

Nahuel Moreno

Feudalism and Capitalism in the Colonisation of the Americas



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Four Theses on the Spanish and Portuguese Colonisation in the Americas, 1948

Letter to Milciades Peña, *Estrategia*, 1957

The importance of Novack's Interpretation, *Revista de America*, 1971

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Foreword

Nahuel Moreno wrote his “Four theses on the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation in the Americas” in 1948 and since then they have been reproduced several times by mimeograph by the GOM. These short theses were a novel interpretation of the character of the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation. On the left, it prevailed the interpretation of the Communist Party, which proposed a supposed feudal character of that historical process. In 1957, the theses were reproduced in the first issue of Palabra Obrera’s magazine *Estrategia*, which was directed by Milciades Peña.¹ In a letter to Peña, Moreno reminded him that in 1948 they had both worked on the subject together and reached the same conclusions as the sociologist and historian Sergio Bagu,² but without knowing his work and with much less documentation.

The 16 November 1970 issue of *Intercontinental Press* included an article by the Trotskyist historian and leader of the American SWP George Novack³ titled “Permanent Revolution in Latin America”. In 1971, *Revista de America* No 4 published the Spanish translation of Novack’s article under the title “The character of Latin American colonisation. Its uneven and combined development”. It was accompanied by an introduction by Moreno, “The importance of Novack’s interpretation”.

In 1972, Ediciones Avanzada published “Four theses...” as a pamphlet. In 1975, Editorial Pluma published “Four theses...” again in an appendix to the Spanish version of Novack’s book *Understanding History*, together with Moreno’s introduction in *Revista de America* No 4. In the 1975 edition of

1 **Milciades Peña** (1933–1965) was an Argentine historian, politician, and thinker. In 1947, he joined the Grupo Obrero Marxista (GOM), led by Nahuel Moreno, which later became the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR), of which he was elected a member of the Central Committee. He actively participated in party formation. However, in 1952 he left the organization, in disagreement with Moreno’s decision to privilege territorial militancy over theoretical training. In 1957, again together with Moreno, Peña founded and directed the *Estrategia de la liberación nacional y social* (Strategy for the National and Social Liberation) magazine (1957–1958). Finally, in 1964 he launched the very prestigious journal *Fichas de investigación económica y social* (Cards for Economic and Social Research) (1964–1966), in which he, besides advancing chapters of his unpublished works, translated Marxist authors such as Charles Wright Mills, Henri Lefebvre and Isaac Deutscher. He married and had a son. Peña committed suicide on 29 December 1965, at the age of 32.

2 **Sergio Bagu** (1911–2002) was an Argentinian Marxist historian, sociologist and political philosopher. His most important book *Economía de la sociedad colonial* (The Economy of Colonial Society, 1949) was one of the first to challenge the idea of Latin American feudalism dominant among the Communist parties of that time and emphasise the capitalist dimension of the colonisation of the Americas.

3 **George Novack** (1905–1992) was a Harvard graduated intellectual who in the 1930s joined the revolutionary struggle. He joined Trotskyism and since then was one of the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party. Between 1937 and 1940, he was the secretary of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, which formed the “Dewey Commission” that examined the charges made against him by Stalin in the “Moscow trials” and in 1938 declared them a complete fraud. He was one of the leading intellectuals of the SWP and published numerous articles and several books on theoretical subjects of Marxism. His works include: *Introduction to the Logic of Marxism* (1942), *The Origins of Materialism*, *Understanding History* (1956–1968), and *The law of uneven and combined development*, published in Spanish by Editorial Pluma in the 1970s.

Pluma, the article by Novack was reproduced with the title “Hybrid formations and the permanent revolution in Latin America”.

In 2012, Editorial El Socialista published these three works (the four theses, the letter to Peña and the comment on Novack’s article) as part of the printed book, *Method of Interpretation of Argentine History* (available to download from nahuelmoreno.org/en/english/), and they are the ones we present here.

All notes are by the Editor.

The Editors

August 2021

Four Theses on the Spanish and Portuguese Colonisation in the Americas

I

There is a whole methodology and interpretation of history that hides under the label of Marxist and is not. It is an approximation to Marxism; even in many it is a healthy attempt to do so, but it is not Marxism. In general, we can include in this definition the entire Latin American Marxism, which has not yet theoretically overcome its embryonic stage.

In saying this, we do not refer to the programmatic side or, better said, to the more general aspects of the revolutionary Marxist program. In this sense, revolutionary Marxists of the past and we, the Trotskyists of the present, are without doubt Marxists.

Our daring statement refers to the method and the interpretation of the world by those who have self-called Latin American Marxists. Mariategui⁴ is the best example of this Latin American revolutionary. He was worthy of admiration and respect but did not or could not rise to a true understanding and Marxist methodology. Mariategui and all others we know, without exception, have been positivist-Marxists or neoliberal Marxists. To be a Marxist, for them, it was primarily to accept the existence of classes, the importance of the economic factor and, in some of them, the need for a workers' revolution. They limited themselves to applying the positivist method they had learned in their university and to change the terminology of the liberal interpretation by Marxist terminology. They were content to be a mere formal improvement, in the terms, of the liberal positivist ideology of official intellectual circles.

The best example of what we have been saying is the interpretation of Latin American history and particularly the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation of Latin America. There is a whole myth of the liberal historians that attributes the current backwardness of Latin America to the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation, and the progress of the United States to British colonisation. This myth is taken by Mariategui and also by Puiggrós,⁵ transforming the racial into economic categories: Spanish colonisation equal to feudal colonisation.

“The conquest of American territory and its inhabitants and its incorporation into the domains of the Spanish crown was the work of feudal conquerors, the successors of those who had fought against the Moors and who previously had swelled the armies of the crusades. Any European feudal undertaking, whether in the North against the Slavs, in the East against the Turks, in the West against

4 **Jose Carlos Mariategui La Chira** (1894–1930), was a Peruvian journalist, political philosopher, and activist. A prolific writer before his early death at age 35, he is considered one of the most influential Latin American socialists of the 20th century. Mariategui's most famous work was *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1928). He was the founder of the Peruvian Socialist Party in 1928 (which, after his death, would be renamed Communist Party), and of the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers, in 1929.

5 **Rodolfo Jose Puiggrós** (1906–1980) was an Argentinian writer, historian, journalist and politician. His works included numerous books and articles on Argentinian and Latin American history and the history of philosophy.

the Saxons and Germans, or in the South against the Arabs has been carried forward under the sign of the cross of Christ. The conquest of America by Spain is part of the general process of expansion of feudalism and it is verified when feudalism is already in decline. Spain poured into America the elements of its decomposed feudal regime. The power of the monarchy was strengthened by handing over to its vassals vast territories, vast wealth and thousands of human beings subjected to the harshness and cruelty of servitude” (*From the Colony to the Revolution*, Editorial Lautaro, 2nd. ed., p. 16).

We need to acknowledge that Puiggros had the merit of having understood, at least, that “the discovery of America was an undertaking carried out by traders and sailors of the Mediterranean Sea”. Pity that he later went on to consider that “the commercial capital had fulfilled its mission by bridging the gap through which Spanish feudalism would be transplanted to America.”

About the United States Puiggros is categorical:

“Saxon America was colonised a century later under different conditions. The English who arrived in the Mayflower, and who continued to arrive from 1620 to 1640, transplanted to the New Continent the seeds of capitalist development they brought from their original homeland. In opposition to the colonisation of the north-eastern United States the immigration of the cavaliers, which took place after the bourgeois revolution of 1648 that overthrew the Stuarts, was built, unlike the first, by feudal elements headed by part of the nobility displaced from the government and expropriated of their land. This immigration was established in the South, in Virginia, and implemented forms of production and lifestyles that corresponded to their feudal origin.

“The exploitation of the labour of Indians and blacks, by servile and slave ways, constituted its social base.

“While the bourgeois immigration current imposed the small rural property and the manufacturing development of urban centres, the feudal immigration current consolidated on the large property, and the domestic economy. The victory of the first removed the last remnants of feudalism in the United States of America” (Ibid, p. 23 and 24).

II

The Spanish, Portuguese, English, French and Dutch colonisation in America was essentially capitalist. Its objectives were capitalist and not feudal: organising production and discoveries to make prodigious profits and to place goods on the world market. They did not inaugurate a system of capitalist production because in the Americas there was not an army of workers in the free market. This is how the colonisers exploit the Americas as capitalists were forced to resort to non-capitalist relations of production: slavery or semi-slavery of the indigenous peoples. The three pillars on which the colonisation of America was settled were: production and discovery with capitalist aims; semi-slave or slave relationships; feudal forms and terminology (like in Mediterranean capitalism).

Puiggros mistakes, like so many liberal historians, the decadence of Mediterranean capitalism with the advancement of feudalism. There is no such Spanish feudalism colonising America; there is an extraordinary development of Mediterranean capitalism that has already begun its decline when it discovers America. The discovery will only further accelerate its decline and the development of the new north-western capitalism that had already emerged and was displacing Mediterranean capitalism before the discovery of our continent. Mediterranean capitalism, steeped in aristocratism and feudal forms, has a commercial, usurious, local and international character in opposition to the capitalism of northwest Europe, which has a manufacturing and national character.

If there is a place in America whose colonisation is not capitalist is the north-eastern United States, exactly the opposite of what Puiggros believes. To this region came, or stayed, Europeans who wanted land, climate and production as those of Europe but who did not envisage to trade with their home countries because they were supplied by themselves of their agricultural products. Hence, it was a colonisation whose goal was land to establish a small production and to self-provide.

This immigration gave rise to a small peasantry that self-supplied and placed in the market the light surplus that remained. Viewed from a historical angle, this immigration continued the magnificent tradition of medieval Europe to colonise new lands with independent farmers. But in the United States, there was a difference which would be crucial: so much land prevented the growth of a feudal landlord class, although there were attempts to do so. If we were fond of paradoxes we might say, against Puiggros, the southern United States and Latin America were colonised in capitalist form but without giving rise to capitalist relations and the north of the United States was colonised in feudal form (farmers seeking land and nothing more than land to feed themselves) but without feudal relations.

The truth is that there can be no other Marxist definition for the Spanish and Portuguese colonies and the southern United States than of capitalist production specially organised for the world market with pre-capitalist relations of production. In contrast to this, the north of the United States must be defined as a region settled by waves of small farmers who did not support pre-capitalist relations of production and, consequently, they constituted for centuries a continuously growing domestic market. The north-western United States inherited the advantages of European feudalism: small agricultural production without their tremendous disadvantages: a class of feudal landlords, inevitable parasites, in the future bourgeois production.

Marx had already seen — again! — this contradiction and difference in colonisation. In his *Theories of Surplus Value* he compared in passing the two types of colonisation and refuting in advance all the Puiggros in the world, he tells us:

“Two different aspects must be distinguished here. Firstly: There are the colonies proper, such as in the United States, Australia, etc. Here the mass of the farming colonists, although they bring with them a larger or *smaller* amount of capital from the motherland, is not a *capitalist class*, nor do they carry on capitalist production. They are *more or less self-working peasants* whose main object, in the first place, is to produce *their own livelihood*, their *means of subsistence*. Their main product, therefore, does not become a *commodity* and is not intended for trade. They sell or exchange the excess of their products over their own consumption for imported manufactured commodities etc. The other, smaller section of the colonists who settled near the sea, navigable rivers etc., form trading towns. There is no question of capitalist production here either. (...)”

“In the second type of colonies— plantations — where commercial speculations figure from the start and production is intended for the world market, the capitalist production exists, although only in a formal sense, since the slavery of Negroes precludes free wage-labour, which is the basis of capitalist production. But the business in which slaves are used is conducted by *capitalists*. The mode of production which they introduce has not arisen out of slavery but is grafted on to it. In this case, the same person is capitalist and landowner. And the *elemental* existence of the land confronting capital and labour does not offer any resistance to capital investment, hence none to the competition between capitals. Neither does a class of farmers as distinct from landlords develop here. So long as these conditions endure, nothing will stand in the way of cost-price regulating market-value” (“Theories of Surplus Value”, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, Vol 31, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p 515 and 516.)

A Spanish or Portuguese conquistador is the first cousin of the owner of “yerbatales” (mate plantations) of the beginning of the century which were popularized by legends and novels. In fact, or in-law the work of the *mensu*⁶ was almost slave but the production of these mill owners was capitalist. The colonisation of Hispanic America continues, with true cruelty, through commercial paths and objectives. And what it did in this regard was enormous. Hispanic America was the boiler of European capitalist development. In this connection, one day it may be necessary to study whether the technique of mineral exploitation brought by the Spaniards was not the highest of the time, confirming, in terms of productive forces, its capitalist character.

6 *Mensu* is a Guaraní word that designates the rural worker in the jungles of Paraguay and the Argentinian provinces of Corrientes and Misiones, in particular the worker of the mate plantations.

What is important is that this capitalist production gave origin from the beginning of the colonisation to an indigenous capitalist class, independent from the traders and bureaucracy: the bourgeois landowners. Latin American history has not yet been studied from this overall characterisation: the existence from the beginning of an indigenous bourgeois class linked to regional production. This class is similar to the class in the southern United States that gave a Washington. Liberal historians and their Marxist imitators have ignored the existence of this class because it was not an industrial bourgeoisie and they have classified it as feudal landlords, when, on the contrary, it is much more progressive than the commercial comprador bourgeoisie.

III

If we take the trouble to ascertain the character of the colonisation and conquest of our country, with a bird's eye we note that the characterisation we have done is correct. First of all, because the main concern of the conquerors and colonisers is the gold and silver mines for the world market, the desperate search of Eldorado, and not land to cultivate with feudal relations. This alone proves the capitalist character of the conquest and colonisation.

But we must contribute some symptomatic facts taking our country as an example of Spanish America:

a) Indigenous labour does not have the character of a serf, agricultural worker stuck to the land but rather of a labour force in the hands of Spanish owners that hire it to the highest bidder. In this sense, there is an army of workers and a rudimentary and "sui generis" labour market since there is free hiring but between business owners and owners or semi-owners of men.

If we begin with Mendoza, a region in which we are familiar with the oldest antecedents, we find that:

"[...] The ideal of Cuyo's *encomendero*⁷ was leaving someone in charge of his trans-Andean interests and go to Santiago with his Indians for lease. In Chile, the Huarpes served in gold mines in the manufacture of *botijambre*⁸ and urban and rural labours. In Mendoza, they planted vineyards, pruned them and harvested grapes and even guided wagons taking wine to Buenos Aires, made by themselves" (Juan Draghi Lucero, *Documentary Revelations about the Cuyo Economy*, Board of Mendoza's Historical Studies, 1940, Volume XVI, pp., 189-249).

"Hunting the Indian was perfectly organised in the early days of the colony. The villager needed *mitayos*⁹ for the extensive agricultural work that had to be dealt with in these remote places" (*Chapter Acts of Mendoza*, Tome L, 1945, p. LVII).

So ingrained was the habit of extracting female indigenous Cuyans to Chile, the very council of Mendoza bluntly states in June 1604, that to deprive them of taking *mitayos* from San Luis "meant the total destruction of this city", adding, "that it has been performing this removal for four years" (Ibid, p. LIX). And when the Indians begin to end, it resolved "to also ask His Majesty to grant us the mercy of thousand licenses for blacks for this city regarding the few naturals that there are in it." Which is indirect evidence that Indians could be replaced by slaves and not by serf peasant tenants.

The case of Mendoza is illustrative to the extreme because the conquistadors met industrious Indians, who already practised agriculture, and were very peaceful. Instead of using these exceptional conditions for establishing a feud, they took advantage of it to better use the indigenous people in companies producing for the market.

7 The *encomienda* was a system of free labour that was used during the Spanish colonisation of the Americas. The Spanish monarch rewarded individual Spaniards, the *encomenderos*, for services rendered, by giving them control of the labour of a particular number of indigenous people.

8 *Botijambre*, early Spanish colonial word designating leather vessels.

9 *Mitayo*: An Indian in the Spanish colonies in America, who had to work on the socioeconomic institution known as *mita*, a system of compulsory labour directed to internally develop a market economy with products and services for European Spain.

In Tucuman, to quote just one other example, the problem of the Indians who are taken by traders and cow herders who pass by is a serious problem, which shows that Indians are not tied to the land as serfs and are used for important commercial traffic or are taken out of their land to other farms, from “Peru, Paraguay and Buenos Aires” (*Chapter Acts of San Miguel de Tucuman*, Vol. 1, National University of Tucuman, 1946, p. 37 et seq.).

b) From the outset the colonisation is done to find or produce products for the world market, or at least for the colonial market. Intensive production of one or a few products is characteristic, as opposed to feudal self-sufficiency.

The testament papers of a neighbour in Mendoza of 29 December 1588 allows us to verify that this good man was already a plain common winemaker who “declared to have a vineyard near this city next to the Videla’s mill and having five thousand plants, which is surrounded by adobe walls and I also have a parcel of land near this vineyard, also fenced, plus a block of land that is close to that street and between this block and the vineyard is the tile kiln that I have, and I also have a plot of land on San Juan Bautista Street” (*Judicial Archive of Mendoza*).

In the north of the country, the situation was not very different. In a paltry village of Tucuman, we found that the Attorney General, Don Galio de Villavicencio, poses to the *Cabildo* [Town Council] a problem of 18 points on 4 May 1680, which is indisputably a program of a bourgeois hamlet without any feudal attachment. In point 3 he proposes that it became compulsory to accept instead of currency, given its lack, “cotton yarn and wool wick” so the village can be supplied and “the poor succoured”. For point 4 he says “the great importance of recording all cow and mule herds, carts and wagons and pack trains that pass through this city and its jurisdiction and others that the residents of this city take”. For point 6, he proposes that drifting Spaniards and mestizos be forced to work or be expelled (like later bourgeois laws requiring work). For point 7 he reports: “It has come to my knowledge that in many houses and farms of this city have two kinds of measures of wheat, one for receiving and another for giving, all sealed against conscience and justice”. In this style, he continues, interspersing occasional requests to retain the Indians as already mentioned. In point 17, he complains that “most of the time chapter members are missing from this city in their farms, *estancias*¹⁰ and busy travelling at their conveniences” showing thus that these settlers are much more like a vulgar capitalist in constant movement to defend his interests than a feudal lord worried about his amusement and hunting (*Chapter Acts of Tucuman* already quoted, Vol 1, p. 37 et seq.).

In 1588, in Corrientes, we find that there are no fiefdoms producing everything, but dealers of specialised production: foals, mares and cows. On 27 May 1588, the *Cabildo* of Corrientes meets to auction the care “of horses and mares of common at three heads by average weight” demanding two guarantors. On 7 November the same year, “Etor Rodríguez is appointed as guarantor of Asencio Gonzalez, guardian of beef cows”. Hernan F. Gomez, in the introduction to the publication of the Chapter Acts, clarified for us that the foundation act had been lost and there were copies in Spain as a result of “serious and valuable open judicial debate over ownership of the feral and wild cattle that populated the jurisdiction of the city of Corrientes in the fourteenth century.” This dispute between the descendants of Torres de Vera and the *Cabildo*, or the *acionero*¹¹ neighbours, about livestock ownership, is anything but a feudal lawsuit over land serfs.

IV

The colonisation of Argentina does not differ from the rest of Spanish America. It is interesting in this regard to study the Portuguese colonisation of Brazil.

10 *Estancias* are large landholdings spread over extensive areas, often 10,000 ha or more. In the Argentinian grasslands, the pampas, *estancias* have historically been estates used to raise livestock (cattle or sheep). *Estanciero* is the owner of the *estancia*.

11 *Acionero*: A person who is professionally engaged in manufacturing “acions” or stirrup straps for the saddle.

Navarrete¹² already informs us in his account of the voyages of Columbus that this had found in the lands discovered wood for dyeing fabrics. In 1501, the Portuguese sent a scouting expedition which returned to Portugal with a cargo of that wood, called “pau Brazil”. The king of Portugal hastened to lease the newly discovered lands to a merchant in Lisbon, Don Fernando de Noronha. Contract terms are not well known but, according to indirect references, Noronha agreed to annually send three ships to Brazil (lands of the Holy Cross), to discover 300 leagues of coastline and to pay 1/5 of the value of the timber to the sovereign. This compact is eminently capitalist.

To not bore the reader with other references, we will limit ourselves to quote Roberto C. Simonsen. In his *Economic History of Brazil (1500-1820)* he states:

“It does not seem reasonable that almost all patriotic historians will stress, far too much, the feudal aspect of donations, with some even getting to classify them as a setback regarding the gains of the era. (...)

“From the economic point of view, which does not fail to be basic to any colonial enterprise, I do not think it is reasonable to compare this system to feudalism.

“In feudal economy, there is no place for profit because the social classes are delimited and remuneration depends on the social status of each class.

“No matter how hard we study the historical elements we cannot conclude that the regime of donations presents a great resemblance to the medieval economy. In the first place, they all came to the new land in search of fortune; they all wanted to improve their economic situation. Gaining profit was the primary cause of the arrival in Brazil. The miners, carpenters, mechanics and other artisans sought to earn to form their own private purse. Anyone who would embark could do so. There were no limits. On the contrary, the higher the number the better. By and large, those who came here did it intending to return enriched. Whoever had capital could plead exploration of the land. The Grantees were only explorers on large scale. The concessions given by the king to those men were the means of stimulating them, facilitating their enterprise. In the following century, other European nations adopted similar processes of colonisation using, in preference, a private initiative through privileged colonising companies.

“Just as today some companies are granted tax exemptions along with high taxation on foreign products in competition with them, in the same way, using these characteristically capitalist procedures, the King of Portugal granted a series of favours to those who with their capitals or services could increase the colonisation of the lands discovered.

“Our historians have not addressed the case under this aspect. When referring to the grantee they regard him as if he were a representative of the feudal regime. Don Manuel, with his navigation policy, with his system of international monopolies, with his economic manoeuvres of displacement of Venice’s spices trade, is a true capitalist. His subjects are not far behind. They made no conquest like the knights of the Middle Ages; they sought to make greater their country, trying to transform Portugal into a power. They conquered the Indies with the same spirit in which, later, the British came to constitute the great British Empire.

“The immense powers given to grantees do not mean feudalism either; those powers still exist today. The chief of a fleet on the high seas, the commanders of the armies, the governors on exceptional occasions, still have today powers almost as big as the powers granted to those grantees. We are, therefore, confident that our donations, leaving aside the hereditary nature of the concessions, only are feudal in the terms, many of them still in use today.

“Regarding the concessions, it may be argued that with its legal aspect resembles feudal institutions. But this is also observed at present. The regime of our mines is characterised by the holder of the mine being but a concessionaire, who therefore works it, performing a social function.”

These are but a few examples, showing that in our country, as well as throughout the Spanish America of the colonisation, there was barbaric capitalism, based on the exchange of goods and in

12 **Martín Fernández de Navarrete y Ximénez de Tejada** (1765–1844), was a Spanish sailor, writer and historian who rediscovered the logs of three of the voyages of Christopher Columbus.

close connection with the world market system. It is undoubtedly a completely different regime from that existing or emerging in northern Europe, particularly in England, Holland and France, but it has nothing to do with the feudal regime. It is an aberrant form of the European capitalist development.

Appendix I

Letter to Milciades Peña

Buenos Aires, 19 August 1957

Dear Peña,

I appreciate your invitation to contribute to the magazine you promote. The crisis of Stalinism opens enormous perspectives to theoretical-political development, and your effort is a great way to boost theoretical development.

Artistic, political and theoretical development cannot take place without a vigorous debate. That is why I think as correct your stated intention to provide pages of *Estrategia* to all intellectuals who claim to be of Marxism without requiring prior agreement.

Given the nature of the magazine, I thought it appropriate to send you an old work of ours on the Spanish-Portuguese colonisation, despite its obvious weaknesses. This “ours” is true, as you know, in many ways. It is ours as Trotskyists, and as being the product of years of fruitful polemic among Trotskyists. It is also ours, in the sense that you collaborated as much as anyone in the study and investigation that culminated in the hasty theses. It is also ours because as Marxists we arrived at the same conclusions as Bagu before knowing his books and with much less documentation. I can only lament that you do not decide to publish the conclusions page you wrote around the time, on the situation in Spain immediately following the discovery of America. On that page, you synthesised our destruction of the current prejudices about the Spain of the Conquest. In a train of lamentations, I must remind you that we never finalised our studies on the colonisation of the United States.

There are hasty intellectuals, newcomers to Marxism who want to take away the right that we Trotskyists have earned of being the first in Latin America who began to theorise like true Marxists. The old work that I now date as December 1948 serves as a call to reality for the young intellectuals who approach the revolutionary movement.

Nahuel Moreno

Appendix II

The importance of Novack's Interpretation

Novack's answers to the questions put to him by some members of the Communist Internationalist Group, the Mexican Trotskyist organisation, are of great theoretical importance for us, Latin American revolutionaries.

Latin American Marxism was educated under the influence of a pseudo-Marxism, which had been watering in the fountains of liberal historians. They proclaimed a supposed feudal colonisation by Spain and Portugal had been the origin of our lagging behind the United States. This false colonisation schema has been supplanted in some Marxist media by another scheme as dangerous as the previous one: the Latin American colonisation was directly capitalist. Andre Gnder Frank is one of the most important representatives of this new current of Marxist interpretation. As Novack so well quotes, Frank states categorically that "capitalism begins to penetrate, to form, indeed fully characterise Latin America and the Chilean society as early as the sixteenth century."¹³

I was one of the first, if not the first, who since 1948 have been struggling in the Latin American Marxist media against the theory of feudal colonisation, which at the time Stalinism held as a theoretical justification for its policy of making an anti-feudal revolution and making popular fronts with the "anti-feudal" and "liberal" bourgeoisie. This is the reason why some theorists of "capitalist colonisation" quote me as one of the pioneers of the current interpretation in vogue. Nothing could be more wrong. Without using the expression combination of various forms and based on Marx, who defined the slave colonisation of the United States as "feudal capitalism", my interpretation has been essentially that of Novack, which in turn is Marx's interpretation, although without quoting him. Some quotes come to mind to delimit the fields well.

In thesis II of my work *Four Theses on the Spanish and Portuguese Colonisation in the Americas*, published several times since 1948, and first printed in 1957 in *Estrategia*, I say categorically:

"The Spanish, Portuguese, English, French and Dutch colonisation in America was essentially capitalist. Its objectives were capitalist and not feudal: organising production and discoveries to make prodigious profits and to place goods on the world market. They did not inaugurate a system of capitalist production because in the Americas there was not an army of workers in the free market. This is how the colonisers exploit the Americas as capitalists were forced to resort to non-capitalist relations of production: slavery or semi-slavery of the indigenous peoples. The three pillars on which the colonisation of America was settled were: production and discovery with capitalist aims; semi-slave or slave relationships; feudal forms and terminology (like in Mediterranean capitalism)."

To any moderately responsible reader, my premise is clear. The colonisation has capitalist objectives, to gain profits, but it is combined with non-capitalist relations of production. Novack says the same thing: to the "capitalist objectives" of my analysis he gives a more accurate name, merchant

¹³ Andre Gnder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York, *Monthly Review Press*, 1967, p. xii, quoted by George Novack, "Permanent Revolution in Latin America", *Intercontinental Press*, Vol. 8, No 38, 16 November 1970, p. 980.

capital, but he stresses as in my thesis, the non-capitalist nature of the relations of production. “What did in fact Spain and Portugal do? They created economic forms in the New World that had a combined character. They welded pre-capitalist relations to exchange relations, thereby subordinating them to the demands and movements of merchant capital.”¹⁴

This theoretical discussion is not an academic controversy unrelated to politics. The theses of the permanent revolution are not merely theses of the socialist revolution, but a combination of the two revolutions, bourgeois-democratic and socialist. The need for such combination stems inexorably from the socio-economic structures of our backward countries, combining different segments, forms, relations of production and classes. If colonisation was from the beginning capitalist, there can only be a place for the socialist revolution in Latin America and not a combination and subordination of bourgeois-democratic revolution to the socialist revolution.

All these reasons are such that, once again, we recommend careful reading of Novack’s responses, as an important contribution to new and old debates on colonisation, as well as the discussion of the program of permanent revolution in the continent.

¹⁴ George Novack, “Permanent Revolution in Latin America”, op. cit., p. 980.