince Regent João and his court had sailed under British escort to Buenos Aires on November 29, 1807. The threat of a vengeful Brazilian attack was now joined to

the menace of the third British invasion.¹

The aggressive diplomacy of the prince gave substance to these fears. He dispatched an emissary with an offer to take the people of the viceroyalty under his protection, promising to respect their rights and liberties and to establish complete freedom of trade. Should they reject the offer, he would be compelled to join with England against Buenos Aires.²

Confusion in the minds of the creoles of Buenos Aires as to British policy towards them began with the first attempt of the Portuguese court to occupy the territory south of Brazil. From March 1808, the Portuguese tried to bully Buenos Aires into handing over the Banda Oriental. Spanish authorities were convinced that Lord Strangford, the British minister in Rio de Janeiro, was behind it. When the British Admiral Sir William Sidney Smith joined with João about the projected occupation of as much La Plata territory as could be seized, Strangford acquiesced in the scheme and even asked Smith to make sure Britain received either Montevideo or Buenos Aires. Strangford had followed the line of the British policy before the Anglo-Spanish alliance, still entirely unsuspected in South America. First, rumors, then definite news came of Britain's changed relations with Spain;

¹Levene, "Intentos de independencia," HNA, V, sec. 2, 388.

²"Acuerdo de 15 de marzo de 1808," Acuerdos, Serie IV, Tomo II, Libro LXII, 65.

then, curtailing Portuguese aggrandizement in the Plata became one of Strangford's major activities.³

Liniers and the cabildo vigorously rebuffed the Portuguese pretensions. In their dealings with Prince Joao and in their preparation for defense they acted like the heads of an independent state. They were aided in their attempts by Strangford, who found that one of his main tasks was to protect Spanish interests in the Plata, where the British government was not yet represented and where French interference would have deprived Great Britain of an increasingly valuable market and source of raw materials. Also, Buenos Aires needed British trade, since it had no desire to become a dependency of France, and was anxious to have assistance against Portuguese schemes.⁴

By March 1808, Charles abdicated in favor of his son Ferdinand, and Napoleon chose this moment to summon father and son to Bayonne in France. Rumors of this new crisis reached Buenos Aires in July. At the end of the month the provincial authorities received official word that Charles had abdicated in favor of his son who should be proclaimed Ferdinand VII. Accordingly the proclamation of

³ J. Street, "Lord Strangford and the Río de la Plata, 1808-1815," HAHR, XXXIII, No. 4 (November, 1953), 477-481.

⁴ João Pandia Calogeras, A History of Brazil, trans. Percy Alvin Martin (Chapel Hill, 1939), p. 59.

the new king was fixed for August 12, but was postponed owing to conflicting reports.⁵

To add to the confusion the Marquis de Sassenay, an envoy of Napoleon arrived in Buenos Aires on August 13. His general instructions directed him to present to Liniers the papers with which he was entrusted, to collect information concerning the general state of the Plata provinces and the trading possibilities with Buenos Aires; and in particular, to observe the reaction of the colonial officials to the news from Spain. His dispatches reviewed the events which had occasioned the renunciation of the Spanish crown by Charles and his son and announced Napoleon's selection of his brother Joseph as king of Spain and the proposal to convoke a cortes at Bayonne.⁶

The audiencia and cabildo of Buenos Aires decided to cast de Sassenay's dispatches into the fire; they ordered him to return to Bayonne, and set August 21 for the proclamation of Ferdinand as king. However, the cautious and ambiguous address issued by Liniers with the advice and consent of the cabildo failed to answer the questions in the public mind. The address spoke respectfully of Napoleon, assured the people of his good wishes for Buenos Aires, and advised

⁵Vicente D. Sierra, Historia de la Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1960), IV, 388.

⁶Marqués de Sassenay, Napoleón I y la Fundación de la República Argentina, trans. Teresa Amalia Cappa (Buenos Aires, 1946), pp. 102-104.

them to imitate their ancestors, who during the War of the Spanish Succession, awaited the destiny of the mother country in order to obey the legitimate authority which occupied the throne.⁷

Buenos Aires proclaimed Ferdinand VII the new king on August 21. Official efforts to conceal the fate of the Spanish monarchs now imprisoned in France proved useless; for two days later a new envoy, Goyeneche, arrived in Buenos Aires. His dispatches revealed that not only had the supreme junta installed at Seville revolted against Joseph, but that peace was being negotiated with England.⁸

A small group of creole leaders headed by Manuel Belgrano took special interest in the news from Spain and felt, "Dios mismo nos presenta la ocasión con los sucesos de 1808 en España y en Bayona. En efecto, avívanse entonces las ideas de libertad e independencia en América, y los americanos empiezan por primera vez a hablar con franqueza de sus derechos."⁹

But the conditions for the achievement of independence were not yet present, for the people of Buenos Aires were still fanatically loyal to the king and the established order. Levene explains that the ideas of emancipation had been formulated in organic and explicit terms by a group of patriots some years earlier

⁷ Mario Belgrano, "El Emisario, El Marqués de Sassenay," HNA, V, sec. 1, 72-73.

⁸ Belgrano, "Autobiografía," 186.

⁹ Ibid.

than May, 1810, which were gradually enlarged from the time they had embraced a plan of independence under an English protectorate or under Carlota until they secured the cabildo abierto of May 22.¹⁰

The most influential advocates of independence, such as Belgrano, Peña, and Paso, recoiled from revolution on the French and North American model. They envisaged a peaceful transition to independence under the auspices of a constitutional monarchy. A candidate was at hand in Brazil in the person of Carlota, wife of the prince regent and sister of Ferdinand VII. The patriot leaders opened negotiations with the princess, but they could hardly have made a more unfortunate choice because Carlota had very absolute views.¹¹ It is significant that Strangford knew of this movement and could have brought it success by helping instead of hindering the plan. Instead he chose to follow his government's policy.¹²

João was playing a double game also. Still intent on revenge for Spain's aid to France in the occupation of Portugal, he supported the plans of his wife to be recognized as sovereign of the viceroyalty of the Plata. This he did in spite of the fact that England would not now outwardly countenance any design hostile

¹⁰"Cabildo del 13 de julio de 1809," Acuerdos, Serie IV, Tomo III, Libro LXIV, 523-524.

¹¹"Santiago Liniers," Anales de la Biblioteca, ed. P. Groussac (Buenos Aires, 1904), III, 129.

¹²Street, pp. 482-483.

to Spain. In these crucial days, Rio de Janeiro was a city of conspiracy, and James Paroissien, a young English merchant who had arrived in Montevideo in 1807, was now to be involved in the plots and designs of three very dissimilar but remarkable personages: the Princess Carlota, Admiral Sidney Smith, and Saturnino Rodríguez Peña, a political exile from Buenos Aires.¹³

On the whole and despite the acquaintances he made in Rio de Janeiro, Paroissien much preferred his Spanish friends. Humphreys remarked, "It was, indeed, in Buenos Aires, not in Brazil, that he wanted to be, and to Buenos Aires that he intended to go as soon as he could, for several reasons, but principally because most money is to be made there."¹⁴ So disposed, he eagerly seized on every rumor that Buenos Aires was to be again attacked by the British, or that it would be opened by the colonial authorities there to British trade.¹⁵

Dr. Peña, who had aided General Beresford in his escape, had formed a plan for declaring the independence of Buenos Aires under the auspices of England.¹⁶ He met Paroissien in Montevideo, and on the evacuation of that city by the English, the two sought refuge in Rio de Janeiro where they met Smith.

¹³Humphreys, pp. 21-22.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Robertson, Letters on South America, II, 79.

Sir Sidney Smith had conceived a romantic devotion for Carlota and had success attended their design to erect in Buenos Aires a throne for the princess, Smith was to have received the title of Duke of Montevideo. It was at this point, however, while Strangford was doing his best to thwart Carlota's plans by securing Smith's dismissal and recall to England, that Peña and Paroissien actively entered the story.¹⁷

Peña was acting as emissary for his old associates in Buenos Aires; these included his brother Nicolás, Castelli, Belgrano, and others who commissioned him to sound out the princess on the question of a constitutional regency. Paroissien bound on the Mary for Buenos Aires was the bearer of Peña's letters to the revolutionaries and secret instructions for himself.¹⁸

The reactionary views of Carlota were clearly revealed when she denounced him in a letter to Liniers as the bearer of documents "llenos de principios revolucionarios y subversivos del presente orden monárquico, tendentes al establecimiento de una imaginaria y soñaba república, la que tiempos hace está proyectado por una porción de hombres miserables y de périfidas intenciones . . ." ¹⁹

¹⁷ DAB, V, 210-211.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁹ "Carlota al Liniers," DAB, V, 227.

As the reactionary and absolutist views of Carlota became better known, the hopes she had aroused in many of the inhabitants of Buenos Aires began to fade.²⁰ Because of her letters Paroissien and Peña were thrown into prison, but they would be defended by Castelli in a spectacular trial in March, 1810. It was more than a defense of Paroissien or even of Peña; it was a defense of the rights of Spanish Americans; and it was the complement in the field of politics, to the arguments of Belgrano and Moreno in the field of economics.²¹

Meanwhile, the Spanish of Buenos Aires, equally convinced of the impending separation of the colony from the mother country, intrigued to depose Liniers and establish a governing junta that would confirm and continue their monopoly of political and commercial privileges. Their leader was Martín Alzaga who had always been critical of Liniers' alien birth, his toleration of foreigners, and his evident partiality toward the creoles and the French. With the outbreak of hostilities between the Spanish patriots and Napoleon's government, the situation of the French-born viceroy became precarious. His alleged disloyalty to Spain afforded a pretext for the revolutionary plans of Alzaga and his followers in the cabildo.²²

²⁰Ibid.

²¹DAB V, 194-219.

²²Robertson, Letters on South America, II, 77-84.

Elío, the governor of Montevideo, was the first to give vent publicly to this feeling. He refused to obey orders from Liniers, denounced him to Spain as a traitor, and convoking the colonists, established an independent junta, after the example of those set up in the mother country. The audiencia pronounced this Montevidean movement to be illegal; yet Alzaga with his colleagues and partisans, conspired to imitate Montevideo, and to destroy the creole party by replacing Liniers with a governing junta. They fixed the date of their uprising for January 1, 1809, when the cabildo chose its membership for the coming year.²³

The ceremonies of election began tranquilly on that day, but at a prearranged signal, the city bell sounded the alarm, and Spanish troops crowded into the plaza. The cry was, "Down with the Frenchman Liniers, a junta as in Spain!" A cabildo abierto, carefully selected beforehand for the purpose, met and voted for a governing junta of Spaniards, with the exception of the two creole secretaries, Julián de Leiva and Mariano Moreno. Liniers had barely signed the required document of resignation when the creole regiments entered with Cornelio Saavedra at their head. Saavedra took Liniers to the plaza where cheering crowds greeted him with assurances of loyalty. Alzaga and his ringleaders in the cabildo were arrested and exiled to Patagonia, only to be rescued by Elío.²⁴

²³ Sir Woodbine Parish, Buenos Aires and the Provinces of the Rio de la Plata (London, 1852), p. 73.

²⁴ Levene, "Asonada del 1^o de enero de 1809," HNA, V, sec. 1, 425-430.

What was unusual in this affair was that on the side of the viceroy were arranged the conservative audiencia, numerous other Spanish officials and military leaders, while the creole Moreno collaborated with the cabildo. From this conflict the creoles emerged with a practical monopoly of military power and greatly increased prestige.²⁵ By invoking the formula of governing juntas, moreover, the Spaniards themselves had established a revolutionary precedent that the patriots would one day use with notable success.

Liniers, comprehending the true source and strength of his authority, now showed himself more than ever well-disposed toward the creole party. Belgrano took advantage of this to urge the opening of the port of Buenos Aires to British trade as a means of diminishing the importance of rebellious Montevideo and relieving the financial distress of the government. The commander of the British naval forces in the area seconded the efforts with the suggestion to Liniers that he open the ports "for mutual convenience and regional benefits, raising revenue from a tolerated commerce."²⁶

A potent argument for legalizing trade with England was the swelling volume of contraband traffic, which afforded no revenue to the treasury and which Liniers appeared unwilling or unable to halt. Indeed, it was charged that the viceroy

²⁵"Santiago Liniers," ABD, III, 152-153.

²⁶Goebel, p. 311.

himself had connived at smuggling operations for personal profit.²⁷

Liniers, perceiving no other solution for the grave financial problems of his government, signified his approval for Belgrano's trade reform in June 1809. Just then word came to Buenos Aires that the newly installed junta central of Seville had deposed the viceroy and that his successor, Baltasar Hidalgo de Cisneros, was at Montevideo. Action on the proposed measure was immediately suspended.²⁸

The removal of Liniers, a victim of Spanish intrigue, angered the dismayed creole party. They foresaw new efforts to restore European domination and commercial monopoly. Belgrano, Saavedra, Castelli, and other patriot leaders meeting secretly in the home of Juan Martín Pueyrredón, discussed a project for offering resistance to Cisneros, but could reach no agreement.²⁹

Cisneros, doubtful of the reception that awaited him, remained at Colonia until Liniers himself came to escort him to the capital where he quietly took possession of his office on July 29, 1809. He discovered, reads his official report,

²⁷ Koebel, p. 309.

²⁸ Belgrano, "Autobiografía," p. 187.

²⁹ Mitre, Historia, I, 324-325.

. . . Dos temibles partidos en la capital, con ocasión del suceso del día lo de enero del año pasado de 1809, un tumulto popular en la ciudad de la Plata que invadió al presidente de aquella Real Audiencia, que lo depuso, que lo arresto y que atropelló los respetos de las leyes y de este superior Gobierno . . .

Ya había conseguido establecer la quietud pública, aunque no desvanecer del todo las murmuraciones, la censura del Gobierno, las especies sediciosas, la diversidad de opiniones sobre la suerte de España, los presentimientos de independencia, siempre lisonjeros al vulgo de los pueblos, y otros males políticos que habían originado en este Virreinato el estado de la España y los notables sucesos anteriores á mi mando. Pero en este estado se presentó de repente una nueva tormenta que llenará de desconsuelo el real animo de v. m. en estas distancias. La seducción de unos y la debilidad de otros han sido su única causa: el pretexto ha sido la supuesta pérdida de España, y el objeto la independencia.³⁰

Revolution was obviously in the air and the intellectuals formed a secret society to direct the agitation toward the establishment of a locally-elected government. The original intention seems to have been not to declare independence from Spain, but merely to insist on the right of the people to a voice in their local government. The leaders of the revolutionary secret society were Manuel Belgrano, Mariano Moreno, Nicolás Rodríguez Pena, Juan Jose Paso, Hipólito Vieytes, and Juan Castelli. The conservative Cornelio Saavedra pledged his support whenever the opportune moment for revolt should arrive. Cisneros proceeded cautiously in Buenos Aires because of the superior power of the creoles, but he soon antagonized

³⁰ Memorias de los Virreyes, pp. 569-570.

them by restoring Alzaga and his followers to their former places of honor.³¹

Cisneros, like his predecessor, pondered the means of solving the grave financial crisis of the colony: the need for additional revenue was great; the viceroy's desire to conciliate the creole party was strong. Reluctantly he turned to consider the unorthodox expedient of free trade. When two English merchants applied to him in August 1809, for permission to sell their cargoes, Cisneros referred the petition to the cabildo and the consulado with a favorable recommendation.³²

The monopolists in the cabildo, representing both sides of the Atlantic, indicated the grave evils that would flow from such trade with foreigners but grudgingly conceded to the necessity of the measure. In the consulado the proposal of the viceroy won by a vote of seven to five, but Fernández de Agüero, attorney for the consulado of Cádiz, submitted to Cisneros an able brief against free trade. This innovation, he asserted, was contrary to the Laws of the Indies and would prove fatal not only to the merchant marine of Spain, but also to the agriculture and industry of Buenos Aires as well.³³ He presented himself as the defender of the artisans in the craft guilds, championing their cause by pointing

³¹ Enrique de Gandía, La Revisión de la Historia Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1952), pp. 55-56.

³² Levene, Ensayo Histórico, III, 51.

³³ Sierra, HDA, IV, 455-456.

out that at that very moment there was an English ship in the harbor loaded with 19,000 pairs of boots. ³⁴

A letter written to the king four days after the opening of the port of Buenos Aires to the English illustrates this monopolistic mentality. In the letter Pedro Balino de Laya moans about the sad plight of "los cochambinos, que vendian los lienzos de algodón a dos reales, dos y tres cuartillo la vara, y que los ingleses los ofrecían a un real y cuartillo; de los cordobeses, cuyos ponchos de siete pesos ahora estaban a tres, por obra de los extranjeros . . ." ³⁵

The day came when the creole hacendados tried to carry out their economic ambitions and Mariano Moreno championed them in the now famous memorandum, Representación del "Apoderado de los Labradores y Hacendados de las campañas de la Vanda Oriental y Occidental del Rio de la Plata," en el expediente "Sobre el arbitrio de ortogar la introducción de algunas negociaciones Ingleses," 30 de septiembre de 1809. ³⁶

More than a defense of the viceroy's proposal of free trade as a temporary financial expedient, the Representación was a vigorous argument for free trade as necessary for the welfare of the people and in conformity with the

³⁴ Levene, Ensayo Histórico, I, 298.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 285.

³⁶ Moreno, Escritos, II, 3.

laws of political economy.³⁷

What was on Moreno's mind can be best expressed in his own words: "Los hombres, que hán unido lo ilustre á lo util, vén desmentida en nuestro País esta importante maxima: y el viajero á quien se instruyese que la verdadero riqueza de esta Provincia consiste en los frutos que produce, se asombraría quando buscando al Labrador por su opulencia, no encontrase sino hombres condenados á morir en la misera."³⁸

He added that these facts and truth are so evident that it insults human intelligence to call attention to them. For example such is the proposition: "A la imperiosa ley la necesidad ceden todas las Leyes, pues no teniendo estas otro fin que la conservacion y bien de los estados, lo consiguen con su inobservancia, cuando ocurrencias extraordinarias la hacen inevitable."³⁹

Indignantly, Moreno spurned Agüero's suggestion that an abundance of foreign goods might be an evil for the country, for he was ignoring a primary principle of political economy: "Nada és más ventajosa para una Provincia que la suma abundancia de los Efectos que ella no produce, pues envilecidos entonces bajan de precio, resultando una baratura util al consumido,

³⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

y que solamente puede perjudicar á los introductores." ⁴⁰

He told Cisneros that his first duty was to improve the public welfare by all means within his power and that all the arguments presented in an attempt to cause alarm and to destroy his praiseworthy free-trade plan were false. To substantiate his arguments, Moreno quoted a certain wise governor who once said that the only injuries to the country as a result of free trade would be the following:

1. Que decaerá el giro clandestino, por que nadie preferira sus riesgos á la seguridad de una publica importacion.
2. Los ocultos introductores, que se llaman Contravandistas, carecerán de este honroso modo de pasar la vida, y tendran que tomar un fusil ó aguja.
3. Los Dependientes del Resguardo no serán necesarios en tanto número, ni tendrán tån crecidas obenciones.
4. Los Sub-delegados y demás participes en los Comisos quedan perjudicados.
5. Decaerá el espiritu militar sin las continuas batallas de los contrabandistas.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

6. Los presidios no estarán t n llenos si se evita el grande ingreso de los defraudadores, y los Curiales perderan mucho, faltandoles causas de esta especie, que les son tan lucratibas.⁴¹

Moreno commented on the merchants worrying that free trade would hurt the craftsmen and warned them not to be duped:  "Quien creer  a los Mercaderes de Buenos Ayres sinceramente consagrados al bien de los Artistas del Pais? Quando os digan que los Ingleses traher n obras de todas clases, respondedles que hacen tiempo se est n introduciendo innumerables clandestinamente y que si esto  s un gran mal, ellos solo h n sido sus autores."⁴²

In his conclusion, Moreno pointed out: "Nada  s hoy t n provechoso para la Espa a como afirmar por todos los vinculos posibles la estrecha union y alianza de la Inglaterra. Esta Nacion generosa que conteniendo de un golpe el furor de la Guerra, franque  a nuestra Metropoli auxilios y socorros, de que en la amistad de las Naciones no se encuentran exemplos es acreedora por los titulos mas fuertes   que no se separe de nuestras especulaciones el bien de sus Vasallos!"⁴³

The value of Moreno's memorial lies especially in its implied condemnation of the colonial mercantile system and its opportune exposition of liberal economic principles. This testament of the hacendados was warmly received and

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴² Ibid., p. 67.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 87.

widely read in creole circles, although Spanish censorship at the time prevented publication. At that moment of uneasy expectancy such a departure from law and tradition had unusual significance, for it meant the opening of a window into the non-Spanish world that could never again be closed. It was a neat summary of the conflict created by the divergence between the creole interest in Buenos Aires and the peninsular interest centered in Seville and Cádiz.

Meanwhile the three-month-old debate on the viceroy's proposal for trade reform grew to a close. The whole affair made the Spaniards in Buenos Aires hate Cisneros and plot his ruin. Thus the viceroy became entirely isolated, losing the support of the Spanish party while he had never been able to gain the confidence of the creole, and from then on his apprehensions and suspicions would only hasten the impending crisis.⁴⁴

On November sixth, the trade junta of Buenos Aires publicly opened the trade of the port to the British who were in waiting to inundate the region with their merchandise. Nevertheless, many vexing restrictions on trade remained: foreigners could consign trade only to Spanish merchants, duties were unduly high, and payment for imports had to be made one-third in money and two-thirds in produce.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Sierra, HDA, IV, 459.

⁴⁵ "Acta de 6 de noviembre de 1809," DHA, VII, 379-383.

Although the decree was not, in actuality, definitive, this marked an important step in the story of the development in the trade of Buenos Aires. The decree soon justified itself, as contraband gave way to open commerce, with increased receipts from customs filling the treasury and enabling the government not only to meet expenses but also to show a favorable balance of 200,000 pesos monthly. At the end of the year the total revenue amounted to 5,400,000 pesos, an increase of 4,200,000 pesos over the revenues recorded in 1808. This economic revolution which emancipated Buenos Aires commercially from the mother country was the first bold step toward independence.⁴⁶ However, in December, 1809, in accordance with the orders of the Spanish government, all ports were to be closed; and shortly after, Cisneros warned the British merchants that they would have to leave the city within a short time. This threat caused renewed uncertainty and gave an impetus to the surge of revolutionary feeling against the Spanish government.

In the midst of the coming storm, Buenos Aires was all anarchy and confusion, as was Spain among the contending juntas; but in Buenos Aires the question was further entangled by the pretension of Carlota to the regency of the Indies. By this time the views of the patriots centered more and more on the project of taking the government into their own hands, and the state of affairs between Cisneros and the Spaniards in Buenos Aires greatly forwarded their designs.

⁴⁶ Mitre, Historia, I, 340-341.

The latter now began to court the patriots in order to put down the viceroy and create a junta in his place. For this reason, when on the first of January the election of the new members of the cabildo took place, they allowed one-half of the offices to be filled with creoles, for the first time in the history of Buenos Aires.⁴⁷

The first days of 1810 brought word from Spain that the armies of Napoleon were driving toward total conquest of the peninsula. The people of Buenos Aires anxiously discussed what they would do when Spain fell to the invader. Three courses were open: Independence, union with Brazil under Carlota, or submission to the new rulers of Spain. The Spaniards preferred to maintain the peninsular connection under all circumstances, but military power rested in the hands of the creoles and armed force would ultimately have to settle the question. Meanwhile news of further disasters in Spain aided Belgrano's efforts, for his tertulia was becoming a patriotic club, separatist in aim. Saavedra, pressed to act, responded that he would at the fall of Seville, Vieytes with the Semanario, and Belgrano with the Correo del Comercio, his new newspaper, would establish a current of ideas that progressed from confidential whisperings to the advantages to be derived from independence.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Robertson, Letters on South America, II, 89-90.

⁴⁸ Enrique Ruiz-Guinazú, Epifanía de la Libertad (Buenos Aires, 1952), p. 152.

On May 13, an English ship brought news that Seville had fallen and that the junta central had fled and dispersed. Cisneros frantically tried to keep the news secret, but it was soon known throughout Buenos Aires. Five days later he published the news of the fall of Seville, which the leading creoles had fixed upon as the signal for revolutionary action. They had been spreading the theory that since there was no king, there could be no viceroy, or vice-king. On May 19 Belgrano and his associates assembled in the house of Rodríguez Peña and resolved to proceed by the constitutional method of cabildo abierto.

Cisneros, the conservative officials, and the clergy realized what the patriotic creoles wanted and what they would probably do to get it; therefore, an unwilling viceroy and cabildo scheduled a cabildo abierto for May 22.⁴⁹

On May 21 the cabildo met to consider preliminaries, while the people in the plaza clamored for the removal of the viceroy.⁵⁰ The next day at the cabildo abierto the decision of the majority was that Cisneros should be deposed and that the cabildo should have authority until they would appoint a junta to rule, pending the assembly of deputies from the provinces to establish the form of government.⁵¹

⁴⁹Memorias de los Virreyes, p. 572

⁵⁰"Cabildo del 21 de mayo de 1810," Acuerdos, Serie IV, Tomo IV, Libro LXV, 108-111.

⁵¹"Cabildo abierto del 22 de mayo de 1810," ibid., p. 130.

The Spaniards, however, made one further attempt to stop the inevitable current of public affairs. They influenced the government cabildo, a cautious and conservative body, to nominate a junta of five persons, two creoles, namely Saavedra and Castelli, two Spaniards, and Cisneros himself as president of the junta. ⁵²

This attempt to modify the decision of the cabildo abierto and to strengthen the viceregal authority aroused popular indignation. Colonel Saavedra, having the confidence of his own regiment, as well as an understanding with the other commanders, awaited the viceroy on the twenty-fourth and advised him to resign. A representation was drawn up and signed by many of the inhabitants, demanding a revocation of the first election, and giving the names of those who were to constitute the junta. Another public meeting was demanded and this was appointed for the following day. ⁵³

On the historic May 25, 1810, the general clamor of the creoles compelled a reluctant cabildo to confirm a government nominated by the patriots: Saavedra as president, Paso and Moreno as secretaries; Belgrano, Castelli, Azcuénaga, Alberti, Matheu, and Larrea, as the other members of junta. On the same day, the patriot junta installed itself in the citadel, the residence of

⁵² "Cabildo abierto del 22 de mayo de 1810," ibid., p. 130.

⁵³ "Cabildo del 24 de mayo," ibid., pp. 153-154.

the ancient rulers of the colony, and began to act in revolutionary fashion while invoking the name and authority of the king of Spain, Ferdinand VII.⁵⁴

The establishment of an American instead of a Spanish junta was held to be nothing less than an insurrectionary movement. If it was a creole, it was also a porteno revolution, an economic protest and the product of economic exigencies. Nothing could stand between Buenos Aires and free trade; the economic emancipation was determined before the political emancipation began. Juan V. Gonzalez claims that the Revolution of May 25 was only the fight over the custom house of Buenos Aires.⁵⁵

Although the change in political control relieved Buenos Aires of the bonds of economic servitude, she would now be in conflict with the rest of the country. Buenos Aires would now try to play the leading role in both national and world economy, but it would take a period of readjustment stretching over half a century before the bitter economic antagonism between the interior provinces and united action produced complete political independence.

In a very true sense Buenos Aires occupied a colonial position in relation to Europe. It was a producer of raw materials and a consumer of manufactured goods. Why should the porteno buy his ponchos in Santiago del Estero

⁵⁴ "Cabildo del 25 de mayo," ibid., pp. 160-174.

⁵⁵ Julio V. González, *Historia Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1957), pp. 148-163.

when he could buy an English-made one for less? Why should he buy his wines in San Juan and Mendoza when he could get French wines? This was the issue that made the Revolution of May 25, 1810, and would later result in civil war between Buenos Aires and the provinces. And so was born the porteño mentality, which may roughly be summed up as the inner conviction that the nation exists for Buenos Aires, and that all outside the limits of Buenos Aires is outside the limits of civilization. ⁵⁶

Buenos Aires, which was the sole port of entry and export for the hides, wool, and other products of the provinces, wished to maintain its commercial preponderance and saw in the movement against Spain an opportunity to do so. As it made the initial moves for independence and undertook to direct the revolution it seemed to be attempting to assert its own sovereignty over the entire area of the old viceroyalty. To the provinces it appeared that Buenos Aires was only supplanting Madrid as the center of power. As Buenos Aires had once been notorious for its resistance to Spanish mercantilism, so now would the interior provinces stubbornly resist the new mercantilism of Buenos Aires that began on May 25, 1810.

⁵⁶ Ysabel Rennie, The Argentine Republic (New York, 1945), pp. 18-20.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

What can be said, in the light of our present knowledge and of the various revisionist interpretations of the history of Buenos Aires and the background of the Revolution of May 25, 1810?

The possibilities for a revision in over-all interpretation of the Latin American revolutions are outlined in Charles Griffin's essay, "Economic and Social Aspects of the Era of Spanish American Independence."¹ This applies particularly to the May Revolution at the port of Buenos Aires in 1810.

The patriots in Buenos Aires were enlightened, keen-witted, class-conscious creoles who quarreled with the mother country because she denied them their rights to participate in the government and to enjoy the profitable results of commerce with the rest of the world. Their leaders represented, as Professor Haring has observed, "the ambitions of the educated creole class to supplant the peninsular merchants in government and trade."²

In essence, then, the task confronting Buenos Aires before 1810 was to establish pre-eminence in the export-import trade. And while the social tensions

¹Charles C. Griffin, "Economic and Social Aspects of the Era of Spanish American Independence," HAHR, 1950, XXIX, 170.

²C. H. Haring, The Spanish Empire in America (New York, 1947), p. 324.

are gradually being more fully revealed, more attention must be focused on the economic factor: to the effects in Buenos Aires, for example, of the innovations introduced into the old commercial system, to the impact on Buenos Aires of the commercial expansion of Europe, and to the economic interests between Buenos Aires and the outside world.

No one could deny the imperial organization and economic liberalization of the eighteenth century as vital prerevolutionary developments: the opening of the port of Buenos Aires by the free-trade reforms, the establishment of the viceroyalty with the capital of Buenos Aires, accentuating and localizing the struggle between the monopolistic Spanish merchants and the ambitious creoles.

Moreover, if we were to examine conditions in Buenos Aires at the turn of the century, we would find they were not materially different from what they had been for decades except that the dissatisfied creoles had begun to discuss matters of social, economic, and political interest. The intellectual movement which had its beginnings in the last years of the eighteenth century, had developed with heightening intensity in the first decade of the nineteenth and was in some ways responsible for the revolutionary activities which began in 1810. Creole views slowly but effectively took on aspects of liberality which could never have developed in the conservative authoritarian royal officials in Buenos Aires. The concept of an abrupt transition during the days of May appears to be yielding to a more meaningful concept of process; so that the period from 1780-1810 takes on an identifying

economic characteristic; matters having arrived at this point, the polemic moved from the purely economic level to the political one, where lines were vague and not clearly defined. Isolation from Spain had encouraged economic autonomy in Buenos Aires, and economic theories were arising in Buenos Aires that reckoned with a new commercial need.

The cause of the revolution of May 25, 1810, pressed by José Ingenieros as the major one, was always the economic. He attributes first place to the economic because through the years the British commercial interests were already tasting through clandestine trade, something of the riches of the commerce of Buenos Aires; and in 1809 the farmers of Buenos Aires joined the commercial interests by addressing a communication to the viceroy, Cisneros, about free trade with the British as a means of alleviating the poverty of the people and enriching the colonial treasury. He regards Rousseau's Social Contract, Quesnay's General Maxims of Political Economy, and Condillac's Treaties on the Sensations as the ideological source of the Revolution of May.

The emphasis on the assertion of natural rights by the creole leaders involved assigning a major role to the political ideas of the Enlightenment as a major cause of the May revolt. The writings of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau were hailed to be at the root, for from what other source could the notion have reached Buenos Aires that man was born free, that he had natural rights, and that governments not based on popular consent were tyrannous.

Of late there has been a new emphasis on the importance of the political theories of the seventeenth-century Jesuit writer Francisco Suárez for the thought of the revolutionary generation in Spanish America. There is a persistence in the effect of the traditional doctrines of Spanish scholasticism, especially the doctrine of popular sovereignty, despite the fact that Guinazú in his Epifanía de la Libertad, in speaking of the Revolution of May 25, 1810, asked: "¿Dónde está el pueblo?"

Probably, the chief influence of the political ideas of the Enlightenment in Buenos Aires before 1810, was to encourage reasonable and efficient administration which caused the creole leaders headed by Belgrano to take a public spirited interest in the improvement of their government. However, the patriots in Buenos Aires were usually too busy with economic protests, too greatly handicapped by empty treasuries, and too much concerned with outwitting royalist officials, to do much more than disseminate propaganda and maintain themselves precariously.

In the first place we see merely the continuation of the idea that the government should develop economic resources, make plans to improve agriculture and industry, stimulate economic activity; and, of course, open the port of Buenos Aires to commerce. The study of economic conditions in Buenos Aires in the immediately pre-revolutionary period shows the conflicting interests of the monopolistic merchant and craft guilds with the creole merchants, plantation owners,

and stockmen, and the way in which they were affected by colonial laws and administrative practices.

One of the first matters that concerned me was that correlation, if any, existed between the craft guilds and the factors working toward the Revolution of May. A scrutiny of the acuerdos of the cabildo of Buenos Aires casts little light upon the activities and influence of the guilds in pre-revolutionary Buenos Aires.

First, there were very few artisans in Buenos Aires before 1810. The carpenters, shoemakers, silversmiths, tailors, blacksmiths, and others, were mostly foreigners from Italy, Germany, Flanders, and England, who were so vital to the colony that royal decrees ordering the expulsion of foreigners from Buenos Aires would read: "De todos los extranjeros que habiten en ella así solteros como casados; y siendo de la obligación de esta Ciudad atender al bien y utilidad pública de su vecindad y teniendo presente la ley décima, libro 19, título 27 de las Recopiladas de Indias en que se ordena que la expulsión de los extranjeros, que residen en estas Indias, no se entiendan en cuanto a los que sirven oficios mecánicos . . . como son herreros, zapateros, sastres, carpinteros, calafates, abañiles, . . ." When the royal order of 1748, for example, did not specify the exemptions, the cabildo judged it necessary for the well-being and usefulness of the city of Buenos Aires that the artisans should be excluded.

Second, at the end of the colonial period when the number of artisans and workshops increased as the restrictions imposed by Spain were lifted, Saavedra

acting as syndic of the cabildo of Buenos Aires was reluctant to register new guilds. The shoemakers formed a guild in 1788 but had trouble from the start because they refused the foreign and colored shoemakers the right to govern. The argument was still raging in 1796 when the foreign and colored shoemakers wanted to register their own guild. Finally, in a report in 1799, Saavedra ruled that the guilds far from being useful and necessary were prejudicial to the general welfare because they weaken the rights of men, increase the misery of the poor, hinder industry, are opposed by the people, and cause many other inconveniences. He opposed the guilds in the name of the right to work and added that this right is the most sacred and inviolable right of man. The cabildo agreed with Saavedra and tried to influence Sobremonte, the one viceroy listed as taking an avid interest in increasing the number of guilds.

Fourth, Belgrano was interested in promoting industry and manufacturing but wanted the trades fostered by the consulado, which would give young men opportunities to visit European countries to learn from experts. He joined Saavedra in opposing the formation and registration of guilds.

Levene adds, "El formidable alegato de Saavedra hirió de muerte a los gremios, y antes de que se produjera la revolución habían desaparecido aun los intentos de su constitución."³

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Levene, Ensayo Histórico, I, 448.

What conclusions are to be drawn from this? Attempts at guild organization in Buenos Aires and even in the entire La Plata had been frustrated at first by Spain and later by the creole leaders in the consulado and the cabildo. It is quite obvious that they would have little power and influence on the factors working toward the Revolution of May 25, 1810.

In his discussion of the internal causes of the Revolution of May, Levene defines an economic cause as the condition of richness and commerce in the colony as a result of the prevailing regime. During the years of Spanish domination there took place on the one hand, active movements of the monopolistic merchants for the purpose of obtaining concessions and special privileges; and on the other hand, movements of the landowners, laborers, and creole merchants who pleaded for the free exportation of products. The documents of the seventeenth century are characterized by opposition to the monopolistic economic policy of Peru; and at the end of the eighteenth century, after the promulgation of the regulations concerning free commerce between Spain and the Indies in 1778, the struggle is interpreted in Buenos Aires as one of opposing interests against the monopolistic clique of Spanish merchants. González phrases it succinctly: "Como el monopolio comercial implantado por la Metrópoli significaba la esencia misma de todo el sistema colonial; la única alternativa era la independencia del imperio español."⁴

⁴ González, p. 169.

Disposal of surplus goods disturbed the creole merchants in Buenos Aires. Freer trade was needed, and North America assisted the commerce of Buenos Aires at the time. American ships carried on commerce for the Buenos Aires merchant Tomás Antonio Romero to Rio de Janeiro, Havana, Africa. Romero was a member of the important Buenos Aires junta of 1809, which assembled to discuss the proposal for the relaxation of trade. Stores of products from wharves in Buenos Aires were transported by New York, Boston, Salem, and Philadelphia ships from 1796 to 1810. The records of the Buenos Aires cabildo and consulado indicate the dismay of the merchants, while American customs house records and shipping lists point to the beginnings of inter-American trade.⁵

Our knowledge of British economic interests in Buenos Aires and of British economic penetration, at a time when new links were being forged and new interests created between Buenos Aires and the outside world, causes us to assess her role in the internal economic causes of the Revolution of May. We need to consider the revolution which the English invasions of 1806-1807 instilled in the minds of the people of Buenos Aires. Although deserted by their ruler, the colonists of Buenos Aires had driven out a foreign enemy. Having long exhibited an apathy and an indifference to their fate, they suddenly became conscious of their own strength. A political transformation had occurred. Some creoles were made

⁵ Bernstein, pp. 40-42.

to see the possibilities of independence, and as soon as this passion for freedom should be diffused, the revolution would begin. But the Napoleonic blockade had cut Buenos Aires from European markets, and the resultant practical economic problems were more important to the people than matters of natural rights, popular sovereignty, and the progress of man.

More tangible results of the English invasions, moreover, and effects more likely to be of greater consequences were the awakening of an American class and the impulse toward action. From the time of the British invasions there arose two definite classes which persisted in an everwidening gap to the eve of the revolution in 1810: the creoles, who centered around the popular leaders; and the peninsulars, who supported the cabildo.

It seemed almost contradictory to the general trend of this study that in this grouping of the people of Buenos Aires into creoles and Spaniards, Mariano Moreno should stand with the Spanish, or at least, opposed to the creoles. Historians give two explanations for this attitude; first, he frowned on the plans to set up an independent constitutional monarchy under Carlota; second, he disliked the ideas and government of Liniers, whom he suspected of Loyalty to Napoleon.

Although Moreno had some connection with the popular movement inspired by Belgrano, it was not until September 1809, that he was drawn into the public spotlight. Following the expulsion of the English, the cost of necessary articles had risen extremely high; farmers and cattlemen had no markets for their

produce; the public treasury was empty; and all classes but the smugglers and monopolists were suffering. It was as defender of the people that Moreno pleaded for the opening of Buenos Aires to British goods, and the free exportation of the frutos del país. The Representación not only had intrinsic value; but for the first time, the name of Moreno was linked with the great commercial crisis in Buenos Aires. His logic was that of a fiery politician pleading for a great national cause.

I agree with Diego Molinari that the importance of the Representación has very likely been exaggerated, but it had at the opportune moment a high economic and political significance. His cry for the intervention of the people in the government and in economic questions was revolutionary in origin and gained wide popularity. In addition to that, its appearance signified a change in the career of Moreno, whose four years of silence on revolutionary ideas had finally come to an end.

But while on the one hand, the Revolution of May was placed very firmly in a general commercial setting, on the other, it was closely related to the developing life within Buenos Aires. There was evidence of a powerful patriotic society utilizing the power of the press, the rise of criollismo, and the slow unfolding of a "Conciencia de sí." This aspect of the revolution manifests itself in the lives of Belgrano and Moreno, whose biographical studies contribute to a more systematic examination of creole ideas, and to a clearer understanding of local economic and revolutionary forces in Buenos Aires.

A compelling economic force caused the Revolution of May 25, 1810 at Buenos Aires, which resulted in the deposition of the viceroy, the establishment of a junta signaling the transfer of power from a Spanish to a creole minority, and the attempt to carry the revolution into the interior provinces. A compelling economic force would also be necessary to bring the provinces together under Buenos Aires.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Robert Reis, C. D. P. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 9, 1946
Date

Paul A. Feltz
Signature of Advisor