

CARLOS MALAMUD RIKLES: *Partidos políticos y elecciones en la Argentina: la Liga del Sur (1908-1916)*. Madrid, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 1997.

A thin historiography traces Argentina's first, pre-World War I transition to "democracy" that instituted compulsory voting by secret ballot for male citizens aged eighteen and above. Existing studies mainly focus on three issues: first, the failed rebellions of 1890 and 1893 led by the Unión Cívica (UC) and its offshoot, the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR); secondly, the "Sáenz Peña law" of 1912 that enacted democratic voting; and thirdly, the 1916 election that brought the UCR (Radical Party) to the presidency through the election of Hipólito Yrigoyen. During the last twenty years, monographs and dissertations have appeared on a scattered list of other topics. They include Ezequiel Gallo's work on the province of Santa Fe, Richard J. Walter's studies of the Socialist party and the politics of the province of Buenos Aires, Eduardo Zimmerman's recent book on the Liberal reformers and the "social question," and above all, Natalio Botana's landmark study of the "Conservative Order" between 1810 and 1916. Despite these impressive studies, several crucial gaps remain. Among them stand the reconstruction of conservative rule during the 1890s under Julio A. Roca and the Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN), the destruction of the PAN following Roca's second presidency in 1904 under President José Figueroa Alcorta (1906-1910), and the subsequent failure of the conservatives to create a successor to the PAN after the electoral reform of 1912.

Carlos Malamud Rikles belongs to a group of young Argentine historians working to remedy these deficiencies. His focus lies on the Liga del Sur (LS), a political movement established in the city of Rosario in 1908, that aimed to enhance the city's political status in the province of Santa Fe, to convert Rosario into the provincial capital, and to protect Rosario from discriminatory taxation. In 1914-1916, the Liga del Sur became absorbed into the Partido Demócrata Progresista (PDP), a newly established conservative party that competed unsuccessfully against the Radicals in the presidential election of 1916.

The LS and its successor have several important and interesting features. Their leader, Lisandro de la Torre, whose career stretched from the rebellion of 1890 until his suicide in 1938, became one of the most colorful and innovative political figures of this period. The PDP in particular illustrated the failure of popular conservatism to take root in Argentina, a failure that had a profound impact on the country's subsequent political development. After 1916, unable to win at the polls, several prominent members of the PDP (although not de la Torre himself) became supporters of the military coup to

restore conservative rule and right-wing Nationalists espousing military dictatorship and "moral regeneration". The failure of popular conservatism in 1916 provides one of the keys to the rise of Juan Perón during the mid-1940s and to the idiosyncratic political history of Argentina after that date.

Selecting the LS as his chief focus, Malamud devotes a large part of his study to the province of Santa Fe, famous during this period for its booming agriculture, for its large European immigrant population, and for the city of Rosario, that grew into the second largest in the Republic after Buenos Aires. Malamud's work on the origins of the LS draws from Gallo's work, but also illustrates the connection between the issues that appeared in Santa Fe during the early 1890s and the birth of the LS in 1908. This linkage chiefly consists of the brand of Liberalism promoted by writers like Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, that stressed the central role of the self-governing municipality in forging the modern democratic society. In the nineteenth century these ideas played a major role throughout the English-speaking world and in parts of Europe, led by Switzerland and Germany. Almost throughout Latin America, by contrast, their concrete results remained limited to southern Santa Fe, close to Rosario.

As Malamud shows, the period 1893-1908 marked a gradual shift in the emphasis on municipal autonomies in Santa Fe from their origins in the German-Swiss agricultural colonies to the city of Rosario. To some extent, de la Torre's later failure sprang from the overwhelming task of disseminating the "municipalist" doctrine from southern Santa Fe to a country in which it possessed very few roots. The LS failed to win control even in Santa Fe; efforts to promote its ideas in the province of Buenos Aires foundered against the autocratic powers of the provincial governors and the strength of local political "machines" that tied the municipalities to the governors. In discussing both Santa Fe and Buenos Aires, Malamud provides some excellent illustrations of how the politics of patronage and election fraud functioned in Argentina before the democratic reforms of 1912.

After 1910 the LS became a prototype for the "parties of principle" that the reformist president Roque Sáenz Peña hoped would evolve from the electoral reform he sponsored. Such new parties would create detailed programs, remain aloof from government patronage, and recruit mass support. The difficulty de la Torre faced in meeting these objectives sprang in part from the task of converting a local political movement based on a single issue into a multi-issue national coalition. His other great obstacle stemmed from the multiple concepts among conservatives themselves over what forms the PDP should take. A basic point of disagreement lay in the question of party centralization. As the leader of the centralizers, de la Torre believed central direction essential to the progressive, program-driven conservatism to which

he aspired. Most conservative leaders, however, preferred to retain the decentralized party structure that characterized the old PAN. This system enabled them to adapt party organization to local peculiarities, an idea de la Torre rejected because it would preserve the politics of patronage, "machines," and bosses. De la Torre failed to resolve this issue, and in 1916 the conservatives went to the polls as two competing factions: the "new" conservatives under the PDP and the "old" conservatives bundled together in the *ad hoc* alliance typical of the PAN era known as the "Concentración."

Malamud's richly documented study highlights the crucial differences between "new" and "old" conservatives, but in focusing exclusively on the LS, the PDP, and de la Torre, he cannot quite tell the whole story. Despite the emphasis on new "parties of principles," the primary objectives of electoral reform lay in constraining the radicals from rebellion. Rather than democratic modernization, the reform aimed to stabilize the political system and to protect conservative interests. As events after 1916 showed, when the new system failed to achieve these objectives, support for it swiftly dwindled among conservatives. Secondly, a complete account of this period requires an explanation not only of why de la Torre failed, but also why Yrigoyen succeeded. The Radicals posed as the heirs of the PAN. They achieved this objective by emulating the successful political parties in large, regionally diverse countries. The secret lay in blending the "new" with the "old," and unlike de la Torre, in camouflaging, not advertising, different and often incompatible sectional orientations. As a single issue movement concerned with little more than the city of Rosario, the LS failed even in Santa Fe; as the vehicle of de la Torre's inflexible and autocratic brand of democratic progressivism, the PDP posed no serious threat to Yrigoyen's Radicals in the 1916 election.

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SAMUEL SCHMIDT: *Humor en serio. Análisis del chiste político en México.* México, Nuevo Siglo, Aguilar, 1996.

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