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**Silvio Frondizi and the Argentine anti-Stalinist Left, 1945-1960**

From a US perspective, dependency theory arose in response to modernization theory, as a consequence of the latter’s weakening hold on the imagination of development economics and sociology. Too many counterexamples belied modernization theory’s central assumptions: that every society would pass through the same, universal stages of growth; that governmental and voluntary experts from the US could make up for the third world’s human capital deficit; that capital loans from the industrial world would be repaid in full once their investment carried undeveloped countries past the take-off point into self-sustaining growth. As states subjected to modernization projects in the 1950s continued to stagnate into the 1960s, a growing international chorus saw modernization as little more than imperialism in a new guise. The various criticisms of modernization theory crystallized into dependency theory, which penetrated modernization theorists’ hold on US thinking on the topic of development in 1967 with the publication of André Gunder Frank’s *Capitalism and Development in Latin America*. Whereas modernization theorists located the causes for underdevelopment within the underdeveloped nations themselves, dependency theorists blamed an unequal global economic structure in which resources flowed from an underdeveloped periphery to a developed core. Historical treatment of dependency theory in the United States has largely centered on its role in dethroning modernization theory, and follows this basic narrative.[[1]](#footnote-1)

An intellectual and social history centered on dependency theory in its own right, rather than simply as a reaction to modernization theory, offers new insights into both its origins and historical significance. It is impossible to unravel the strands of thought that fed into dependency theory as a relatively coherent set of propositions purporting to explain underdevelopment without focusing on the network of intellectuals that constituted a dependency “school,” or the broader social forces sustaining them and in turn feeding off the implications of their ideas. Frank indeed looms large in such a history, but his intellectual influences and trajectory have so far been insufficiently examined and poorly understood. Histories of Frank’s place in dependency theory usually locate his immediate antecedents in the Latin American structuralist economists from the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLA), and Marxist economists Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, the figures surrounding the radical US journal *Monthly Review*. ECLA economists, beginning in 1949 with Raúl Prebisch, provided the core-periphery model, a cornerstone of Frank’s version of dependency theory, and Baran and Sweezy adapted the classical Marxist theory of imperialism for the epoch of Monopoly Capitalism. These two currents fused together to form dependency theory, a “neo-Marxist” theory that gained some modicum of traction in mainstream ideas about development in the 1960s and 1970s.[[2]](#footnote-2) This well-entrenched origin story for dependency theory itself originates in the common sense of the era when the theory was current, and is sustained in modernization historiography based on interpretations of the key texts of dependency theory, Latin American structuralism and the Monthly Review school.

I aim to retrieve an under-recognized intellectual current of greater or equal importance as ECLA and/or the MR school in the genesis of dependency theory. Traveling through Latin America in the early 1960s, Frank immersed himself in established networks of Latin American anti-imperialist intellectuals, in which he picked up midstream on debates dating back at least to the ‘40s and ‘50s over the strategy and tactics for liberating Latin America from the economic control of the industrialized world. Many of the intellectuals involved in these debates identified as revolutionary Marxist socialists opposed to the modernization programs of both the Soviet Union and the United States. In the early years of the Cold War, Latin American anti-Stalinist Marxists questioned the historic relationship between the expanding capitalist system and their own national economic, political and social institutions. To what extent were these institutions pre-capitalist; Latin American variants of their European counterparts during the feudal ages? Or, in contrast, to what extent were they products of capitalism, shaped in and through a relationship to international capitalism during the colonial era? At issue in these debates were complex questions about the definition of capitalism itself and the nature of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which carried important implications for the strategy and tactics of contemporary anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles in Latin America. Far more than ECLA’s empirical observation that the region suffered from diminishing terms of trade, the conceptual framework of dependency theory came out of the efforts of the Latin American anti-Stalinist left to orient itself politically within a local class structure that had historically evolved in and through a subordinate relation to the expanding global capitalist system.

In this paper, I demonstrate the importance of the anti-Stalinist left in laying the conceptual groundwork for dependency theory by focusing on the life and thought of Silvio Frondizi, in particular between 1945 and 1960. Frondizi’s opus, a two-volume study entitled *La Realidad Argentina*, overtly employs the historical materialist method to explain the political, economic and social foundations of Peronism. Throughout the work, Frondizi places the relation between national and global social forces at the center of his analysis. Argentine politics play out nationally, but on a terrain indelibly shaped by the stage of development of the capitalist system as a whole. Frondizi’s ideas directly contributed to dependency theory through Frank, who read *La Realidad Argentina* in the 1960s while writing the essays that would go into *Capitalism and Underdevelopment*. Unlike dependency theory, however, Frondizi’s work is better labeled Marxist without the “neo” prefix. Against the backdrop of what he saw as a national political crisis, Frondizi formed his ideas through close attention to programmatic debates among contemporary Argentine left organizations as well as rigorous study of the history of Marxist thought. Frondizi saw no distinction between his theoretical and practical work. He studied Marxism and polemicized with other left groups in order to build a cadre organization with strong theoretical foundations. Because polemic with other left groups formed such a vital part of Frondizi’s creative process, my narrative of the development of Frondizi’s thought occasionally digresses into the intellectual history behind certain Communist Party and Trotskyist formulations on Peronism, the idea of “bourgeois-national” revolution in Latin America, and Argentine foreign relations with other states.

**Frondizi’s Early Life and Political Radicalization**

Born in Paso de los Libros in 1907 to Italian immigrant parents, Frondizi was the twelfth of fourteen children. The large family placed a high value on culture and education, and the three youngest sons, Silvio and his brothers Arturo and Risieri, would all become prominent Argentine intellectuals. Arturo, closest to Silvio both personally and in age, went into politics. He helped form the Unión Radical Intransigente in 1950 and held a leadership position within the party for nearly forty years, including a four year stint as the President of Argentina from 1958-1962. [[3]](#footnote-3) Silvio and Arturo were in classes together from the years of their primary education in Concepción, through their university education at el Colegio Nacional Mario Moreno in Buenos Aires, up to and including law school at the University of Buenos Aires. At law school, their career paths began to diverge. Silvio concurrently enrolled in the Nacional Instituto del Profesorado, and emerged in 1930 with both a law degree and a professorship in history. While Arturo went on to practice law, eventually moving into politics, Silvio continued his postgraduate study, and in 1936 received his doctorate in jurisprudence.[[4]](#footnote-4)

As a young doctor of philosophy in the late 1930s, Frondizi was drawn into the newly formed philosophy department at the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán (UNT). Argentine students began agitating against the traditional system, which tied universities to the church, as early as the end of the nineteenth century. In 1918, students throughout the country organized a national federation pushing for university reform, including the nationalization of many of the largest universities and the creation of widely accessible public education, which achieved results throughout the 1920s under the sympathetic presidency of Hipólito Yrigoyen. The student movement protested the 1930 coup, led by General José Felix Uriburu with the backing of US Standard Oil, and the subsequent dictatorship. To quell this opposition, the military regime expanded a number of universities throughout the country, including UNT. In December of 1936, the Inspector General of Schools, Don Pascal Guaglianone, in an effort to increase the role of humanities in public education, presented a proposal to add a department of philosophy to UNT, which previously had offered courses of study only in Engineering and Pharmacy. In 1937, Julio Prebisch took over as rector of UNT, and attracted a group of humanist philosophers to form the new department, many of whom had recently fled from Nazi Germany or the turmoil of the Spanish Civil War. At the center of this new faculty stood Manuel García Morente, who had served as the deacon of the University of Madrid before escaping first to France then to the United States with the eruption of the Civil War. As director of the new department, Morente designed a curriculum with an emphasis on history, theory and method. To execute his vision, he reached out to progressive young professors in different parts of the country, including Risieri Frondizi to teach logic. Risieri came to teach logic, and brought Silvio along to teach political theory.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Frondizi’s comfortable, middle-class academic life came to an end in 1943. The military coup in June of that year placed Gustavo Martínez Zuviría as Minister of Justice and Public Instruction. Openly identifying as a fascist, Martínez Zuviría made it his mission to fight against the education reform of the late 1930s, and replace the liberal, humanist curriculum with religious education. Tucuman underwent a complete fascist overhaul of the local government, and UNT set out to implement the new religious curriculum. Frondizi refused to submit. In November of 1943 he denounced Academic Council of UNT and wrote an open letter to his colleagues and students: “The jackals and crows circling around modern culture have it wrong, it is not yet a cadaver and will not be; those of us who know and love our culture are disposed to defend it, because its death would mean our own death.”[[6]](#footnote-6) By 1946, Frondizi had been stripped of his professorship, and relocated to Buenos Aires to work as an attorney and integrate himself into the political circles of his brother Arturo.

The rise of Peronism politicized Frondizi for the first time. He approached politics as an academic matter while at UNT, but having been forced out of his position by the changing political winds, he turned his attention to his country’s current political crisis with a newfound sense of urgency. Later in his life, he saw this as a decisive turning point in his transition from a “petty bourgeois intellectual” to a “revolutionary socialist.” After having been a titled and published professor, he personally experienced the crisis by having to live for a number of years on a very modest salary.[[7]](#footnote-7) His first serious effort at analyzing his contemporary Argentine political and social reality, a pamphlet entitled *La Crisis Política Argentina*, reveals a definite shift to the left in Frondizi’s thinking. For Frondizi, Peronism emerged out of a nearly two-decades-long crisis of leadership in Argentine politics. In the early years of the twentieth century Radicalism carried the promise of progress for the Argentine people, but rested on a foundation of heterogeneous and antagonistic social groups. Hipólito Irogoyen allowed the conservative landowning oligarchy and the church to retain political influence, creating a constant drag on progressive legislation at odds with the almost mystic aura of modernity surrounding the Radical label. The Radicals’ inability to resolve these contradictions and the absence of a developed socialist movement to take up the mantle opened the door for traditional conservative forces, operating through the military. Once in power, however, the conservative dictatorship could only keep Radicalism at bay through force and fraud, which caused the repression and corruption that generated enormous popular hostility and ultimately made the dictatorship untenable. The coup of 1943 represented the failure of dictatorship to rule through brute force, which convinced the forces behind the scenes of the dictatorship of the need to adopt populist measures. Frondizi saw this as positive insofar as it represented the entry of the masses into Argentine political life, and negative in that Peronism, lacking a true left element, missed a historic opportunity to sweep away for good the old conservative landowning oligarchy. While not presented as a contribution to Marxist thought, nor employing any theoretical discussion of the Marxist method, *La Crisis Política* places antagonistic social classes at the center of its analysis.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Even as yet uncultivated, Frondizi’s socialist political orientation and opposition to Peronism already stood to the left of Argentine Stalinists, who concurrently courted an alliance with liberals to block Peron’s accession to power. In August of 1945, Rodolfo Ghioldi, a longtime Communist Party stalwart addressed a mass audience at Luna Park. Ghioldi called on all radicals, progressive, conservatives, and socialists to form a “Democratic Union” against the fascist threat of Peron. Other anti-Peronist parties heeded the call, and in November the Communist Party (CPA), the Socialist Party, the Radical Civic Union and the Democratic Progressive Party formalized the Democratic Union coalition and ran presidential and vice-presidential candidates. US ambassador Spruille Braden helped organize the Democratic Union, which had the full backing of Washington. Although the Democratic Union candidates had the strongest chance of defeating Peron, Frondizi instantly, almost instinctively rejected the alliance with liberalism. Over the next few years, he formed his ideas in opposition to the collaborationist stance of Argentine Stalinism, and it is useful to understand those positions and their history.

Although the CPA traces its heritage to the left wing of the Socialist Party in the early twentieth century, and prides itself on being a founding section of the Third International (Comintern), Argentine Stalinism really took root at the Comintern’s Sixth World Congress in 1928. As the only country in which Communists actually held power, the Soviet Union had always played a leadership role in International Communism. The Sixth Congress, however, marked an inflection point in the Comintern’s bureaucratic evolution, after which revolutionary strategies of individual communist parties would be determined outside of the context and with little understanding of local and national political peculiarities, and protection of the Soviet Union would be elevated to the primary function of the International.[[9]](#footnote-9) According to the theses presented at the Congress, Latin America as a whole was to be categorized as “semi-colonial.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Russian Social Democrats had characterized their own country as semi-colonial in the years leading up to the revolution, which implied that tsarist Russia was neither a fully developed capitalist country nor entirely under the thumb of imperialism. This classification, accepted by Russian, German and Eastern Europe Social Democrats involved in the Second International, generated enormous controversy surrounding the role that the bourgeoisie would play in abolishing feudalism in semi-colonial countries, and the immediate tasks at hand for Socialists, who saw themselves as the vanguard of the proletariat.[[11]](#footnote-11) Ironically, the Stalinist bureaucracy applied the semi-colonial label to Latin American countries at the Sixth Congress to support a “bourgeois-democratic” revolution to abolish feudalism, which was the conception that Lenin had rejected upon his return from exile in his *April Theses*, which became the guiding theory behind the slogan “All Power to the Soviets,” under which the Bolsheviks gained a majority in the Soviets leading to the seizure of power in the October Revolution.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Unaware of the world historical significance of the meeting in which they presented their ideas, Latin American delegates wrangled over the categories used to define the social, economic and political institutions on their continent. Jules Humbert-Droz, the Swiss Communist placed as the Comintern’s special liaison to Latin America, objected to the broad category “semi-colonial” used to define a diverse range of social systems throughout Latin America. Humbert-Droz’s objection opened up space for the Colombian delegation to propose a new category defining as “dependent states” those countries that had been economically penetrated by imperialism while retaining a certain level of political autonomy. The Russian delegation quickly squashed this discussion, which strained the rigid bounds of the simplified model of historical stages that would be central to Stalinist Marxism. Suggesting that imperialism had in any way warped or altered the trajectory of Latin American countries on their path from feudalism to capitalism carried the whiff of Trotsky’s theory of uneven and combined development, which by 1928 the bureaucracy already realized must be treated as the most pernicious form of revisionism.[[13]](#footnote-13) The next year, Communist Parties throughout Latin America met in Montevideo, Uruguay for the first Latin American Communist Conference, a meeting which established the Confederación Sindical Latinoamericano (CSL), a trans-Latin American labor federation directly linked to the Comintern. Those Communists who had mostly zealously defended the Soviet party’s conceptions at the Sixth Congress, especially Victorio Codovilla of Argentina, assumed leadership positions at this meeting. Having assimilated the theoretical assumptions of Stalinism, and gained the backing of the International, Codovilla and a small handful of leaders of the Communist Party of Argentina (CPA) effectively managed for the next several decades to maintain control of an ideologically homogeneous organization.[[14]](#footnote-14)

As participants in the Democratic Union, the CPA pursued one of the most extreme expressions of the wartime popular front strategies that played out in national Stalinist parties throughout the world as a consequence of the alliance between the US and the Soviet Union.[[15]](#footnote-15) Once the bureaucratic apparatus in control of the Soviet Union had institutionalized the theory of “socialism in one country,” protecting the national security of the Soviet Union trumped all else. With the rise of European fascism, and especially the Nazi threat on Russia’s border after the mid-1930s, the Comintern sharply reversed the ultraleftist course of the so-called third period, and pushed Comintern affiliated parties to form anti-fascist alliances with their liberal governments. Although some historians see the Popular Front period abruptly ending with the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, in terms of the strategy and rhetoric of the CPA the period between 1939 and 1941 marks a brief interlude, after which their program again took on the anti-fascist, pro-democratic and national unity orientation characteristic of the Popular Front period.

During the months of campaigning for the Democratic Union, the CPA propagated a message of “unity without exclusion” of all Argentine democrats against the “Nazi-fascist” Peron. The party erased from its discourse any call for revolution or class struggle. At a national party conference in December 1945, the height of the campaign, Codovilla, the party’s chair, rebranded the party as “passionate champions of unity…Unity among all of the parties and forces of democracy, unity of the Argentine nation, to detain the advances of reaction and fascism.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Throughout the Democratic Union period, party leaders made repeated efforts to incorporate current and historical liberals into its mythology. At Luna Park Ghioldi delivered his speech beneath a giant banner adorned with portraits of Stalin, Truman, Roosevelt and Churchill.[[17]](#footnote-17) Similarly, Codovilla’s speech at the party’s conference in December of 1945 hailed Roosevelt and Stalin as the great heroes of the war, the international saviors of democracy, and the symbolic figures around which capitalist and socialist countries would build a peaceful, collaborative and *democratic* future.[[18]](#footnote-18) These efforts very much fit the mood of international communism in the war years, and are the Argentine version of CPUSA leader Earl Browder’s famous slogan “Communism is twentieth century Americanism.” The party’s hyper-nationalist, patriotic and essentially liberal democratic message flowed directly from the wartime security needs of the Soviet Union.

Frondizi was living in Buenos Aires during the campaign, and he had long since begun to take seriously the politics of his country, but he was unsatisfied with the Democratic Union as an alternative to Peronism. In 1946 he taught courses on “the current state of the political problem” (*Estado actual del problema política*) at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores. Colegio Libre was a step down financially from his full-time professorship at UNT, but it did not carry the same censorship as the quasi or outright fascists who controlled both the UNT and the local government in Tucumán. The more liberal atmosphere provided him the space to gather intellectual collaborators who formed an incipient political movement, which they initially called the Acción Democrática Independiente (ADI), but would later adopt the name Grupo Praxis.[[19]](#footnote-19) They published a periodical entitled *El Ciudadano* (The Citizen), and, rather than impotently opposing the Peronist avalanche through what they saw as an unprincipled alliance with liberalism, dedicated their intellectual energies to building a cadre organization around a concrete analysis of the social foundations of Peronism. Within this intellectual space Frondizi first took up a serious study of Marxism, which he had earlier called an “outstanding example of a simplistic thesis.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

Through the courses he taught at Colegio Libre Frondizi first developed his theory of global capitalist integration, which saw the light of day in mid-1946 in an article entitled “La evolución capitalista y el principio de soberanía” (The evolution of capitalism and the principle of sovereignty).[[21]](#footnote-21) The truncated article, sent to the Overseas News Agency, came out as an independent pamphlet in Argentina near the end 1946, and almost immediately drew an attack from the CPA, in an article by Ghioldi published in “La Hora” in March of 1947. In his response to Ghioldi’s criticism, his first public piece to include any serious discussion of Marxism, Frondizi draws out the political implications of his theory and the Stalinist critique. Still primarily concerned with understanding the social foundation of Peronism, Frondizi begins with the current state of evolution of the capitalist system as a whole. He divides the evolution of international capitalism into three phases. The first phase, identified by Marx, was the competitive phase, which witnessed the consolidation of national economies. To this phase corresponded the program of bourgeois-democratic revolution. The second phase, identified by Lenin, grew out of the first as a consequence of the internal contradiction between social production and individual accumulation. Monopoly formed out of competition, which consolidated advanced capitalist states into imperial powers. On the international plane, the second phase was characterized by inter-imperialist conflict. In the third phase, through which Frondizi saw his contemporary world passing since the end of the war, the capitalist part of the world was being integrated and organized under US leadership, and in its own interests.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Ghioldi most sharply disagreed with the implications of Frondizi’s ideas on the question of decolonization. Frondizi believed that, due to the entrance of the masses into politics worldwide, the old political form of colonialism, no longer tenable, would be replaced with economic control. Thus, Frondizi had stumbled upon the exact formulation that had been raised, and quickly squashed at the Sixth Congress. Nearly twenty years later, Ghioldi had only become more intransigent in his hostility to this view, exacerbated by the changing security needs of the Soviet Union as the Cold War picked up momentum. Ghioldi insisted that the claim that the US would abandon colonialism flew in the face of Washington’s current efforts to colonize Greece and Turkey, a piece of hyperbole clearly linked to the deepening rift over the division of Europe among the former allies. Not only was this inconsistent- Frondizi had already predicted the US subsuming the entire global economy in its own interest at the moment when Ghioldi hailed Bretton Woods as the pinnacle of democracy under a banner of Roosevelt with the backing of Spraden and the Democratic Union- Frondizi showed quite clearly how it derived from an effort to undermine any revolutionary program in colonial and semi-colonial countries. “The integration of a global capitalist front” argued Frondizi, “irremediably calls for the formation of a global anticapitalist front and invalidates the argument of the necessity that our country complete the so-called ‘bourgeois-democratic revolution.’”[[23]](#footnote-23) Frondizi’s theory of integration implies a community of interest between the national and imperialist bourgeoisie, and stood in stark contrast to the doctrinaire view of universal historical stages characteristic of Stalinist Marxism.

**La Realidad Argentina**

Frondizi achieved his opus, and his most important contribution to Marxist thought, in the mid-1950s with *La Realidad Argentina: Ensayo Critico de Interpretación Sociológica*. The word “essay” (*ensayo*) in the subtitle inappropriately describes either the scope of Frondizi’s undertaking- an intensive study of classical Marxism and a rigorous empirical examination of the Argentine political economy- or the massive two-volume presentation of his findings. The first volume, published in 1955, attempted to explain the political economic structure of Latin America in general and Argentina specifically as the historical outcome of the dependent relation to imperialism, and especially to the United States. The second volume, released the following year, attempts to propose a program of action for the problems presented in the first, and amounts to a lengthy rumination on the history of Marxist strategy and tactics in which his conclusions reject any collaboration with the local bourgeoisie. Frondizi grounds his work in the Marxist theory of imperialism, but argues that the postwar period marked a new era in capitalist development defined by global capitalist integration under US hegemony. Around this conceptual framework, Frondizi unfolds a sophisticated analysis that anticipates many of the conclusions of dependency theory, including a rejection of the notion of feudal relations in Argentine agriculture, and the corollary political necessity for a “bourgeois-democratic” revolution.

Frondizi did accept the major tenets of classical Marxist writings on imperialism, the root motive for which he found in the Marxist theory of overproduction based on the growth in the organic composition of capital. To grossly simplify a complicated argument, Marx saw an inescapable tension in mechanization of the production process under capitalist relations of production, in which all value, and thus all profit, derived from labor. Machines produced more goods with less workers, thus putting pressure on capitalists to profitably circulate their goods resulting in a tendency for the rate of profit to decline in a closed capitalist system. With the sole exception of Lenin, who had a popular audience in mind, all of the major Marxist works on imperialism begin with an excursion into this highly technical problem of Marxian political economy. Although they disagree on important points, all in some ways find the primary impulse behind capitalist imperial expansion at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth in the falling rate of domestic profit as a result of the rising organic composition of capital. For Frondizi, that tension had not been resolved by integration. On the contrary, the central dynamic of the globally integrated capitalist system continued to be “the growing concentration of capital, the growth of the organic composition of capital, etc., determine a descending tendency, more accentuated at each turn, in the rate of profit.”[[24]](#footnote-24) A reconciliation between the competing views of Luxemburg and Hilferding actually takes place in Frondizi, who sees imperial expansion temporarily relieving the downward pressure on the rate of profit *both* by increasing the size of the market for capitalist exchange relations *and* continuing to incorporate the surplus from precapitalist modes of production through an ongoing process of primitive accumulation.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Frondizi’s theory of global capitalist integration also rests on a Marxist theory of the state. Motivated ultimately by political goals, Frondizi approached his analysis of the social foundations of the Argentine state with the utmost seriousness. Since Peronism, the concrete state formation he confronted, drew strength from its anti-Yankee nationalist rhetoric, Frondizi’s work sought above all to develop a social theory of the state in semi-colonial Latin American countries that could explicate the relationship between local political actors and US imperialism. Although the first volume of his study seeks primarily to reveal the structural underpinnings of Argentina, the author’s constant, unremitting commitment to the primacy of a globally integrated capitalist system leads him to first understand the state structure of the United States, which he sees as the metropolitan center. Economically, the United States is characterized above all “by the intensity and rapidity of the process of concentration.” Drawing on the research from the American *Temporary National Economic Committee*, conducted between 1938 and 1940, Frondizi established the preponderant weight of eight trusts that, through their various holdings “dominate more than half the North American economy,” from which he concludes that “North American monopolies have mounted a formidable and complex mechanism through which they can exercise a true political dictatorship.”[[26]](#footnote-26) This part of Frondizi’s argument resembles Lenin. The statistical analysis of American trusts draws directly from the same argument in *Imperialism*, with more current data. The political conclusion follows the line of *State and Revolution*, in which the state in a capitalist society serves as nothing more than a “dictatorship” of the bourgeoisie.

By the end of the Second World War, Argentina’s economy had already been shaped by imperialism. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, British and US capital oversaw the development of an export-oriented economy, structured primarily around producing beef for the two main imperialist rivals. Foreign control of commerce “conferred to the Argentine economy characteristics of subordination and deformed specialization,” while providing both lucrative investments and cheap primary sector goods, especially livestock, for the metropolitan capitalist centers.[[27]](#footnote-27) Whatever infrastructural, industrial or urban development Argentina experienced before the 1930s only served to facilitate the movement of goods to the metropolitan centers. Railroads “not only constituted a fundamental area (*rubro*) for imperialist investment, but also, in equal or greater measure, were a decisive instrument in the process of deformed adaptation of the Argentine economy.” Foreign-owned railroads and ports, and immigration into the cities as a consequence of the growing commercial economic opportunities, gave rise to export-oriented urban hubs in Buenos Aires and El Litoral, which functioned as “privileged appendices of imperialism, intermediaries and minor co-participants in the exploitation and ‘colonization’ of the less favored regions.”[[28]](#footnote-28) The similarity between this analysis and the global structure of micro and macro metropolises in Andre Gunder Frank’s *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, published twelve years later, is unmistakable.

Global capitalism, integrated under the dominance of the bourgeois state in Washington, sets the stage on which postwar Argentine politics plays out. Only the enormous gap between the United States and the rest of the capitalist world allowed for the temporary cessation of interimperialist rivalries, but that same inequality exacerbated the structural contradictions driving the expansionist imperative. In the post-World War Two world order, this contradiction expressed itself in a unique tension, which pressed down heavily on Latin America. The US faced an ever greater crisis in organic composition and ever smaller sphere of expansion, the latter a consequence of both the diminishing opportunities for primitive accumulation and the removal of the socialist bloc from the capitalist economy.[[29]](#footnote-29) Only in the early 1940s did American capital overtake British capital as the majority of foreign capital in Argentina’s economy. In the early twentieth century, British capital had not been interested in developing Argentine industry, aside from railroads. US capital in the 1940s was interested in doing so, as it had become the exporter of heavy machinery. It therefore wanted to industrialize Latin America both to create markets for machines of production and to increase the efficiency of extracting its much needed raw materials. Frondizi quotes at length a number of American sources from the late 1940s arguing that promoting industrial will be more tenable and better serve US interests than over colonialism.[[30]](#footnote-30)

For Frondizi, Peronism represents of the limited possibilities of a bourgeois-democratic revolution within modern capitalism, which he defines as state capitalism (*capitalism del Estado*). With the decaying revolutionary will of the bourgeoisie internationally, only the state has the means or will to “assume the double function of the exterior defense and interior support of national capitalism.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Peronism acts in the interests of the bourgeois class as a whole. His analysis of Peronism is where Frondizi’s thoughts most closely resemble the theory of permanent revolution. In essence he argues that Latin American countries at best can hope for Peronism, a sort of deformed statist capitalism maintaining the role that semi-colonial function of dependent countries within the capitalist system. The second volume, which takes the inherently anti-progressive nature of the national bourgeoisie as its point of departure, proceeds to find a solution for progressive forces within Marxism, understood here as a written record of revolutionary strategies and tactics. In the second volume, Frondizi demonstrates his comprehensive grasp of the programs of all the concurrent left tendencies in Argentine politics. He disparages the Stalinists, for their never ending zig-zags on Peronism and the US, which he argues directly link to the changing security of the Soviet Union, and for their dogged commitment to the democratic revolutionary potentialities of the Argentine bourgeoisie. Because of this commitment, “the Stalinists,” he writes, “take a concrete point of departure: what progressive possibilities does the bourgeois have. A revolutionary party, in contrast, should start from the revolutionary possibilities of the proletariat.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

Although never affiliated with any Trotskyist organization, Frondizi had a much closer affinity to Trotskyist ideas than to those of Stalnism. In the years leading up to the publication of *La Realidad Argentina*, he followed closely Trotskyist debates through their publications, and in the early 1950s through a friendship with the Trotskyist historian Milcíades Peña who helped him prepare the political sections of the second volume.[[33]](#footnote-33) Later in his life, he would have a strong sympathy with the Partido Revolucionario Trabajadoro, which grew out of the Nahuel Moreno tendency, of which Peña had been a member since the age of 15. His public defense of a militant guerrilla offshoot of the PRT in 1974 led to his assassination by the Triple A, a militant far-right organization that regularly attacked not just communists but anyone opposed to the right-wing of Peronism.

Argentine Trotskyism, a politically and intellectually consequential force in latter decades of the twentieth century, came into the world through a long and laborious process. By the early 1940s, four small groups rivaled for affiliation with the Fourth International, the international Trotskyist organization founded in 1938. Throughout the early ‘40s, the international executive committee of the Fourth International pushed the small sectarian groups to unify, with little success.[[34]](#footnote-34) Although some of the division was simply a product of geography and resources, a theoretical disagreement, revolving around the program of “national liberation,” did stand between the unification of the two main tendencies. Liborio Justo led a tendency that favored a program of national liberation against imperialism. According to Justo, the proletariat must wage immediate struggle against imperialism as such, not the national bourgeoisie. In fact, progressive sections of the latter would join the in the struggle for national liberation, and even initially play a leadership role. The proletariat must “accompany them [the bourgeoisie] while they maintain that struggle, which only the revolutionary proletariat...will be capable of carrying to the end by means of the proletarian revolution."[[35]](#footnote-35) This resembled the position of the Stalinists, with the exception that Justo believed that, once progressive sectors of the bourgeoisie initiated the struggle against imperialism, only the proletariat would be able carry it through to the end, meaning the “democratic” revolution could only come to fruition at the hands of the proletariat. Historically, this most closely resembled the slogan of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,” the position maintained by the Bolsheviks between the 1905 revolution and Lenin’s return from exile in April of 1917.

A rival tendency, led by Antonio Gallo (pseudonym Ontiveros) and Pedro Milesi, put forth their thesis on the question of national liberation at the request of the International Committee in the lead up to a unification conference in 1941. The Liga Obrera Revolucionaria, the name of the Gallo/Milesi group at the time, denied in the case of Argentina the importance of an agrarian revolution to liquidate the remains of feudalism. The abstract call for “national independence” for semi-colonial countries, part of the theses of the founding congress of the Fourth International, when applied to the particularities of Argentina’s level of economic backwardness, which includes a population composed of 43% proletariat, a highly concentrated industrial sector, and an agricultural sector that was, in its essence, capitalist, meant that the fight against imperialism would necessarily have to be waged directly by the proletariat, in opposition to the local bourgeoisie which was fundamentally linked to imperialism. For that reason, they denied that anti-imperialism should be the axis of local struggle, and even more so since the slogan of “national liberation” was a populist slogan employed as much by the GOR as by petty bourgeois nationalist groups, such as Apristas, as well as Stalinists and fascists.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The origins of Argentine Trotskyism thus faltered on the question of whether capitalist or feudal social relations predominated the country in general, and the agricultural sector in particular. The efforts to unify the two tendencies in 1941 failed, and by the end of 1942 most of the original leaders dropped out of the movement. The debates, however, lived on through the younger generation of comrades, many of whom regrouped in the tumultuous mid-1940s around the young Nahuel Moreno’s Grupo Obrero Marxista (GOM). Moreno had participated in both tendencies at different times, and as the leader of the small GOM, he pushed his group not only to familiarize themselves with the debates over the question of national liberation, but to study industrial and agrarian censuses, and read the academics works surrounding similar questions, such as the historian Sergio Bagú. By 1948, the GOM had come to reject the notion that Argentina had any feudal past to contend with.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Frondizi exhaustively reviewed recent publications of each of the nominally Trotskyist groups, concluding that he most closely agrees with the Moreno group, which by that point had come to thoroughly reject any notion of feudal relations in the Argentine countryside, arguing instead that the latifundia were largely capitalist operations, employing wage labor to produce crops for export to the global capitalist economy. Politically, the Morenistas opposed any collaboration with the local bourgeoisie, and rather saw the need to strike a blow at imperialism by carrying through a proletarian revolution locally.

Much more than the similar metropolis-satellite structure, Frondizi’s stance on feudalism, and the political conclusions that flow from it, form the most important link between his ideas and dependency theory. While Frondizi was writing *La Realidad Argentina*, Frank was pursuing his PhD in economics at the University of Chicago, studying under and assimilating the perspective of his advisor, the renowned modernization theorist Bert Hoselitz. It is difficult to say why he grew disillusioned with modernization theory, but it certainly was not due to any systematic engagement with classical Marxism along the level of Frondizi’s intense study between 1945 and 1955. By 1964, when Frank had already penned first drafts of most of the essays that would go into *Capitalism and Underdevelopment*, he had close to zero firsthand knowledge of any of the texts of pre-Stalinist Marxism, a fact he repeatedly acknowledged both publically and in private correspondence.[[38]](#footnote-38) In fact Frank’s first essay that can rightly be described as an articulation of dependency theory levelled an attack against Marxism as he understood it, which was largely through encounters in his travels with Latin American Stalinists. Frank opposed the Stalinist conception of historical stages and their insistence on the “dual thesis,” which classified at least part of their economies as feudal. As he explained to Sweezy, his idea for the essay that would take the title “The Myth of Feudalism” in the book came as a reaction to “some Marxist types” in Brazil that had claimed that Latin America was feudal. Frank aimed instead “to demonstrate, or at least to suggest…that the apparently feudal relations in the countryside were constructed and are here and there maintained by the capitalist structure of the economy, and even of agriculture.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Sweezy encouraged Frank’s effort to recast Latin American institutions as a product of the historical development of capitalism- as a consequence rather than cause of underdevelopment- but he urged Frank to situate his work as a contribution to rather than a refutation of the Marxist tradition. While he found Frank’s idea compelling, Sweezy told him that it was “not nearly as new or rare an idea as you seem to imply. On the contrary, it is absolutely central to Marx’s conception of both primary (not “primitive”) accumulation and the accumulation process in advanced capitalist countries.[[40]](#footnote-40) Sweezy pressured Frank to read and incorporate into his thinking Marx’s *Capital* and Rosa Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital*. Frank instead read syntheses of classical Marxist thought written by Latin American scholars, and reported to Sweezy that he was particularly impressed with the second volume of Frondizi’s *La Realidad Argentina*, which struck Frank as “the only serious Marxist attempt to draw on [theories of imperialism] and interpret current reality on this continent that I know. Others merely quote the masters and then mechanistically apply them supposedly and come out with crap.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

**Afterward and Conclusions**

Scholarship on dependency theory virtually unanimously dates the solidification of a distinct “neo-Marxist” variant to the publication of Frank’s book in 1967. Frank continued to play a central role in the development of the theory into the mid-1970s, when it went out of vogue. Although by no means the most sophisticated dependency theorist, little doubt surrounds Frank’s credentials as one of its central innovators. Clearly influential on Frank’s thought, Frondizi’s work warrants recognition as one of the most important antecedents to the theory as a whole. Rewriting Frondizi into the origin story of dependency theory does more than just correct a factual blind spot in the narrative, it shifts the focus of the most important elements of the theory, the way we evaluate its explanatory merits, and our explanation of its brief popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and subsequent decline later in the decade.

Most historians and social scientists see Frank’s metropolis-satellite structure as the central take-away from his work, and the defining feature of dependency theory in general. According to Frank’s model, the global capitalist centers, with the US at the head, constitute the macro-metropolises of the system, which extract raw materials from the underdeveloped satellites. In order to facilitate this flow of surplus from periphery to center, the capitalist metropolises established micro-metropolitan centers in each region during the colonial era, which reached into their domestic hinterlands through a chain of regional micro-metropolises leading all the way to the level of the lowest peasant. Through this chain of satellites and micro and macro metropolises, all economic activity in Latin America is linked into the global network of commercial capital, and therefore, according to Frank, all production in the region takes place under capitalist relations. If the satellite-metropolis defines Frank’s thought, then Raúl Prebisch’s similar core-periphery model indeed constitutes perhaps the most important antecedent to dependency theory. Moreover, this model, which suggests a rigid hierarchical international structure precluding any possibility for industrialization of the global south, can and has been empirically falsified.

Yet, for Frank, the satellite-metropolis structure was a relatively minor feature of his work; a subsidiary point in his broader effort to combat what he called the “myth of Latin American feudalism.” And here, undoubtedly, the Latin American anti-Stalinist left, directly and indirectly, influenced Frank’s thought more than any other current, including the Monthly Review School. Although I have focused on the Argentine left in this paper, similar debates over the validity of feudalism as a category took place among Stalinist and anti-Stalinist Marxists in countries throughout Latin America in the 1940s and 1950s. In Frondizi we find a rare case of a trained academic who, galvanized by his personal experience with his country’s political crisis, followed these debates closely and dedicated serious intellectual energy to systematically tracing their lineage to the works of classical Marxism. These debates lend themselves to a different method of evaluation than the empirical falsification of the metropolis-satellite model. For their participants, whether their societies were defined as “feudalist” or “capitalist” carried more than academic concern. They saw these definitions as central in their efforts to orient themselves within their local class structure, and derive meaningful and effective slogans to galvanize social forces behind a program to change what, in their view, was a fundamentally unjust and unequal system. From this perspective, historical assessment of dependency theory as an idea should focus not on the empirical validity of its model, but the extent of its rhetorical power in orienting Latin American discontent in the 1960s and 1970s in anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist directions.

1. For accounts of dependency theory primarily as a challenge to modernization theory, see: Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003), 234-240; H. W. Arndt, *Economic Development: The History of an Idea* (Chicago, 1987), 115-129; Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, 2011), 162-7; David Ekbladh, The *Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of American World Order* (Princeton, 2010), 234-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is the basic story in the brief sketches of dependency theory in the modernization works listed above: Gilman, *Mandarins*, 235-6 includes a paragraph on ECLA and a paragraph on Sweezy and Baran; Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution*, 165 packs both into one sentence; Arndt, *Economic Development*, 116-19 on Baran, 119-20 on ECLA. Diane Hunt, *Economic Theories of Development: An Analysis of Competing Paradigms* (Savage, 1987), 121-97 treats the ECLA structuralists and the neo-Marxists as distinct “paradigms,” and attributes the origins of the latter exclusively to Baran. Other works, especially those most prone to attach the “neo-Marxist” label to dependency theory, have made stronger efforts to link dependency theory to Marxist thought. Robert A. Packenham, *The Dependency Movement: Scholarship and Politics in Development Studies* (Cambridge, 1992), 5-14 notes the continuities between dependency and the Marxist tradition of imperialism and loner Latin American Marxist debates stemming back to José Carlos Mariátegui. The closest to my account is Joseph L. Love, *Crafting the Third World: Theorizing Underdevelopment in Rumania and Brazil* (Stanford, 1996), 192-3, which notes briefly and in passing that Latin American Marxist debates about the role of the bourgeoisie provide the most important background for dependency theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See: Rodolfo Pandolfi, *Frondizi por él Mismo* (Buenos Aires, 1968); Pisarello Verasoro-Menotti, *Arturo Frondizi: Historia y problemática de un estadista* (Buenos Aires, 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tarcus, *Marxismo Olvidado*, 50-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Lilian Vanella, “Los Orígenes de la Facultad de Filosofía de la Universidad de Tucumán: Principales Acciones, Actores y Entramado de Relaciones, 1936-1938,” *Cuadernos de Educación*, 5/5 (Cordoba, July 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Silvio Frondizi, *Doce Años de Política Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1958), 23. Quotation translated from Spanish by the author. Other information for the paragraph comes from Tarcus*, Marxismo Olvidado*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Silvio Frondizi, “Interpretación Materialista Dialéctica de Nuestra Epoca,” Introduction to the Second Edition of *La Realidad Argentina, Ensayo de Interpretación Sociológica: Tomo II, La Revolución Socialista* (Buenos Aires, 1960), III. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Silvio Frondizi, *La Crisis Política Argentina: Ensayo de interpretación ideológica* (Buenos Aires, 1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For the effects of bureaucratization of the CPSU and the Comintern on the CPA, see: *La Gran Estafa: La Penetración del Kremlin en Iberoamérica* (Mexico D. F., 1952). A very similar process played out in other Communist Parties. For the CPUSA see: James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana, 1999); Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* (Illinois, 2010). For the importance of Stalinism as a concept in history of the left, see: Bryan D. Palmer, “Rethinking the Historiography of United States Communism,” *American Communist History* 2 (March, 2003), 139-173; Emanuele Saccarelli, *Gramsci and Trotsky in the Shadow of Stalinism: The Political Theory and Practice of Opposition* (New York, 2008), especially 11-18; Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, 1976), especially 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Thesis from the Comintern. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See: Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record*, (Chicago, 2009); Emanuele Saccarelli, “The Permanent Revolution in and around the Communist Manifesto,” (unpublished paper in the author’s possession). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See: Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (Chicago, 1932), 227-39; Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921* (Oxford, 1954), 211-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Horacio Tarcus, *El marxismo olvidado en la Argentina: Silvio Frondizi y Milcíades Peña* (Buenos Aires, 1996), 68-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Robert J. Alexander, *Communism in Latin America* (New Brunswick, 1957), 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See, for example, Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?: The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Urbana, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Victorio Codovilla, *Batir al Nazi-Peronismo, Para Abrir una Era de Libertad y Progreso* (Buenos Aires, 1946), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Rodolfo Ghioldi, *Los Comunistas al Servicio de la Patria* (Buenos Aires, 1945), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Codovilla, *Batir al Nazi-Peronismo*, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Frondizi, “Interpretación Materialista,” xxx. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Frondizi, *Locke*, 19. Quoted in Tarcus, *Marxismo Olvidado*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Silvio Frondizi, *La Integración Mundial, Última Etapa del Capitalismo* (Buenos Aires, 1954), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Frondizi, *La Integración Mundial*, 13-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Frondizi, *La Integración Mundial*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Frondizi, *El Sistema Capitalista*, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For the former, see his discussion of the meaning of Bretton Woods and the Marshall Plan, for the latter his discussion on ground rent. Frondizi, *El Sistema Capitalista*, 49-50; 97 respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Silvio Frondizi, *La Realidad Argentina, Ensayo de Interpretación Sociológica: Tomo I, El Sistema Capitalista*, (Buenos Aires, 1955), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Frondizi, *Sistema Capitalista*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Frondizi, *Sistema Capitalista*, 91-95, quotations from 94 and 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Frondizi, *Sistema Capitalista*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Frondizi, *Sistema Capitalista*, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Frondizi, *Sistema Capitalista*, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Frondizi, *La Revolución Socialista*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Frondizi, *La Revolución Socialista*, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Socialist Workers’ Party to Grupo Obrero Revolucionario, April 15, 1941, Socialist Workers’ Party Records Hoover Institute (hereafter SWP), Box 23, Folder 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Justo to SWP, undated (1941), SWP, Box 23, Folder 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. “Tesis de la Liga Obrera Socialista,” September, 1941, SWP, Box 23, Folder 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Tarcus, *Marxismo Olvidado*, 106-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Letter from Frank to Sweezy, November 4, 1963, Paul Marlo Sweezy papers, Houghton Library, Harvard, Box 5 (hereafter PMS). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Frank to Sweezy, June 1, 1963, PMS, Box 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Sweezy to Frank, January 7, 1964, PMS, Box 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Frank to Sweezy, November 23, 1964, PMS, Box 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)