

PEHESA :  
An Argentine Social-History Group

*Programa de Estudios de Historia  
Económica y Social Americana*

The Programa de Estudios de Historia Económica y Social Americana (PEHESA) was established in 1977 in association with the Centro de Investigaciones Sociales sobre el Estado y la Administración (CISEA) by a group of Argentine historians committed to the study of social history. This field has not had too fortunate a fate in our country; political, academic, and institutional reasons have condemned it to the fringe.

Trapped in the nineteenth-century view of the humanities until the 1950s, our academic world produced traditional history based upon empirical study of political events and of the institutional development of the country. With few exceptions, history was the history of great public figures or at best, of successful enterprises carried out by distinguished members of society. Yet historical works were not produced only in the academic world. Ideologues from different sectors of society looked to the past in search of arguments, models, and stereotypes, and although they did not write an alternative history, in some cases they did raise new issues or question old assumptions.

The 1950s represented a turning point in Argentine historiography. Although the traditional approach continued to be preferred by the establishment, new approaches were being embraced not only within academic circles, but also within other sectors of society who found in them a source of legitimation of their ideological positions.

The political and social changes experienced by Argentine society in the postwar years with the advent of Peronism, the rapid consolidation of the labor movement, and the massive eruption of the working class into the political arena, inevitably shattered previous interpretations and models. New questions were being posed and new answers would have to be sought. This challenge to understanding the decisive changes that were taking place in Argentina did not elude the social sciences, and in this new environment, they found fertile ground for development in the following decade. Historians were strongly influenced by this development, and also by the new methods and approaches of European historiography, particularly the French school of the *Annales* and the British group of *Past and Present*.

This radical renewal proved to be short-lived, however. Due to the political and economic developments of the last decade, social history has not found a permanent place in the existing institutional framework and has necessarily receded into the background. A few of the historians who a decade ago were among the most innovative have chosen to follow less controversial paths, shifting to old subjects and methods. The rest have emigrated, abandoned history altogether, or tried to continue their work in relative isolation. In this context, few, if any, younger historians have the opportunity to explore social issues.

In view of this difficult situation, a group of historians decided to join together in an attempt to encourage the continuation of studies in social history and the development of new lines of work. Thus, we organized PEHESA as a research center for the study of social history and a forum for discussion and exchange among all those who in one way or another are interested in the history of the Latin American people.

In most countries, historians consider the university as the natural ground for research and teaching, even for those who do not limit their work to academic activities. In Argentina, however, most universities are closed to social history or the social sciences, and therefore research in these fields has to be carried out elsewhere. Unfortunately, this necessity does not imply that it is possible to overcome the limitations of academic practices in favor of developing new and less elitist forms of intellectual production. On the contrary, the result is that most relevant research work in the social sciences is presently being carried out in private and relatively small centers that are financed mainly through international grants and subsidies. When we decided to organize PEHESA, we were aware of the problems faced by the existing centers in Buenos Aires. Therefore, we sought the advice and support of social scientists experienced in these matters and became associated with one of those centers, the Centro de Investigaciones Sociales sobre el Estado y la Administración (CISEA).

Although most of us come from rather broad backgrounds in economic and social history, we are all engaged at present in research dealing with the role of labor and the working class in the formative years of Latin American contemporary societies, from the mid-nineteenth century to the crisis of 1930. We work mainly on four closely interrelated areas: the formation of the labor market; living standards and experiences of the urban working class and the urban poor; the development of the labor movement; and the formation of popular culture.

Our purpose in the first area of research is to analyze the formation of the labor market by focusing upon the conditions and characteristics of the supply of labor. Throughout the nineteenth century, Argentina witnessed a complex, uneven, and often contradictory process of

development of a free labor market. In this context, the period between 1850 and 1914 was decisive in shaping that market and in defining its main features for a long time to come. We are particularly concerned with the coexistence of different forms of labor; although there was a tendency toward the predominance of wage relations, other forms persisted, and still others found new grounds for expansion in this period (self-employment, for example).

From the point of view of the workers, these changes spelled deep transformations in work experiences and daily life. We approach these problems by concentrating on such matters as seasonal and casual labor, female and child labor, forms of engagement and admission to different trades, and so on. Our current project within this area is called "Workers and the Labor Market in Buenos Aires, City and Province, 1850–1880."

Our second area of research has been highly influenced by the British debate on the standard of living in the Industrial Revolution and particularly by the works of Hobsbawm, Thompson, and Stedman Jones. It is directed toward the study of the experiences of urban workers and the urban poor in the period of expansion of the export economy. In our rather limited historiography, it is possible to find an optimistic and a pessimistic view in relation to the standard of living of the urban masses during the period of expansion of our economy, under the particular conditions imposed by the process of consolidation of a late and dependent capitalism. There are, however, few studies of the subject, and both arguments are generally grounded in discussions that deal mainly with wage levels and working conditions. Our main concern is to overcome some of the most obvious limitations of that approach by exploring such aspects as living conditions, "moral" experiences, and cultural traits.

Furthermore, we are concerned not only with the working class, but also with the increasing sector of the population that formed "the residuum," the dangerous classes. Frequently underlying the faith in progress expressed by many contemporaries was the increasing fear of classes that were more and more visible in the expanding cities—beggars, prostitutes, casual workers, all those who seemed to be impervious to the benefits of progress. Our present work in this area includes three projects concerning Buenos Aires, and one that concentrates on the same type of questions in Santiago de Chile: "Living Conditions and Experiences of the Working Class in Buenos Aires, 1880–1914"; "The Urban Poor in Buenos Aires, 1880–1914"; "Charity and Philanthropy in Buenos Aires, 1870–1910"; and "Health and Housing: Living Conditions of the Popular Sectors in Santiago de Chile, 1840–1895."

Our third area of research is directed toward the study of the labor movement, particularly in Córdoba and Rosario, the second and

third largest cities of the country. Taking into account such aspects of working-class experience as living and working conditions, our research in this case is centered on the organization of labor, the expansion of the trade-union movement, and the performance of political parties that channelled the demands of labor. At present our work within this area includes a project called "The Labor Movement in Rosario, 1914–1930," a continuation of a previous study on the same subject for the period 1880–1914.

Finally, we are beginning to explore the problems posed by the process of formation of popular culture in Buenos Aires. Heterogeneous and fragmentary, this culture resulted from a permanent merging of various immigrant traditions and creole heritage. The old and the new, the local and foreign were in permanent conflict, but they also became the raw material in the construction of a novel culture. The two following projects deal with certain specific aspects of this complex process: "Mass Communication and the Formation of Institutions of Popular Culture in Buenos Aires, 1920–1940" and "Participation and Political Culture of the Popular Sectors in Buenos Aires, 1862–1896."

PEHESA is more than a research center offering support and stimulus to its relatively few members. One of our main purposes is to provide an ongoing forum for the discussion of different problems that concern all those who are interested in social history. We consider learning a collective process and therefore we organize seminars, regular workshops, courses, and meetings that bring together a relatively wide range of people: teachers, students, scholars, nonprofessionals. At events of this sort, which are held about twice a month, there are usually around thirty participants, fifteen to twenty of whom attend regularly. During the year approximately eighty to ninety people participate in our activities. These figures are far from impressive, but they give some idea of the relative isolation in which social historians must work in our country.

This isolation seriously hinders the possibility of future developments in the field. History students in most universities receive no training in social research and even self-training is extremely difficult because libraries are poor and most specialized foreign journals and books are not available. At PEHESA we try to encourage students and graduates to work in social history through courses, discussion groups, and personal guidance. Our attempts in this and other respects are only a mild palliative to mitigate the effects of the present predicament of social history in Argentina. Far from doing what we would like to do, we find we are only doing what we can.

We welcome contacts with colleagues abroad and are particularly interested in the exchange of papers and publications. Please write to PEHESA-CISEA, Av. Pueyrredón 510, 6°(1032) Buenos Aires, Argentina.

PEHESA MEMBERS

Ricardo González, Leandro H. Gutiérrez, Juan Carlos Korol, Luis Alberto Romero (coordinator), Hilda Sabato, Miriam Trumper, Ofelia Pianetto (visiting member).

PUBLICATIONS (as of June 1982)

*PEHESA Working Papers*

*The Camps: inmigrantes irlandeses en la Provincia de Buenos Aires (1840–1890)*, by Juan Carlos Korol and Hilda Sabato, 1979.

*Trabajadores y marginales en Buenos Aires, 1890–1914*, by Leandro Gutiérrez, 1980.

*Buenos Aires: la sociedad criolla, 1810–1850*, by Luis Alberto Romero, 1980.

*Condiciones materiales y experiencias de los sectores populares en Buenos Aires, 1880–1914*, by Leandro Gutiérrez, 1981.

*Vivienda y salud en Santiago de Chile, 1840–1895*, by Luis Alberto Romero, 1981.

*Los trabajadores y el mercado de trabajo en Buenos Aires, ciudad y campaña, 1850–1880*, by Hilda Sabato et al., 1981.

*Articles and Books (since 1977)*

Ricardo González and Leandro Gutiérrez

“Pobreza marginal en Buenos Aires, 1880–1914,” in *Revista Eure* (in press).

Leandro Gutiérrez

“Los trabajadores y sus luchas” and “La mala vida”, in *Buenos Aires, cuatro siglos*, eds. José Luis Romero and Luis Alberto Romero (Ed. CREA, forthcoming).

“Condiciones de la vida material de los sectores populares en Buenos Aires, 1880–1914,” in *Revista de Indias*, 163–64 (Jan.–June 1981).

Juan Carlos Korol e Hilda Sabato

*Como fue la inmigración irlandesa en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1980).

Luis Alberto Romero

*La sociedad de la igualdad. Los artesanos de Santiago de Chile y sus primeras experiencias políticas, 1820–1851* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 1978).

*Pensamiento político de la emancipación. Selección, prólogo y notas*, with José Luis Romero (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1977).

*Pensamiento conservador en América Latina*, Idem, 1978.

"El acceso radical," in *La historia argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1978).

"El ciclo del tanino en Argentina," *Revista Paraguaya de Sociología*, Jan. 1977.

"Los efectos de la promoción industrial en una región atrasada: Chaco y Formosa, 1954–1972," *Revista Interamericana de Planificación*, June 1977.

"Empresas externas y atraso regional: el tanino y el algodón en la región chacoformoseña," *Revista Interamericana de Planificación*, June 1978.

"Primary Production, Export Production and Distribution of Income in a Backward Region," with A. Rofman (Antipode, 1977).

"A 150 años del 'experimento unitario'," *Todo es Historia*, July 1977.

"Decadencia regional y declinación urbana: el interior argentino, 1776–1876," *Revista Paraguaya de Sociología*, Dec. 1978.

"La lucha por la libertad comercial," "La vida social: una convivencia acriollada," and "Buenos Aires frente al país," in *Buenos Aires, cuatro siglos*, eds. Luis Alberto Romero and José Luis Romero (Ed. CREA, forthcoming).

#### Miriam Trumper

*Efectos económicos y poblacionales de la explotación del quebracho colorado: el caso de la Forestal Argentina* (Buenos Aires: CEUR-ITDT, 1977).

"Planificación global y corporaciones de desarrollo regional en América Latina: un estudio de sus vinculaciones," co-ordinated by Jorge F. Sabato, mimeo (Buenos Aires: CISEA, 1979).

#### Thesis

#### Hilda Sabato

"Wool Production and Agrarian Structure in the Province of Buenos Aires, North of the Salado, 1840s–1880s," Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1980.

*Papers*

Juan Carlos Korol e Hilda Sabato

"Sheep. Land and Labour: Irish Settlers in Rural Buenos Aires," mimeo, presented to the Latin American History Seminar, London, March 1977.

"The Camps: incorporación de inmigrantes irlandeses a la estructura productiva de la Argentina rural, 1840–1880," presented to the Fifth Symposium of Latin American Economic History, Lima, April 1978.

"Los trabajadores y el mercado de trabajo en Buenos Aires, ciudad y campaña, 1850–1880: fundamentos, metodología y fuentes," presented to the Segundas Jornadas de Historia Económica, Buenos Aires, September 1980.

Hilda Sabato

"Trabajos y trabajadores: población activa y estructura ocupacional en Buenos Aires, 1850–1880," presented with collaboration to the Eighth International Congress of Economic History, 1982.