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Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuadorian Marxist Thought¹

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At the May 1926 founding congress of the *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano* (PSE), intense and lengthy debates divided the assembled delegates over the question of whether or not to ally the new party with the Moscow-based Third or Communist International (also known as the Comintern). Within a couple of years, this dispute led to a division into separate Socialist and Communist parties. These acrimonious discussions still stirred passions half a century later when the *Instituto Nacional de Formación Obrera y Campesina* (INFOC) brought together eight longtime Marxist activists to reflect on the origins of socialism in Ecuador.² The split did not appear to be either entirely ideological or necessarily personal in nature. Although at the time the Communists were called the left-wing of the movement, as was common throughout Latin America, socialists often assumed more radical positions. Even though some militants followed specific leaders into either the socialist or Communist camps, the

¹ Several of the documents used in the writing of this paper are posted to the e-archivo ecuatoriano at <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/>

² See Manuel Donoso Armas, Isabel Herrería, Miguel Angel Guzmán, Luis Maldonado Estrada, Andrés Avelino Mora, Leonardo Muñoz Muñoz, Jorge Reynolds, and Floresmilo Romero Paredes, *El 15 de noviembre de 1922 y la fundación del socialismo: relatados por sus protagonistas*, 2 vols., Colección Popular 15 de noviembre (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional-INFOC, 1982).

disagreement also divided close allies and friends against each other. By all indications, the division resulted from a serious and not-so-friendly disagreement as to whether or not Marxist movements in Ecuador would be better served by an alliance with an international revolutionary movement, or whether activists should forego such connections to focus on their own local economic, political, and social realities.

Although the debate about whether to affiliate with the Comintern was largely carried out among urban intellectuals, it had a lasting legacy for Indigenous organizing efforts in Ecuador. Furthermore, how Ecuadorian Communists handled this affiliation arguably set the country on a different trajectory than its neighbors, in particular Peru where José Carlos Mariátegui defined much of the early ideology of the Marxist left. Specifically, as a result of pursuing affiliation with the Comintern, the Communist movement in Ecuador developed close associations with indigenous militants. Whereas Mariátegui criticized a Comintern proposal to create an indigenous republic in the Andes, his Ecuadorian counterparts embraced the language of indigenous nationalities and made it a key part of their struggle. Indigenous activists subsequently assumed this discourse, and used it to construct a powerful movement for social justice. Inadvertently, in following centralized Comintern dictates, Ecuadorian Communists contributed the ideology of Indigenous nationalities on which this movement was built.

Communist contributions to the construction of indigenous nationalities are largely unknown, both in Ecuador and more broadly. Minimal studies and an absence of documents have resulted in a history full of silences and legends with participants forwarding multiple conflicting interpretations in order to justify different ideological positions. It has also led to assumptions not based on historical research but on self-perpetuating stereotypes. One of the most persistent is that the left treated indigenous peoples in a paternalistic fashion, and attempted to interpret them in class terms as peasants instead of as ethnicities. For example,

without evidence Fredy Rivera condemns the Marxist left for having “displaced ethnic-national problems to a second theoretical level since these would be solved in the new socialist society.”³ Such arguments that present Marxists as subjugating ethnic and nationalist identities to a secondary status ignore the Comintern’s critical role in constructing the concept of indigenous nationalities in South America.

On the surface, it would be tempting to argue that out of the context of a weak hierarchical leftist tradition a strong horizontal social movement emerged. This perspective, however, ignores the long and deeply entwined history of indigenous movements and the Marxist left in Ecuador.⁴ Instead, much as the Comintern brought African-American issues to the attention of the Communist Party in the United States,⁵ it would appear that Ecuadorian attempts to align itself with international leftist currents in the 1920s contributed to a strong indigenous movement in that country. Ironically, this experience is quite at odds with that of the better known example of Mariátegui in neighboring Peru, whose heterodoxy led him to reject dictates from far off Moscow to create an indigenous Republic in the Andes as unworkable given his interpretation of Peru’s national reality.⁶ While by the 1980s Peru had descended into the bloody and destructive neo-Maoist Shining Path insurgency, activists in Ecuador pursued a political and largely non-violent but successful struggle for indigenous rights fueled by the rhetoric of the rights of indigenous nationalities that

³ Fredy Rivera Vélez, “Los indigenismos en Ecuador: de paternalismos y otras representaciones” in *Antología ciudadanía e identidad*, ed. Simón Pachano (Quito: FLACSO Sede Ecuador; ILDIS, 2003): 387.

⁴ Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador’s Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁵ See Oscar Berland, “The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the ‘Negro Question’ in America: 1919-1931 Part One”, *Science and Society* 63, no. 4 (Winter 1999-2000): 411-32; Oscar Berland, “The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the ‘Negro Question’ in America: 1919-1931 Part Two”, *Science and Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 194-217; Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978); Mark I. Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-36* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998).

⁶ Marc Becker, “Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question

the Comintern had originally articulated in the 1920s. Following a more orthodox Comintern line in the 1920s on race issues seemingly contributed to stronger social movements and a better positioned left in general in Ecuador.

Birth of the Ecuadorian Left

The founding of the PSE in Quito in May 1926 represented a momentary convergence of diverse ideological trends before they quickly, once again, fractured along new lines. The modern left is generally understood as emerging out of three distinct currents: utopian socialism, anarchism, and Marxism. In the Ecuadorian case, historian Enrique Ayala Mora defines a fourth influence, the left-wing of the Liberal Party.⁷ In the aftermath of Eloy Alfaro's 1895 Liberal Revolution, this fourth axis became the dominant one. During the early twentieth century, the Liberal Party incorporated broadly divergent ideological trends, including a radical one with socialist tendencies that condemned imperialism and called for agrarian reform, protection of worker rights, and nationalization of the means of production.⁸

The most renowned representative of the utopian socialist wing of Ecuador's left was Colonel Juan Manuel Lasso, a member of Ecuador's traditional elite and large landowner. Ayala Mora describes his ideology as "a socialism with utopian edges and a marked agrarian-artisan character."⁹ In 1924, Lasso made an unsuccessful run for the presidency of the country in alliance with the Conservative Party. Historian Richard Milk calls his the first populist campaign in Ecuador, because even though he came from a wealthy aristocratic family he presented a program of "preferential

in Latin America", *Science & Society* 70, no. 4 (October 2006): 450-79.

⁷ Enrique Ayala Mora, *El Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano en la historia* (Quito: Ediciones La Tierra, 1988), 9.

⁸ Patricio Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriano: De su génesis al Frente Popular*, segunda edición revisada, Colección Análisis histórico, no. 1 (Quito: Centro de Documentación e Información Sociales del Ecuador (CEDIME), 1984), 192, 241.

⁹ Ayala Mora, *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano en la historia*, 9.

treatment for the problems of the proletariat.”¹⁰ In a highly congratulatory pamphlet, Miguel Costales Salvador describes Lasso as chatting amiably in Kichwa with indigenous delegates to a socialist assembly despite his successful military, diplomatic, and parliamentary experience in Quito and even Europe.¹¹ Socialist novelist Jorge Carrera Andrade, who supported Lasso’s candidacy, also described him in positive terms.¹² Communist Party founder Ricardo Paredes spoke of Lasso’s campaign in glowing terms, claiming that as a result of his radical-socialist program the “spirit of the laboring masses assumed a highly revolutionary character.”¹³ Other scholars are more critical of Lasso’s utopian socialism, pointing to its failure to address underlying class contradictions. Manuel Agustín Aguirre criticized Lasso for his “utopian or rather feudal socialism.”¹⁴ Sociologist Rafael Quintero similarly characterized his ideology as a “socialist feudalism” with reactionary characteristics.¹⁵ Emilio Uzcátegui labeled Lasso’s approach as a romantic socialism,¹⁶ and Alexei Páez Cordero terms it a “Christian socialism.”¹⁷

In contrast to the radical liberal and utopian socialist influences, Ecuador never had a strong anarchist tradition. What existed was largely concentrated in the coastal Guayas province, with particular strength in the

¹⁰ Richard L Milk Ch., *Movimiento obrero ecuatoriano el desafío de la integración* (Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1997), 101.

¹¹ Miguel Costales Salvador, *El socialismo y el Coronel Juan Manuel Lasso* (Quito: Imp. Mercantil, 1926), 3.

¹² Jorge Carrera Andrade, *El volcán y el colibrí. Autobiografía*, 2d ed., Colección Testimonios, v. 3 (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1989), 51-52.

¹³ Ricardo Paredes, “El movimiento obrero en el Ecuador,” *La Internacional Sindical Roja* 1 (August 1928): 79.

<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-isr-agosto28.php>

¹⁴ Manuel Agustín Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador: notas para discusión” in *Marx ante América Latina: Homenaje a Carlos Marx por el centenario de su muerte* (Quito: Instituto de Investigaciones Economicas, Universidad Central, 1985): 81.

¹⁵ Rafael Quintero, *El mito del populismo en el Ecuador: análisis de los fundamentos del estado Ecuatoriano moderno (1895-1934)* (Quito: FLACSO, 1980), 113.

¹⁶ Emilio Uzcátegui, *Medio siglo a través de mis gafas* (Quito: 1975), 78.

¹⁷ Alexei Páez Cordero, *Los orígenes de la izquierda ecuatoriana* (Quito: Fundación de Investigaciones Andino Amazónica (FIAAM); Ediciones Abya-Yala,

incipient labor movement and in artisan sectors. Foreign radical influences that flowed with travelers into the port of Guayaquil contributed to an awakening of a social and political consciousness. A general strike in Guayaquil in November 1922 was a high point of anarchist influence on the Ecuadorian left. A declining economy with rampant inflation, unemployment, food shortages, and rising prices had led to growing labor unrest. On the afternoon of November 15, police herded the strikers toward the Guayaquil waterfront, massacring hundreds and blocking anyone who attempted to flee the area. As Richard Milk notes, authorities declared that “they had saved the city from a Bolshevik uprising and brought subversion under control.” Rather than ending Ecuador’s nascent popular movement as the government had intended, “November 15, 1922, became a rallying cry for labor and thus served as a milestone in the growth of Ecuador’s labor movement.”¹⁸ Communist leader Ricardo Paredes later observed that the events at Guayaquil “pointed to the entrance of the Ecuadorian proletariat onto the road of social revolution.”¹⁹ Although the massacre largely ended anarchist influence in the labor movement, it also gave birth to the modern organized left through a baptism of blood.

The November 15, 1922 strike and massacre also graphically pointed to the failures of the dominant liberals to bring about real social change. In response, young progressive military officers led a July 9, 1925 coup known as the *Revolución Juliana* against the increasingly unpopular government of Gonzalo Córdoba. Several people in the new government were broadly sympathetic to socialist reforms. Military leader Idelfonso Mendoza Vera reportedly read tracts from Lenin and other socialist

2001), p. 110.

¹⁸ Richard Lee Milk, “Growth and Development of Ecuador’s Worker Organizations, 1895-1944” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1977), 90,-91. On the anarchist roots of leftist movements in Ecuador, see Alexei Páez, ed., *El anarquismo en el Ecuador*, Colección Popular 15 de noviembre, Volumen 6 (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional-INFOC, 1986) and Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 126.

¹⁹ Paredes, “El movimiento obrero en el Ecuador”, 79, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-isr-agosto28.php>

proclamations to his troops in the days after the coup.²⁰ The new government implemented reforms including the establishment of a Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and progressive labor legislation. “For the first time in the history of Ecuador,” Paredes observed, “the large financiers and deceitful government officials were trapped.” Although there was a definite limit to the extent and type of reforms that this military government was willing to implement, the *Revolución Juliana* created political spaces that “gave a huge push to the socialist movement.”²¹ The Marxist left was already in ascendancy throughout Latin America after the 1917 triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution, and this also became the dominant trend in Ecuador. “Without having sought it,” Hernán Ibarra notes, “the anarchists prepared the land for the political autonomization of the popular classes.”²² Many activists who had gained their formation in the anarchist movement subsequently joined the socialists and often provided the most radical and ideological elements of that now dominant tendency.

More than anyone else, Ricardo Paredes was associated with, and helped define the direction of, the revolutionary Marxist tradition in Ecuador. Although he never gained the international stature or renown of his contemporaries José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru or Julio Antonio Mella in Cuba, he was known as the “Apostle of Ecuadorian Communism” and played a similar role in organizing and consolidating the Communist Party in Ecuador.²³ Paredes was born in the central highland town of Riobamba in 1898, three years after Eloy Alfaro’s liberal revolution. In 1922, the year of the Guayaquil massacre, he graduated from the medical school at Quito’s Universidad Central, and subsequently worked as a medical doctor and biology professor. He led the groups *Los Amigos de Lenin* and *La Antorcha*

²⁰ Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 237.

²¹ Paredes, “El movimiento obrero en el Ecuador”, 79, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-isr-agosto28.php>

²² Hernán Ibarra C., *La formación del movimiento popular: 1925-1936* (Quito: Centro de Estudios y Difusión Social (CEDIS), 1984), 34.

²³ Letter from William Dawson to Secretary of State, Washington, no. 921, March 10, 1933, National Archives Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, 822.00B/43, p. 5, College Park, Maryland.

which were precursors to the founding of the *Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano* (PCE). Later he served as secretary general of the PCE from 1933 to 1952. He suffered for his activism, and by 1951 had been imprisoned fourteen times.²⁴

Although Paredes lacked Mariátegui's intellectual stature, he did contribute something that his Peruvian counterpart could or did not offer. Confined to a wheelchair in his house in Lima on the Peruvian coast, Mariátegui lacked direct knowledge of indigenous lives in the rural highlands. Paredes, similar to Salvador Allende and Ernesto Che Guevara, was a medical doctor who had direct knowledge of human suffering. Paredes traveled frequently throughout the country, and gained immediate experiences of oppression that Mariátegui lacked. Whereas Mariátegui critiqued his Peruvian reality from an intellectual perspective, Paredes approached Ecuador as a political grassroots organizer. Robert Alexander later wrote that Communist organizing in indigenous communities was "more due to the personal interest of the Party's founder, Dr. Ricardo Paredes, than to any conscious policy of the Party." Alexander added that as "an avid student of the Indian problem in Ecuador, he won a certain degree of confidence from the aborigines."²⁵ Inevitably, these different perspectives influenced their critiques of the indigenous question and how they viewed the issue of indigenous nationalities.

The Indigenous Left

To the four already identified currents in the Ecuadorian left (radical liberalism, utopian socialism, anarchism, and revolutionary Marxism), we should perhaps add a fifth: rural indigenous communities engaged in a millenarian struggle for land, ethnic rights, and their very survival. Militant Indigenous and peasant movements emerged in the

²⁴ "Datos biográficos del Secretario Gral. del Partido Comunista del Ecuador Ricardo Paredes", *El Pueblo* (June 2, 1951): 3.

²⁵ Robert J. Alexander, *Communism in Latin America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 234, 239.

context of growing labor movements and leftist political parties. Indeed, the emergence of these indigenous movements was closely related to, and reliant on, labor and leftist movements. During a period in which many elites maintained deeply held racist sentiments toward indigenous peoples, Communists comprised a rare group willing to defend their interests. They did not remain in Quito, removed from local struggles and manipulating events at a distance. Rather, they worked hand-in-hand with workers on haciendas to develop organizational structures. In addition, while unquestionably Paredes did take a personal interest in indigenous issues, the Comintern also pushed local political parties in this direction.

In 1926, the nascent left in Ecuador had few organic connections with international movements, but their successful work with indigenous communities brought them to the attention of the South American Secretariat of the Communist International. A multi-part article in the first several issues of the Secretariat's newspaper *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* summarized the status of the class struggle in Ecuador, and ended with reprinting a lengthy description of a land struggle on the Chagalá hacienda in Cayambe that Paredes had published in the socialist newspaper *Germinal*. Paredes championed the actions of indigenous militants, noting that they had developed a profound spirit of the class struggle and as a result were playing a major role in ongoing social struggles. Indians had an advantage over the urban proletariat in that they came out of a communistic tradition that dated back to the Inkas.²⁶ Writing from Buenos Aires, *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* noted that "the events at Chagalá are a testimony to the growing revolutionary force in Ecuador that is increasingly inclined toward the cause of communism and the social revolution."²⁷ Not only did the rise of an indigenous left in Ecuador attract the Comintern's attention, but more importantly it may

²⁶ Ricardo Paredes in *Germinal* quoted in "La lucha de clases en el Ecuador", *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* 1, no. 5 (June 15, 1926): 22.

²⁷ "La lucha de clases en el Ecuador," *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* 1, no. 2 (April 30, 1926): 26.

also have helped shape their policies on organizing in indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Latin America.

Literacy, knowledge of governmental apparatuses, and access to public officials seemingly would give urban leftists an upper-hand in this relationship that most scholars have stereotypically derided as unequal, paternalistic, and manipulative. Instead, they formed a type of reciprocity to which indigenous communities were long accustomed, but now with leftist involvement it created new potential for social change. Leftists treated indigenous activists as equals as they fought for a common goal. Naturally, urban intellectuals had access to skills and tools that indigenous peoples typically did not enjoy, but far from being a disadvantage these skills proved to be key in advancing indigenous struggles. At the same time, while indigenous peasants often lacked formal educational training, the imposition of global capital into their lives gave them the type of lived experiences leading to a penetrating analysis of exploitation that urban intellectuals often lacked. Rather than needing urban activists to awaken a revolutionary consciousness in a pre-political peasant population, subalterns gained their own political consciousness and then helped awaken that of their urban allies while intellectuals helped frame the issues. Revealing their level of commitment and presence, urban Communists often suffered the same threats of police action and imprisonment as the Indigenous activists. Indigenous challenges to capitalism contributed to a radical leftist tradition in Ecuador.

The rise of the Marxist left

Although the *Revolución Juliana* created new political spaces for those on the Marxist left, several small groupings had already been converging before then. Given Ecuador's fragmented regional nature, much of organization occurred independently on a local level. Already on May 13, 1919, a group in Guayaquil created a socialist party. Although the party soon disappeared and left little lasting impact, it published a periodical

called *La Bandera Roja* that articulated the first socialist aspirations in Ecuador. Of the various socialist organizations, the best organized and most significant was *La Antorcha*, which eleven activists founded in Quito on September 16, 1924. Many leading leftists were involved in this group, including Ricardo Paredes, Leonardo J. Muñoz, Jorge Carrera Andrade, and others who subsequently played significant roles in the early history of radical politics in Ecuador.²⁸ *La Antorcha* also attracted the support of more moderate politicians, including Luis Napoleón Dillon, a modernizing factory owner with liberal or even socialist tendencies who the following year participated in the *Revolución Juliana*. Other similar groups began to function throughout Ecuador.²⁹

La Antorcha gained visibility through its bi-weekly newspaper of the same name, which it began to publish a few months later. Alexander characterizes the newspaper's line "as a Liberal program with socialistic overtones," but under the leadership of Jorge Carrera Andrade and Luis Maldonado Estrada it was the first explicitly socialist periodical in Ecuador.³⁰ *La Antorcha* announced the publication of its newspaper with an attack on capitalist tyranny, and called for people to protest for their rights. This group saw a strong potential for socialism emerging out of "the subordinate public employee, the worker of lands (the Indian), the labor apprentice, the common soldier, the school teacher."³¹ Although they published this newspaper for only six months during 1924 and 1925, it provided the means of public expression for several of the people who were

²⁸ Donoso, *El 15 de noviembre de 1922 y la fundación del socialismo*, vol. 2, p. 90; Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 242.

²⁹ Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriano*, pp. 194-95; Elias Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, Biblioteca de autores ecuatorianos; 62 ([Guayaquil]: Departamento de Publicaciones de la Facultad de Ciencias Economicas de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1986), 51; Jorge Crespo Toral, *El comunismo en el Ecuador* (Quito: np, 1958), 10. Also see "La organización del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano" in Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 297-99.

³⁰ Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, 236.

³¹ "Encendiendo la Antorcha," *La Antorcha* (Quito) 1, no. 1 (November 16, 1924): 1.

to become key actors in the emergence of Ecuador's nascent leftist movement.

La Antorcha spoke out against government and property owner abuses of Indians. It dismissed racist assumptions that Indians were incapable of participating in the political process, and called on the "indigenous race" to claim its rightful place in Ecuador and to demand social justice.³² *La Antorcha* noted that most of Ecuador's land was in the hands of a few elite families while most Indians lived in miserable and impoverished conditions. These urban activists included the right to land as the second point on their preliminary agenda for creating socialism, noting that "the earth is for all."³³ Ricardo Paredes, Luis F. Chávez, and other socialists from *La Antorcha* came to the defense of Indigenous struggles against hacienda owners and helped present Indigenous demands to the national government.

Indigenous voices, however, did not appear in the pages of this newspaper. Rather, seemingly following Mexico's Minister of Education José Vasconcelos' thinking in *La raza cósmica*, the Ecuadorians called "to unify the race: to fuse the enslaved race, the ancient indigenous possessor of the earth—with the dominant race. In this way," the statement continued, "the ethnic differences and racial prejudices will disappear." In its place, a robust people would emerge.³⁴ Such racialized thinking typified the 1920s. Rather than embracing ethnic diversity, *mestizaje* contended that indigenous identity must be suppressed and society must be whitened in order for the country to progress forward.³⁵ Nevertheless, as urban

³² Pilo de la Peña, "Los indios aspiran socialimente", *La Antorcha* (Quito) 1, no. 3 (November 29, 1924): 3.

³³ L. V., "El problema de tierras en el Ecuador", *La Antorcha* Epoca II, 1, no. 2 (March 30, 1925): 4-5; "Manifiesto a la nación", *La Antorcha* Epoca II, Año 1, no. 7 (May 1, 1925): 1.

³⁴ "Manifiesto a la nación", *La Antorcha* Epoca II, 1, no. 7 (May 1, 1925): 1. See José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La raza cósmica* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) and Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³⁵ Ronald Stutzman, "El Mestizaje: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion", in Norman E. Whitten, Jr., ed., *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in*

socialists came in greater contact with rural activists these calls to assimilate Indigenous peoples into a *mestizo* population quickly disappeared. *La Antorcha* facilitated linkages and alliances that would characterize leftist agitation for decades to come.

On July 14, 1925, only five days after the *Revolución Juliana*, many of those involved in *La Antorcha* founded the *Núcleo Socialista de Pichincha*, in Quito. Led by Ricardo Paredes, Luis F. Maldonado Estrada, Leonardo J. Muñoz, Jorge Carrera Andrade, and others, it subsequently became the leading force for the formation of a national unified socialist party. On September 22, 1925, and in parallel to the *Núcleo Socialista de Pichincha*, seven activists founded the *Sección Comunista de Propaganda y Acción Lenin* under the guidance of Mexican diplomat Rafael Ramos Pedrueza. Ramos Pedrueza had been a member of the Mexican Communist Party since 1923, and had visited the Soviet Union in 1924 before Plutarco Elías Calles exiled him to Ecuador. Ramos Pedrueza's significance to the Mexican Communist Party is not clear. Barry Carr does not mention him in his monumental *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*. Víctor Alba says that Ramos Pedrueza was later expelled from the Mexican Communist Party.³⁶ In any case, he entered Ecuador at the port city of Guayaquil where he met with leftists and gave talks that the governor sought to close down because he feared that he was inciting workers to revolutionary action.³⁷ The editors of *La Antorcha* warmly welcomed Ramos Pedrueza with a front page message that they would "attentively listen to his words with respect."³⁸ In Quito, Ramos Pedrueza proceeded to form a study group that triggered vigorous intellectual and ideological debates.

Modern Ecuador (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 45-94.

³⁶ Víctor Alba, *Politics and the Labor Movement in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 135. On Ramos Pedrueza's contributions to the historiography of the Mexican Revolution, see the article by Luis F. Ruiz in this issue of *A Contracorriente*.

³⁷ "La Revolución Comunista en Guayaquil", *La Antorcha* Epoca II, Año 1, no. 11 (June 1, 1925); Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 52, 83.

³⁸ "¡Bienvenida!", *La Antorcha* Epoca II, Año 1, no. 12 (June 8, 1925): 1.

The *Sección Comunista de Propaganda y Acción Lenin* declared its intent to “constitute in the Republic of Ecuador the Section of the Communist Party that would work according to the ideals of the doctrine of the World Communist Party.” The group declared its adhesion to the Comintern under the guidance of Mexico’s Communist Party, and designated Ramos Pedrueza as its official representative to the international organization. The group’s organization would “conform to the ethnic conditions in the Republic of Ecuador; race, environment, political parties, social state, economic state, but always based on the basic ideals of the Doctrine of World Communism.” Finally, “only urban and rural workers in mind and action” could belong to the group.” Copies of the document were to be sent to Mexico and Moscow.³⁹ Rafael Quintero notes that “the origins of the group were very existential and politically dispersed, because while one of the members became a ministerial undersecretary in the Government, another wanted to emigrate immediately to Russia to exercise his profession, and the paths that others followed were not very consistent with the act that they had signed.”⁴⁰ The group also briefly published a newspaper, *La Fragua*.

Notable for his absence was Ricardo Paredes, who subsequently became Ecuador’s strongest advocate for bringing the socialist party into alliance with the Comintern. Quintero says he deliberately kept his distance, perhaps indicating his hesitancy with the direction of the group.⁴¹ Nevertheless, according to Elías Muñoz Vicuña, Paredes identified Ramos Pedrueza as “the first to diffuse Communism theoretically and practically in Ecuador.”⁴² Because of his subversive activities in Ecuador, the United

³⁹ Sección Comunista de Propaganda y Acción Lenin, “Acta de Constitución de la República del Ecuador” in Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 87-89, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/lenin.php>

⁴⁰ Rafael Quintero, *El mito del populismo en el Ecuador: análisis de los fundamentos del estado ecuatoriano moderno (1895-1934)*, 3a ed., aumentada y corregida (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala-Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 1997), 112.

⁴¹ Quintero, *El mito del populismo en el Ecuador*, 3a ed., 112.

⁴² Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 83.

States Embassy convinced the Mexican government to withdraw Ramos Pedrueza.⁴³ With its leader gone, the *Sección Comunista de Propaganda y Acción Lenin* soon dispersed with little apparent lasting impact.

Despite his short time in the country, Ramos Pedrueza had a lasting impact on the memory of the Marxist left. When he died in 1943, the student newspaper *Surcos* published a homage that identified him as “one of the figures that contributed most to the awakening of the new restlessness in Ecuador.” He initiated “a new stage in the social and political evolution of our people.”⁴⁴ In 1968, the Communist newspaper *El Pueblo* stated that “the old militants in our Party had an indelible memory of Rafael Ramos Pedrueza for his contribution to the diffusion of Marxist Leninist ideas in Ecuador, and for his contributions to the construction of the Ecuadorian Communist Party.”⁴⁵ In his 1975 autobiography, Emilio Uzcátegui remembered Ramos Pedrueza as an “illustrious writer and ideologist” who “offered his warm friendship to young intellectuals and workers.”⁴⁶ Subsequently, the PCE began to claim the *Sección Comunista de Propaganda y Acción Lenin* as the foundation of their party, rather than the *Asamblea Nacional Socialista* that took place the following year.⁴⁷ This group points to the presence of a more radical and clandestine Communist tendency operating within broader socialist movements.⁴⁸

Asamblea Nacional Socialista (1926)

Fifty-four delegates gathered in Quito for the *Asamblea Nacional Socialista* on May 16-23, 1926, to found the *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano* (PSE). The PSE was the third political party, following the creation of the

⁴³ Lazar JEIFETS, Victor JEIFETS, and Peter Huber, *La Internacional comunista y América latina, 1919-1943. Diccionario biográfico* (Moscow: Instituto de Latinoamérica de la Academia de las Ciencias, 2004), 277.

⁴⁴ Eduardo Santos C., “Rafael Ramos Pedrueza”, *Surcos* 1, no. 7 (July 2, 1943): 2.

⁴⁵ “Rafael Ramos Pedrueza,” *El Pueblo* Epoca IV, no. 597 (April 20, 1968): 2.

⁴⁶ Uzcátegui, *Medio siglo a través de mis gafas*, 78.

⁴⁷ “47 aniversario”, *El Pueblo* (September 23, 1972): 2.

Partido Conservador Ecuatoriano on October 9, 1925, and the *Partido Liberal Radical Ecuatoriano* on December 10, 1925. With broad sympathies to socialist tendencies and believing that the formation of new parties was a positive development for Ecuador's political evolution, the new *Revolución Juliana* government granted the radicals use of the main meeting hall in the municipal building in Quito. The PSE grew to become one of the three main "traditional" and largest parties in Ecuador.

Notably, the PSE was the first party in Ecuador to attempt to organize the indigenous masses as a political force, a radical departure from the actions of other political parties. During a period in which many elites maintained deeply held racist sentiments toward indigenous peoples, socialists comprised a rare group willing to defend their interests. Pointing specifically to the situation of land concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy elites while a large indigenous population worked like slaves, the new party declared that "Ecuador has its social problems that need to be resolved as soon as possible."⁴⁹ On May 16, 1926, at the inaugural session of the *Asamblea*, an indigenous leader named Jesús Gualavisí took the floor to propose that this founding congress salute "all the peasants of the Republic, indicating to them that the Party would work intensely for their redemption." His proposal passed unanimously.⁵⁰ The party's new secretary general Jorge Carrera Andrade noted that

No one could believe their eyes that the distinguished former presidential candidate, Juan Manuel Lasso, was sitting next to Gualavisí in his thick red poncho. Gualavisí was the spokesperson of the Indian communities indoctrinated into the new ideas of land reform.⁵¹

Gualavisí participated actively in discussions, particularly when they related to issues of land or indigenous peoples. For example, Gualavisí

⁴⁸ Quintero, *El mito del populismo en el Ecuador*, 3a ed., 112.

⁴⁹ Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano (PSE), *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista y Manifiesto del Consejo Central del Partido (16-23-Mayo)*, Quito, 1926 (Guayaquil: Imp. El Tiempo, 1926), 4.

⁵⁰ PSE, *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista*, 33.

proposed that the party create an office to defend the interests of peasants and workers. The delegates voted and accepted the proposal.⁵² “Taking into account that one of the fundamental postulates of Ecuadorian Socialism is the redemption of the Indian,” Paredes proposed that the delegates congratulate and support Gualavisi’s struggles against landlord abuses. His proposal also passed.⁵³ This collaboration elucidates attitudes toward class consciousness and ethnic identity among indigenous groups and leftist activists in Ecuador. Gualavisi and other indigenous leaders understood that in order to end the oppression and discrimination that they faced, they would need to effect radical changes in society. Given their day-to-day realities, indians naturally understood the nature of racism and discrimination in Ecuador. But purging Ecuador of its white population would not solve the fundamental underlying problems that they faced. Drawing on Indigenous myths and legends proved useful, as Mariátegui understood in the 1920s, to move people to action, but the necessary changes would need to be much more profound and structural in nature. Building a class-based movement for social change was the most direct method to fight for fundamental social changes. Indigenous peoples needed allies to achieve their goals, and they found these among the members of the Socialist Party.

The agrarian socialist legacy of the Inkas, according to Paredes, was still apparent in their communistic traditions and institutions. He recognized a high degree of class consciousness among indigenous workers, and believed that they formed “a potent revolutionary factor.” Previously they were “constituent elements of the state agrarian socialism of the Inkas, and still keep those strong communist traditions today,” Paredes wrote. “The class spirit among the indians is very strong.”⁵⁴ In his writings, Mariátegui presented a similarly positive image of the Inka empire and its

⁵¹ Carrera Andrade, *El volcán y el colibrí*, 55.

⁵² PSE, *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista*, 52.

⁵³ PSE, *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista*, 74.

⁵⁴ Paredes, “El movimiento obrero en el Ecuador”, 81,

legacy for the role of Indigenous peoples in a revolutionary movement. “The indigenous hope is absolutely revolutionary,” Mariátegui famously states in his classic work *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*.⁵⁵ Paredes’ ideas were not out of line with what other Marxists in the Andes were thinking, and those ideas probably influenced and shaped how he viewed Indigenous militancy in Ecuador.

New divisions

A very ideologically and socially diverse group of people came together in the formation of the PSE, and perhaps new divisions were inevitable. Luis Maldonado Estrada noted that its heterogeneous nature included “workers, peasants, mostly elements of the middle class, and their orientation leaves a lot to be desired for the range of doctrinal tonalities that are manifested, from the liberal supporter of private property to the extremes of communism.”⁵⁶ Rafael Quintero identifies three main ideological currents present in the founding congress of the PSE: liberal-bourgeois, utopian socialist, and revolutionary Marxist.⁵⁷ Elías Muñoz Vicuña similarly characterized the range of delegates as representing the left, center, and right. “It was majority left,” he wrote, “but their positions were not completely coherent.”⁵⁸ Perhaps the one unifying factor of those at the socialist assembly was their dissatisfaction with the existing Liberal and Conservative parties.⁵⁹ A radical wing criticized the presence of “liberals, or pseudo-socialists, motivated by opportunism,” but proclaimed that

<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-isr-agosto28.php>

⁵⁵ José Carlos Mariátegui, *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*, 13th ed. (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1968), 30.

⁵⁶ Luis F. Maldonado Estrada, *Bases de partido socialista ecuatoriano, su declaración de principios, estatutos y programa mínimo* (Quito: Ediciones Antorcha, 1938), 43.

⁵⁷ Rafael Quintero, “Estudio introductorio” in Angel Modesto Paredes and Rafael Quintero, *Pensamiento sociológico*, Biblioteca básica del pensamiento ecuatoriano, 6 (Quito: Banco Central del Ecuador. Corporación Editora Nacional, 1981), 20.

⁵⁸ Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 75-76.

⁵⁹ Uzcátegui, *Medio siglo a través de mis gafas*, 78.

consolidating “the ideological position of the Party with radical tendencies toward Communism closed the door on opportunism.”⁶⁰ Not only did the PSE group urban workers and rural peasants with middle-class professionals and intellectuals, but regional divisions, particularly between Quito and Guayaquil, also tore at the party. This led John Martz to identify the history of Marxist struggles in Ecuador as “a checkered tale of organizational competition, ideological conflicts, strategic and tactical disagreement, and a general fragmentation which has diminished its potential impact on public affairs.”⁶¹ Already at the socialist assembly, the revolutionary Marxist tendency began to split into socialist and Communist wings. These ideological divisions surfaced during the assembly in such issues as attitudes toward private property, the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and whether a Marxist concept of a working-class struggle was applicable to Ecuador’s reality of a small proletariat and weak syndicalist organization.⁶² It would be difficult to hold the heterogeneous grouping together.

Subsequently, leftists would also disagree over strategic issues such as relations with non-Marxist parties and participation in coalition governments. Heated debates also ran through the socialist assembly over whether or not to ally the new party with the Comintern. On the night of May 19, with the session under the direction of Juan Manuel Lasso, the *Grupo Lenin* from Ibarra proposed the affiliation. Ricardo Paredes, as secretary general of the assembly, and Juan Genaro Jaramillo argued strongly in favor of affiliation, but in the end the assembly voted against the

⁶⁰ El Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, Sección de la Internacional Comunista (PSE-IC), “Síntesis histórica e ideológica de este nuevo Partido Político” in *El Ecuador en cien años de independencia, 1830-1930*, ed. J. Gonzalo Orellana (Quito, Ecuador: Escuela tipografica salesiana, 1930), 176, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/orellana.php>

⁶¹ John D. Martz, “Marxism in Ecuador”, *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 33, no. 1 (Summer 1979): 11.

⁶² Ayala Mora, *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano en la historia*, 9; Crespo Toral, *El comunismo en el Ecuador*, 13-14.

proposal.⁶³ According to the Communist wing of the party, however, the assembly returned to this topic at its closing session on the night of May 23, although there is no mention in the published proceedings of a discussion or vote on affiliation with the Comintern.

Communists later declared that “the last session of the Socialist Assembly marked the unequivocal direction towards a communist tendency, with the unanimous agreement to authorize the Executive Central Council of the Party to requested adherence to the great Communist International.”⁶⁴ The final session was packed, and disrupted by conservative thugs who injured Pablo Charpentier.⁶⁵ It is possible that in the resulting chaos some of the details were lost, or that some delegates had left before the discussion took place. Elías Muñoz Vicuña claimed that the member who was in charge of publishing the proceedings inadvertently left out the resolution approving affiliation with the Comintern. “When the Central Council received the pamphlet,” Muñoz Vicuña stated, “it was noticed that it was missing a resolution from the Closing Session that the General Secretary had proposed to affiliate with the Communist International. A page was added to the pamphlet to correct the flaw.”⁶⁶ As a result, in some copies of the *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista* appeared an unnumbered page that stated:

NOTE: In the closing session it was forgotten to add one of the Assembly’s resolutions, one that refers to the adherence of the Party to Moscow’s Third International as was proposed by the comrade General Secretary and unanimously approved. The Party’s Central Council should request that adherence after consulting with the provincial councils.⁶⁷

⁶³ PSE, *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista*, 45.

⁶⁴ PSE-IC, “Síntesis histórica e ideológica de este nuevo Partido Político”, 177, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/orellana.php>

⁶⁵ PSE, *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista*, 60-66.

⁶⁶ Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 78.

⁶⁷ Reprinted in Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 79, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse-23mayo26.php> A copy of *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista* archived in the Biblioteca Ecuatoriana Aurelio Espinosa Pólit (BEAEP) does not include this page, while a copy at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin—apparently the only one in the United States—does. A note in the library catalog states “A leaf

Muñoz Vicuña states that given the difficulties in deciding the question, the assembly decided to have provincial councils consult their bases on how to proceed.⁶⁸ Uzcátegui adds that “there was a lot of fighting around the agreement to adhere to the Third International, but the issue was not clear,” and surmises “that probably a special unnumbered page was inserted in several copies to send to Russia.”⁶⁹ In fact, in his autobiography Leonardo Muñoz claims that he was the one charged with taking the resolutions to Guayaquil for printing. Muñoz was a close comrade of Paredes, and although subsequently he left with the socialist wing of the party at this point he apparently still held a pro-Soviet position. He seemingly would not have had any reason to leave out a resolution in favor of affiliating with the Comintern, although he does note that due to the number of resolutions passed at the congress they had to make a limited selection for the published proceedings.⁷⁰ As Muñoz Vicuña notes, “the polemic around this issue still goes on,” even though regardless of what might have happened at the assembly the Central Committee “acted in accordance with that resolution.”⁷¹ Those actions led to an eventual split in the party.

Sixth Congress

Twenty-six delegates (all men) from Latin America attended the famed Sixth Comintern Congress that “discovered” Latin America. Ecuador

containing additional party resolutions inserted after p. 66.”

⁶⁸ Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 231.

⁶⁹ Uzcátegui, *Medio siglo a través de mis gafas*, 80. Miguel Angel Guzmán and Germán Rodas Chavez similarly accuse Paredes of misrepresenting the results to Moscow and other Communist groups. See Donoso, *El 15 de noviembre de 1922 y la fundación del socialismo*, vol. 2, 106 and Germán Rodas Chavez, *Partido Socialista: Casa adentro, Aproximación a sus dos primeras décadas*, Historia del Socialismo en el Ecuador, 1 (Quito: Ediciones La Tierra, 2006), 31-32.

⁷⁰ Leonardo J. Muñoz, *Testimonio de lucha: memorias sobre la historia del socialismo en el Ecuador*, Colección Testimonios, Volumen 1 (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1988), 53.

⁷¹ Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 81.

held two of the votes assigned to Latin America.⁷² As the secretary-general of the PSE, Jorge Carrera Andrade logically would be an official delegate from Ecuador. In his autobiography *El volcán y el colibrí*, Carrera notes his plan not only to study the Soviet experiment, but also to travel through Europe and especially France, “whose thought exercised a powerful influence on me.” His trip was seriously underfunded, and as he boarded a boat in Guayaquil he pondered “the absurd adventure that such a trip toward a world that seemed distant as the moon would mean.”⁷³ He arrived in Hamburg, Germany, broke and without any contacts to help plan his trip onward to Moscow. He visited the Ecuadorian consulate where he met an old friend, Carlos Zambrano Orejuela, who held some socialist sympathies. Zambrano helped him write a letter to the Soviet embassy in Berlin to request a visa. Carrera waited for months for the visa until he finally received news that the Sixth Congress had concluded, and that it would no longer be necessary to travel to Moscow. He had used consulate letterhead to request the visa, and this raised suspicions that he was a government spy.⁷⁴ Due to inexperience and lack of funds the trip had been a fiasco.

Carrera, however, points to much more nefarious forces at work that prevented his attendance at the Sixth Congress. In Hamburg, Zambrano showed him press clippings in which other party members had announced his death at sea. “It was clear that this was a move to avoid sending more funds to their incautious delegate,” Carrera writes in his autobiography. Furthermore, he claims “that another Party member wanted to displace and replace me in my functions.”⁷⁵ That other comrade, apparently, was Ricardo Paredes who, with a much closer ideological affiliation to the Comintern, was already in Moscow. Paredes did not leave

⁷² Luis E. Aguilar, ed., *Marxism in Latin America*, Revised edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 17. Other countries in representation were Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Uruguay.

⁷³ Carrera Andrade, *El volcán y el colibrí*, 62.

⁷⁴ Carrera Andrade, *El volcán y el colibrí*, 65.

⁷⁵ Carrera Andrade, *El volcán y el colibrí*, 65, 62.

a similar autobiographical account providing his side of the conflict, but his attendance seems to belie Carrera's claims that travel to Moscow was too difficult and expensive. Salvadorian Communist Miguel Mármol provides one of the few early detailed descriptions of a trip to Moscow. Mármol describes the trip as difficult but completely feasible.⁷⁶

Paredes was one of eight Latin Americans who traveled to Moscow during the summer and fall of 1927 to participate in the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Russian Revolution. He stayed on for training in the International Leninist School and the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in July and August 1928. Logically both the Comintern and Communists in Ecuador would want someone representing them who was more sympathetic to their ideological perspective. Leonardo Muñoz claimed that everyone was in favor of Paredes as their delegate anyway:

Everyone was in agreement and we decided that the best delegate was Dr. Ricardo Paredes because of his fanaticism and admiration for the Soviet Union, as well as for his decision to work for communism. Ricardo left very happy to fulfill the responsibility.⁷⁷

In *Temas obreros*, Muñoz Vicuña, who takes a stridently pro-Paredes Communist position, maintains that the party “consulted with the Provincial Councils to name Ricardo Paredes as delegate to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, and sent with him the application for affiliation to the Communist International.”⁷⁸ Paredes had at least the support of one wing of the fractured party.

On March 1928, PSE Central Committee members formally petitioned the Comintern for affiliation, but apparently this request was denied.⁷⁹ In Moscow, Paredes took this one step further and wrote two

⁷⁶ Roque Dalton, *Miguel Mármol* (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1987), 175-84.

⁷⁷ Muñoz, *Testimonio de lucha*, 60.

⁷⁸ Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 81.

⁷⁹ “Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano a Secretario General de la III Internacional” in Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 91, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse12marzo28.php>

letters, both dated July 13, 1928, requesting affiliation. Paredes signed the first letter as a “Delegate of the Ecuadorian Socialist Party” and the second in the name of the PCE.⁸⁰ He acknowledged that while the PSE was led primarily by Communists, it “is still not organized as a Communist Party because it is still necessary to present a program of immediate concerns.” A problem they faced was that while the leaders were Communists, the base of the party had not been educated as to the nature of Communist ideas or the importance of alliance with the Comintern. Both the socialist and Communist parties, however, had been working to bring themselves in line with the Comintern, and he requested that they both be admitted in order to form only one strong united party.⁸¹ In the final session, on September 3, 1928, the Comintern accepted the affiliation.⁸²

Paredes actively participated in the Sixth Congress, particularly in regards to issues concerning the role of the rural masses in a Communist revolution. Páez Cordero notes the “great relevance” of his proposals to the Congress.⁸³ In discussions on the revolutionary movement in the colonies, he argued for a more complex understanding of colonialism. A new category of “dependent countries” was needed for those “which have been penetrated economically by imperialism but which retain a certain political independence.”⁸⁴ He disagreed with a proposal to expropriate land from

⁸⁰ Letter from Ricardo Paredes to Sixth Comintern Congress, July 13, 1928, in Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 95
<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes13julio28.php>; Letter from Ricardo Paredes to Sixth Comintern Congress, July 13, 1928, in Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 97
http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes_pce13julio28.php

⁸¹ Letter from Ricardo Paredes to Sixth Comintern Congress, July 13, 1928, in Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 97
http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes_pce13julio28.php

⁸² Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador”, 84.

⁸³ Páez Cordero, *Los orígenes de la izquierda ecuatoriana*, 80.

⁸⁴ Ricardo Paredes, “VI World Congress, Reply to Bukharin on Draft Programme”, *International Press Correspondence* (London, H.R.G. Jefferson) 8, no. 66 (September 25, 1928), 1177
<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-ipc-25sept28.pdf> For an excellent analysis of Paredes’ contributions to the Sixth Congress, see Páez

large estates and distribute it to the poor in small private parcels. He presented two arguments against this strategy. First, such an approach would not address fundamental problems in the existing land tenure system. Second, building on existing community structures, much like Mariátegui advocated in neighboring Peru, would prove rewarding in developing a socialist system. Indigenous society naturally tended toward socialism, Paredes believed, and Spanish colonization had disrupted this process. “The American Indians are imbued with a remarkable collectivist spirit,” Paredes stated. “These elements must be utilized in the proletarian State for the construction of socialism.” As evidence of the potential for this strategy, he pointed to four Indigenous insurrections, which had taken place in 1926 as the first and most important example of rural Communist organizing efforts.⁸⁵ That uprising “highlighted the important revolutionary role of the Indians in Ecuador in the fight against the capitalist yoke.”⁸⁶ Paredes proposed that “it is possible that the revolutionary struggle will be started by a revolt of the agricultural workers and peasants against the big landowners and the government.” But the key issue was one of organization. “The proletariat will be able to win the hegemony with the aid of the peasantry only if it has a Communist Party.”⁸⁷ His arguments swayed the Comintern, and the Congress’ final resolution advocated that land expropriated from plantations and haciendas be handed over for “the collective cultivation of the agricultural workers.” The examples of indigenous revolts Paredes brought to the attention of the assembly were

Cordero, *Los orígenes de la izquierda ecuatoriana*, 66-73.

⁸⁵ Paredes, “VI World Congress, Reply to Bukharin on Draft Programme”, 1177, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-ipc-25sept28.pdf>
Also see Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador”, 85.

⁸⁶ Paredes, “El movimiento obrero en el Ecuador”, 80, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-isr-agosto28.php>

⁸⁷ Ricardo Paredes, “VI World Congress, Reply to Humbert-Droz”, *International Press Correspondence* 8, no. 74 (October 25, 1928), 1350-51, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-ipc-25oct28.pdf>

listed as evidence of the “widening and deepening of the revolutionary process” in Latin America.⁸⁸

The 1928 Sixth Congress launched what has come to be known as an “ultraleft” phase in the Comintern with a “class against class” organizing strategy replacing that of building alliances with other leftist forces. The Comintern urged local parties to work in rural areas, organizing worker-peasant coalitions. Paredes can be seen as partially responsible for this direction as he brought his experiences with indigenous communities in Ecuador to the table. He told the congress:

The revolutionary problem is linked up with that of the oppressed masses such as the indians of Latin America. In some countries, indians constitute the biggest section of the rural population; they suffer much more than white and half-caste workers from the exploitation of the landed proprietors. Indians who are considered an inferior race are treated more brutally. All these factors have created among the indian workers and peasants a spirit of solidarity and a class spirit of the exploited. Therefore, indians are very revolutionary elements. I think this problem of oppressed races must be dealt with in the programme.⁸⁹

Even before the Comintern dictated that local parties should work with oppressed populations, Communists (with Mexico taking the lead) developed strong connections with peasant movements.⁹⁰ In Ecuador, even though the PSE had incorporated indigenous peoples and issues into the founding of the party, the Sixth Congress triggered an intensification of rural activism.

⁸⁸ Communist International, *The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies: Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies, Adopted by the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, 1928* (New York: Workers Library, 1929), 59, 6.

⁸⁹ Paredes, “VI World Congress, Reply to Bukharin on Draft Programme”, 1177, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-ipc-25sept28.pdf> Also see Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador”, 86.

⁹⁰ Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 32.

Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, sección de la III Internacional Comunista

As in many other Latin American countries, the issue of participation in the Communist International led to a split in the socialist movement. Paredes appeared to acknowledge the lack of sufficient support to ally with the Comintern and so pursued what Quintero terms a bi-frontal approach. In addition to working inside the PSE, Paredes organized a clandestine Communist cell that followed the Comintern line. Quintero claims that this was an unworkable position:

[I]t could not work democratically and a division, sooner or later, was inevitable. There were two political programs, two organizational structures, two formal political practices, and, clearly, two types of militancy and international relationships.⁹¹

It proved impossible to unify such divergent ideological trends, and the Marxist left soon split into Communist, socialist, and vanguardist wings.

Upon his return to Ecuador in November 1928, Paredes stepped up his efforts to bring the party under strict Communist control. He assumed the post of Secretary General of the PSE, and two months later called a meeting of the party's central committee. At the opening of the meeting on January 12, 1929, Paredes presented a doctrinaire speech in which he called for a deep self-reflection, "correcting all of their defects" and "suppressing the bad roots of the past."⁹² This introduced a two-year period of what Páez Cordero terms an "internal purge, with an aggressive general secretariat."⁹³ This move would change not only the direction of the party, but also the history of the Marxist left for the rest of the twentieth century.

⁹¹ Quintero, *El mito del populismo*, 3d ed., 113-14.

⁹² Ricardo A. Paredes, "Discurso de apertura de la conferencia del consejo central ampliado del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, Sección de la Tercera Internacional Comunista", in *La primera Conferencia del Consejo Central Ampliado del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, sección de la III Internacional Comunista*, ed. Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano (PSE) (Quito: Imprenta del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, 1929), 4.

<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse-ic12ene29.php>

⁹³ Páez Cordero, *Los orígenes de la izquierda ecuatoriana*, 106.

Revealing lingering ideological divisions within the party, Paredes maintained that socialism could not simply be the leftwing of liberalism. Liberalism was a bourgeois, individualistic ideology that represented the interests of the dominant classes, whereas socialism was a proletarian, collectivist ideology that embraced the interests of the exploited with a goal of eliminating class structures. To realize this goal, the party must be purged of artisans and the small bourgeoisie in order to build the party on a proletarian base.⁹⁴ Paredes criticized an intellectualism that embraced reflection without action. “We need fighters, men with energy and thought, not closed libraries.”⁹⁵ What they needed was a new party with a new orientation, one that followed the Comintern’s line.⁹⁶ He condemned alliances with bourgeois parties, rejected reformism, and proclaimed “that the only method for the construction of socialism is the installation of a socialist government of the workers, peasants and soldiers.”⁹⁷ The party stood for the abolition of private property, complete equality, and the termination of social classes. They linked the “agrarian question” to the “indigenous problem.”⁹⁸ The party used its newspaper *La Vanguardia* to champion “the ongoing protests against the abuses of the large estate system, and against the authorities that have carried out fires and mass slaughters against the justified indigenous risings.”⁹⁹ This was not the first time the left addressed the presence of indigenous peoples in Ecuador, but it was an indication that, following the lead of the Comintern, they were

⁹⁴ Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador”, 90.

⁹⁵ Paredes, “Discurso de apertura de la conferencia del consejo central ampliado del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano,” 8
<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse-ic12ene29.php>

⁹⁶ Paredes, “Discurso de apertura de la conferencia del consejo central ampliado del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano”, 12
<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse-ic12ene29.php>

⁹⁷ *La Vanguardia*, quoted in Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador”, 91.

⁹⁸ PSE-IC, “Síntesis histórica e ideológica de este nuevo Partido Político”, 178, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/orellana.php>

⁹⁹ “Síntesis histórica de Partido Socialista Ecuatoriana”, 16, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse-ic12ene29.pdf>

going to engage it on a much deeper and more systematic level.

Under Paredes' control, the party changed its name to *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, sección de la III Internacional Comunista*. This name was not gratuitous, but part of the twenty-one conditions for admittance to the Comintern.¹⁰⁰ Paredes also founded an Anti-Imperialist League, as other Latin American Communist parties were doing. In 1929, Paredes launched *La Hoz* as the "Central Organ of the Ecuadorian Socialist Party–Section of the Communist International" with a more explicitly Communist ideology. *La Hoz* announced the formation of a Communist party that at its base was purely proletarian and "would incorporate elements of other classes: peasants and intellectuals."¹⁰¹ According to Víctor Alba, under his guidance by the late 1920s the party had 10,000 members.¹⁰² Nevertheless, this tactic alienated many of his colleagues. "When he returned he never said anything to us," party leader Leonardo Muñoz grumbled.¹⁰³ Ayala Mora claims that affiliation with the Comintern was done "without a real consultation with the bases." According to Ayala Mora, even the radical Marxists advocated a certain distance from the increasingly Stalinistic tendencies in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴ Opponents complained that under Paredes' growing control, the party began to function in a vertical and bureaucratic fashion. They opposed what they viewed as subjugating the party to the rigid control of the Soviet Union.

In moving the PSE toward a Communist party, Paredes' actions in Ecuador were quite distinct from those of his contemporary José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru. Despite intense pressure from Moscow, Mariátegui refused to move in that direction and it was only after his death in 1930

¹⁰⁰ Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 209.

¹⁰¹ "El P.S.E. haciéndose comunista", *La Hoz* 1, no. 8 (December 20, 1930): 1.

¹⁰² Alba, *Politics and the Labor Movement in Latin America*, 119.

¹⁰³ Leonardo Muñoz quoted in Donoso, *El 15 de noviembre de 1922 y la fundación del socialismo*, vol. 2, 115. Also see Muñoz, *Testimonio de lucha*, 60; Aguirre, "El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador", 91.

¹⁰⁴ Ayala Mora, *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano en la historia*, 11.

that the Peruvian socialists formed a Communist party.¹⁰⁵ Often the Peruvian Party's hardline turn is interpreted as an error, as an action that destroyed the gains that Mariátegui had struggled so hard to make. Similarly in Ecuador, the United States Embassy reported that "Communism, affiliated with the Third International, was practically exterminated upon the dissolution of the PSE." Paredes "was the only outstanding person who remained and he was followed by a small group of equally fanatical admirers." Membership in Quito had been reduced to seventy-five people.¹⁰⁶ Although becoming a section of the Communist International did narrow the base of the party and perhaps prevented it from gaining broad appeal, it did contribute to the construction of a strong indigenous movement with arguably notable and positive results.

CSLA

While in Moscow, Paredes attended a continental Latin America labor conference at the Profintern headquarters. Delegates drafted a resolution calling for trade unions to work toward the organization of agricultural workers who, in several countries, were largely indigenous. They set May 1929 as the date for a meeting of class-conscious trade unions in Montevideo. The call for the meeting set forth an agenda that included discussions of the problems facing indigenous peoples and an agricultural proletariat.¹⁰⁷ Back in Ecuador, in April 1929 Paredes organized a *Congreso*

¹⁰⁵ El Secretariado Político del C. E. de la I.C., "Sobre la formación del partido comunista en Perú," *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* 2 época, no. 26 (May 1, 1930): 18-24; Eudocio Ravines, *The Yenan Way* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).

¹⁰⁶ Letter from William Dawson to Secretary of State, Washington, no. 921, March 10, 1933, NARA RG 59, 822.00B/43, 2.

¹⁰⁷ "Resolución de la primera reunión sindical latino americana realizada en diciembre de 1927", *El Trabajador Latino Americano* 1, no. 1 (1928): 5, quoted in Rodrigo García Treviño, *La ingerencia rusa en México y Sudamérica pruebas y testimonios* (México: Editorial América, 1959), 77-78; *International Press Correspondence*, December 22, 1927, quoted in Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, 48-49; "Resoluciones de la primera Conferencia sindical de América Latina (Moscu, 7-12 abril 1928)," *La Internacional Sindical Roja* 2 (September 1928): 149-57; Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, 50-51.

Provincial Obrero Campesino in the coastal province of Guayas to organize participation for the Montevideo meeting scheduled for the following month. Working in a traditional anarchist stronghold led to fierce sectarian infighting, with local activists wanting to ally with the anarchist International Working Men's Association (IWMA) rather than the Communist Third International. Anarchists denounced the socialist efforts as "a pure and coarse lie," accusing them of creating fictitious paper organizations to follow the dictates of far-off Moscow.¹⁰⁸ Páez Cordero says that the congress was a fiasco, and after twelve days of meetings its only concrete accomplishment was to name three delegates for the Montevideo meeting.¹⁰⁹

In May 1929, representatives of labor groups from 15 countries gathered in Montevideo for the *Congreso Constituyente de la Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana* (CSLA). The proceedings from the congress list Félix Carrasco, Jorge Ramos, and Alberto Araujo as attending from Ecuador.¹¹⁰ After the conclusion of the Montevideo conference, many of these same delegates crossed the Río de la Plata to attend the *Primera Conferencia Comunista Latinoamericana* in Buenos Aires from June 1-12, 1929. Araujo was joined by Ezequiel Padilla Cox, with Luis Humberto Heredia and Neptalí Pacheco León, union leaders from Milagro, denied admittance despite their credentials from the PSE.¹¹¹ As a result, of the thirty-eight delegates only two were from Ecuador.

At both the Montevideo and Buenos Aires conferences delegates

¹⁰⁸ "Dos congresos continentales: nuestra posición," *Luz y Acción* (February 1929), reprinted in Páez, *El anarquismo en el Ecuador*, 167; "Ficciones obreristas," *Luz y Acción* (March 1929), reprinted in Páez, *El anarquismo en el Ecuador*, 169.

¹⁰⁹ Alexei Páez, "El anarquismo en el Ecuador" in Páez, *El anarquismo en el Ecuador*, 81; also see Ibarra, *La formación del movimiento popular*, 51-52.

¹¹⁰ Confederación Sindical Latino Americana (CSLA), *Bajo la bandera de la C.S.L.A.: Resoluciones y documentos varios del Congreso Constituyente de la Confederación Sindical Latino Americana efectuado en Montevideo en Mayo de 1929* (Montevideo: Impr. La Linotipo, 1930), 298. Also see Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 215.

¹¹¹ Jeifets, Jeifets, and Huber, *La Internacional comunista y América latina*, 151, 250.

debated a Comintern proposal to create Indigenous republics in the Andes. Mariátegui sent a document to both meetings that criticized that position because, according to him, economic and land issues were more central to solving the problem of indigenous marginalization than those of racial identity.¹¹² The Ecuadorian delegates apparently did not participate in the heated debates in Buenos Aires on the question of indigenous nationalities, but in a previous discussion on the “Peasant Question,” Padilla stated that “as a peasant, I am under special conditions in comparison to other comrades who work in the cities.” Working in rural areas should be an immediate task of utmost importance to the movement.¹¹³ Padilla, along with other Ecuadorian colleagues, appeared to be in agreement with the Comintern line on the “indigenous question.”

Indians

Under Comintern guidance and in the aftermath of the Buenos Aires conference, socialists dramatically accelerated indigenous organizing efforts. Beginning in May of 1930, socialists began meeting furtively with Indians in their huts on haciendas. In the face of increasingly violent attacks from “the landowners in complicity with foremen, authorities, and priests who carry to an extreme their attempts to rob and to squash rural workers,” socialist activists stepped up their support for Indians and their organizational efforts. The socialists founded a *Socorro Obrero y*

¹¹² José Carlos Mariátegui, “El problema indígena” in *Bajo la bandera de la C.S.L.A.: Resoluciones y documentos varios del Congreso Constituyente de la Confederación Sindical Latino Americana efectuado en Montevideo en Mayo de 1929*, ed. Confederación Sindical Latino Americana and Congreso Constituyente (Montevideo: Impr. La Linotipo, 1930): 147-59; José Carlos Mariátegui, “El problema de las razas en América latina” in *El movimiento revolucionario latinoamericano: Versiones de la primera conferencia comunista latinoamericana, junio de 1929*, ed. Secretariado Sudamericano de la Internacional Comunista (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Revista La Correspondencia Sudamericana, 1929): 263-90. Also see Becker, “Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America”.

¹¹³ Secretariado Sudamericano de la Internacional Comunista, *El movimiento revolucionario latinoamericano: Versiones de la primera*

Campesino “to help with the demands of workers and peasants in their conflicts with capitalists, landowners, and authorities.”¹¹⁴ The first action in which this organization engaged was to free the imprisoned members of the agrarian workers’ syndicate El Inca on the Pesillo hacienda in Cayambe, as well as members of the *Juventud Comunista* who had gone to help them with organizational efforts. The newspaper *La Hoz* defiantly proclaimed that workers would continue to resist the terror of the property owners and the government. Such repression “will only accelerate the revolution as it tries in vain to stop these miserable agents of capitalism.” The party claimed success for its new support organization, as the rapid and efficient mobilization of resources led to the release of the imprisoned activists.¹¹⁵

Workers on haciendas increasingly turned to urban communists to help them organize and present their demands. While earlier leftist newspapers such as *La Antorcha* had given passing, almost token, attention to indigenous issues, Ricardo Paredes and Luis F. Chávez prominently featured agrarian struggles in *La Hoz*. A front-page article in the September 11, 1930 issue noted that united peasant syndicates “will reject the ferocious repression of their enemies.” Struggles for an eight-hour work day along with other demands infuriated land owners who saw an “awakened class conscience among the Indigenous peoples.” Paredes and Chávez called on their urban allies to defend these Indigenous struggles.¹¹⁶ In November 1930, the syndicate *El Inca* wrote to Paredes outlining the abuses that the “comrades” on the Pesillo hacienda suffered, including being overworked, treated as beasts of burden, exploitation of women, and payment of very low wages. Signed “rebelliousness and work,” the letter struck a tone of informing their urban counterparts of their daily

conferencia comunista latinoamericana, junio de 1929 (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Revista La Correspondencia Sudamericana, 1929), 251.

¹¹⁴ “El terror de los campos,” *La Hoz* (Quito) 1, no. 2 (September 11, 1930): 6.

¹¹⁵ “Formación del socorro Obrero y Campesino,” *La Hoz* (Quito) 1, no. 2 (September 11, 1930): 6.

¹¹⁶ “El gobierno de Ayora permite abusos imperdonables,” *La Hoz* 1, no. 2 (September 11, 1930): 1.

lived realities without engaging in a whining, submissive discourse that would indicate a perceived inferiority or a paternalistic relationship.¹¹⁷

Central to the party's demands was raising salaries, returning lands to indigenous peoples, canceling peasant debts, and recognizing revolutionary organizations of workers and peasants.¹¹⁸ Later the Communist Party would proudly proclaim that they had been the only ones to come to the defense of the indians. They supported indigenous interests in the national press, accompanied indians when they presented accusations to the authorities, helped indians with their organizations, defended workers against the abuses of landlords and their employees, and assisted in the formation of schools and literacy campaigns.¹¹⁹

Manifest to the Ecuadorian proletariat

Throughout 1929 and 1930, heated debates continued to rage within the party even as under Paredes' leadership it dramatically increased its organizational efforts in indigenous communities. The complaints of those who did not find Moscow's vision of a proletariat struggle applicable to their rural reality eventually spilled over into the public arena.¹²⁰ Even the United States Embassy became aware of militants who had grown disillusioned both by what they had seen in Moscow, as well as by internal dissension in the party in Ecuador.¹²¹ The final and irrevocable break between the socialist and Communist wings of Ecuador's Marxist left came

¹¹⁷ Reprinted from *La Chozza* (Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano), November 15, 1930, in José Solórzano Freire, *Nuestra gente: Relatos del Cayambe antiguo* (Quito: Pasquel Producciones Periodísticas, 2004), 15-16.

¹¹⁸ "Reivindicaciones mínimas propugnados por el Comité Central del Partido Comunista", *Campamento* 2, no. 63 (November 23, 1933): 3.

¹¹⁹ "El partido comunista organizador y defensor de los indios", *El Pueblo* (June 2, 1951): 6.

¹²⁰ "El P.S.E. haciendose comunista", *La Hoz* (Quito) 1, no. 8 (December 20, 1930): 1; "Grave cisma se produjo en el Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano", *El Día* (Quito), (December 24, 1930): 1; Charles A. Page, "Memorandum with Regard to Communism in Ecuador", attached to letter from William Dawson to Secretary of State, Washington, no. 150, January 29, 1931, NARA RG 59, 822.00B/24, 20.

¹²¹ Letter from William Dawson to Secretary of State, Washington, no. 921, March 10, 1933, NARA RG 59, 822.00B/43, 7.

on January 6, 1931, when seven Central Committee members of the PSE signed a *Manifiesto al proletariado ecuatoriano* in which they denounced the bureaucratic turn the party had taken under Comintern control. Under Comintern domination, the party “toses out dogmatic resolutions, written at a desk at the North Pole when our realities are near the South Pole.” They demanded that the party free itself from subjugation to external control in order to liberate workers from capitalist exploitation. They publicly resigned their positions in the PSE, and called on other manual and intellectual workers to join them in the construction of a new party capable of liberating workers from capitalist exploitation without being subject to foreign manipulation.¹²²

The dissidents held a series of ten long meetings before deciding to draft a statement to send to provincial councils calling on them to form a new Marxist party. “We revolutionary socialists are Marxists, but are not subordinate to any Communist International,” Leonardo Muñoz stated. “We wanted to apply Marxism to the Ecuadorian reality.”¹²³ The seven who signed the document were not marginal, but important members of the Consejo Central and key activists in the organization of socialist struggles in Ecuador. Juan F. Karolys had been one of the original members of the *Sección Comunista de Propaganda y Acción Lenin*, the precursor to the PSE that in 1925 allied itself with the Comintern. Karolys and Enrique Terán Baca were two of four PSE Central Committee signers of a March 12, 1928 letter requesting affiliation with the Comintern.¹²⁴ Juan G. Jaramillo had vocally spoken up at the founding of the PSE in 1926 to defend Paredes’s position in favor of allying with the Comintern.¹²⁵ The break was

¹²² Juan G. Jaramillo, Enrique A. Terán, Juan F. Karolys and others, *Manifiesto al proletariado ecuatoriano* (Quito: Imp. y Fotograbado Kaleda, January 6, 1931)

<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/manifiesto6ene31.php>

¹²³ Leonardo Muñoz quoted in Donoso, *El 15 de noviembre de 1922 y la fundación del socialismo*, vol. 2, 120.

¹²⁴ Muñoz Vicuña, *Temas obreros*, 91

<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse12marzo28.php>

¹²⁵ PSE, *Labores de la Asamblea Nacional Socialista*, 45.

not so much ideological as it was over differing strategic visions of how to make their goals a reality. As Ayala Mora notes, “it was not a division between ‘authentic revolutionaries’ who opted for communism and a reformist ‘right wing,’ but rather one over definitions of socialism’s revolutionary character and the search for a national identity and a rejection of foreign influences.”¹²⁶ The dissidents’ commitment to radical politics, and even to a vision for Ecuador’s Communist future, could not be questioned.

Ycaza notes that the antecedent for this break was Luis Gerardo Gallegos’ 1930 trip to the Soviet Union for the Fifth World Congress of Red Trade Unions. Gallegos returned deeply disillusioned by what he had seen and requested that the PSE disaffiliate itself from the Comintern. Gallegos published a tract, *Rusia Soviética y la revolución mundial*, in which he condemned what he saw as a corrupt Soviet bureaucracy distant from the visions of Marx and Lenin. He considered the Comintern’s instructions for the Ecuadorian party, including a demand that it transform itself into a Communist party based in a (nonexistent) proletariat, to be woefully ignorant of local conditions. Gallegos was particularly critical of the Comintern’s position pressing the party to work in indigenous communities and its stance on the National Question. Gallegos quoted from the Comintern’s directive to the party:

to work intensely among poor peasants and, in particular, among indians and in big agrarian communities in the mountain and on landed states. The Communist Party should commit itself completely to the indian masses to sustain and drive its struggles for land and for national independence, exposing the roles of priests and the church. The Party should not consider the problem of the indian only as the problem land but rather one that also includes the national question.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Ayala Mora, *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano en la historia*, 11-12.

¹²⁷ Luis Gerardo Gallegos, *Rusia Soviética y la revolución mundial*, Suplemento no. 3 de la revista Rieles (III, no. 15 y 16), Mayo y junio 1931 (Quito: Imp. de la Universidad Central, 1931): 130-31. Also see Ycaza, *Historia del*

Similar to Mariátegui, Gallegos considered this position to be in error, both because encouraging indigenous uprisings was criminally irresponsible and would only result in thousands of deaths, but also because encouraging the constructions of Indigenous nationalities would foster racial tensions while Lenin favored racial equality. Instead, Gallegos preferred to develop policies more appropriate to their local realities. Rather than being subject to the demands of a far off centralized organism, the “Red Pope” as Gallegos termed it, the dissidents wished to free themselves from this dogmatic control in order to become a truly revolutionary party.¹²⁸

The following month, the dissidents distributed a lengthy communiqué in which they elaborated on their reasons for breaking from the Communists. They declared the Third International dead, and called on Communists to leave the “red mummy” behind if they wished to fulfill their historic destiny. The group complained that the only purpose for the Comintern was the defense of the USSR and criticized its perspectives on the National Question that advocated “the creation of autonomous Black and Indigenous Republics.” This policy “divided the blacks into one part, whites into another, and indians into another, sustaining the reactionary principle of racial inferiority.”¹²⁹

That the dissidents would chose to target the Communists’ position on indigenous nationalities is perhaps not incidental, but points to underlying strategic divisions over how to organize the revolutionary movement. Significantly, the break between the two wings of the Marxist left came as urban militants were helping Indigenous activists lead a strike on haciendas in Cayambe, and only weeks before a planned Indigenous conference in Cayambe. As a result, the dissident socialists dropped out of

movimiento obrero ecuatoriana, p. 219 and Rodas, *Partido Socialista*, 42.

¹²⁸ Gallegos, *Rusia Soviética y la revolución mundial*, 131-32, 137

¹²⁹ Comité Organizador del Partido Socialista del Ecuador, “Circular dirigida a los camaradas socialistas de la República,” Quito, February 1931, quoted in Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador”, 96.

these organizational initiatives.¹³⁰ Over time, these strategic differences did begin to acquire ideological aspects. Significantly, those who had a history of working in Indigenous communities and continued to do so remained in the Communist wing of the movement. As a result, the concept of Indigenous nationalities was seen as a Communist ideology.

Paredes, of course, reacted strongly against the manifesto and its authors. He denounced Muñoz as “a spy that the government had maintained during some years in the heart of the Central Committee,” and Jaramillo was an “agent of delusion and intrigues.” He mourned the “applauses of the bourgeoisie and their government” that greeted the manifesto.¹³¹ Muñoz felt particularly injured by the accusations. “It was really very painful for us, and especially personally for me,” he said. “I had gotten along well with Ricardo like a brother. For seven years we were constantly together.”¹³² Just before leaving for the Soviet Union in 1927, Paredes had participated on a commission with Muñoz and Jaramillo to travel to Guayaquil to confront what they saw as threats of regionalism and anarchism in the port city. The trio gave a series of talks, and in a review of the party’s activities in a report for the January 1929 meeting that announced the PSE’s affiliation with the Comintern this was reported as one of the party’s significant successes.¹³³ The conflict over affiliation with the Comintern seemed to change Paredes’ personality, or at least peoples’ perception of him. The United States Embassy in Quito reported that Paredes had lost the prestige he had previously enjoyed. “He is regarded as a fanatical, visionary, impractical man who has become obnoxious to the people by his revolutionary activities,” the Embassy claimed.¹³⁴ The

¹³⁰ Muñoz, *Testimonio de lucha*, 63.

¹³¹ Quoted in Rodas, *Partido Socialista*, 40.

¹³² Donoso, *El 15 de noviembre de 1922 y la fundación del socialismo*, vol. 2, 117.

¹³³ Muñoz, *Testimonio de lucha*, 55; “Síntesis histórica de Partido Socialista Ecuatoriana”, 15, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/pse-ic12ene29.pdf>

¹³⁴ Letter from William Dawson to Secretary of State, Washington, no. 921, March 10, 1933, NARA RG 59, 822.00B/43, 5.

division, ultimately neither personal nor ideological, was permanent.

Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano (PCE)

Not only did 1931 bring a split between the socialists and Communists, but the Communists themselves also faced deep divisions in their ranks. In addition to the PSE, Section of the Third Communist International in Quito, two other Communist groups also operated in Ecuador. In May 1931, Carlos Coello Serrano and Carlos Guevara Moreno formed a group in Guayaquil that they called the Communist Party, Section of the Communist International. In Milagro—a sugar growing area with a militant history of labor organizing—Antonio Ruiz Flores who, since 1929 was the secretary general of the *Bloque Obrero y Campesino of Milagro*, headed up a third group. The South American Bureau of the Comintern refused to recognize any of the groups, and instead called for a unification conference. The first week of August 1931, fifteen delegates from Guayaquil, Quito, Milagro, and Riobamba met and agreed to unify their efforts with the party's base in Guayaquil.¹³⁵ According to the United States Embassy, this was because the party numbers had plunged in Quito while they were growing rapidly on the coast.¹³⁶ At its second congress in Quito on October 6-15, 1931, the group that had taken over the PSE formally changed its name to the *Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano* (PCE). Aguirre argues that the lack of published statutes or a political program from this meeting points to ongoing divisions in the party.¹³⁷ In fact, the leaders from the Guayaquil group soon left to join the government of conservative populist caudillo José María Velasco Ibarra.¹³⁸

As the Quito group gained domination among the Communists, it

¹³⁵ Gilberto Molina Correa, *Enrique Gil Gilbert notas para un ensayo* (Ambato: Edit. Pío XII, 1974), 57; Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 221-22.

¹³⁶ Letter from William Dawson to Secretary of State, Washington, no. 921, March 10, 1933, NARA RG 59, 822.00B/43, 5.

¹³⁷ Aguirre, "El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador", 99.

¹³⁸ Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, 237.

stepped up its work in indigenous communities. As the PCE and indigenous organizational demands converged, the two forces became natural allies in a unified struggle against the Ecuadorian oligarchy. In the 1933 presidential election, Paredes ran as the “candidate of the workers, peasants, Indians, and soldiers” and promised bread, work, land, and liberty for the people.¹³⁹ His campaign literature noted that indigenous workers knew and appreciated him because of his involvement with their movements, and that he remained a symbol in the struggle against large landowners and exploitation. He sought to build a “worker-peasant bloc,” calling on the urban proletariat to “to ally intimately with the peasants in their common fight against the capitalism-feudal order.” For years he had worked with indigenous communities, but now his language changed to match that of the Communist International. Paredes defended “Indians and Blacks, not only as exploited and oppressed classes, but also as oppressed nationalities.” Indicating Communist dedication to the rights of subalterns excluded from political discourse, the alliance announced that it would fight via its elected representatives in congress and through revolutionary action of the masses on the streets to pressure extension of the vote to illiterates, passage of minimum wage legislation, return of land and water to rural communities, and the cancellation of agricultural worker debts to haciendas.¹⁴⁰ Although parts of the platform, including the call to expropriate hacienda land, suppression of debts, formation of indigenous republics, and the arming of a popular militia apparently come from a thesis which the Communist International had adopted, there are also aspects which indicate an application of these general ideas to a local

¹³⁹ “Ricardo Paredes, Candidato del Partido Comunista,” Imprenta La Económica, [1933], Private Collection of Leonardo J. Muñoz, http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/paredes1933_es.php I would like to thank Sandra Fernández Muñoz and Jorge Canizares for facilitating access to this collection.

¹⁴⁰ “Manifiesto del Bloque Obrero-Campesino” (Quito, May 2, 1932), Hojas Volantes, 1921-1932, D. Polit Partid., 247, Biblioteca Ecuatoriana Aurelio Espinosa Pólit (hereafter BEAEP), Cotacollao, Ecuador
<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/bloque2mayo32.pdf>

situation.¹⁴¹ Significantly, agrarian reform headed the list of demands and was to continue to be the principal goal of Indigenous organizations for the remainder of the twentieth century.

Conservative caudillo José María Velasco Ibarra won the 1933 elections with 51,848 votes (his first of five times as president), while Paredes came in a distant fourth with only 696 votes.¹⁴² At the time, an observer commented that this was only the third time that Ecuador had held a completely free election.¹⁴³ The total number of votes cast in that election, however, represents only 2.5 percent of Ecuador's population of about 2.5 million. Paredes denounced a "bourgeois democracy" that "in reality is a masked dictatorship of the dominant classes." He complained about a failure to count votes in Cayambe and Esmeraldas, areas of high indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian population density and strong Communist support, and threatened an electoral boycott.¹⁴⁴ With their base largely disenfranchised, it would be difficult to gain power through electoral means.

Despite these difficulties and divisions within the movement, Paredes proudly proclaimed that Communists would never enter into compromises with the bourgeoisie. The Communists had experienced success in building a strong Communist movement as demonstrated by uprisings in Quito, Guayaquil, Milagro, Riobamba, and Cayambe.¹⁴⁵ The new party was determined to retain a base in the subaltern masses. The Communists were the only ones willing to continue serious and dedicated political work in rural indigenous communities. When the PCE's new newspaper *Frente Obrero* printed the classic Marxist slogan "workers of

¹⁴¹ Communist International, *The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies*, 59.

¹⁴² Quintero, *El mito del populismo en el Ecuador*, 282.

¹⁴³ Alfonso Rumazo González, *El Congreso de 1933; para la historia del Ecuador*, Biblioteca ecuatoriana, vol. x (Quito: Edit. Bolívar, 1934), 211.

¹⁴⁴ "Comunicación enviada por el candidato comunista," *El Día* (Quito), December 12, 1933, quoted in Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 230.

¹⁴⁵ Aguirre, "El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y

the world unite!” in both Spanish and Kichwa on its masthead it was not empty or opportunistic rhetoric.¹⁴⁶ Rather, the slogan elevated the significance of indigenous cultures and reflected the importance of rural communities to their struggles.

Refounding the Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano (PSE), 1933

After Paredes transformed the PSE into a Communist party, socialists who opposed subjecting party policies to foreign control regrouped to form a new *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano*. The group called for a revolutionary socialism relevant to Ecuador’s national reality because they had “already gone through the infantile communism of extremist texts and foreign utopias.”¹⁴⁷ On January 1, 1933, thirteen provincial delegations met in the *Primer Congreso Socialista Nacional* in Quito at the *Casa del Obrero*.¹⁴⁸ Under the leadership of Luis F. Maldonado Estrada as secretary general, the Socialist Party grew in strength. Ayala Mora maintains that this wing of the socialist left became “the most dynamic pole of ideological influence of Ecuador.”¹⁴⁹ The new PSE, however, continued to be divided between a strong reformist tendency and a smaller leftist revolutionary trend, and the two groups commonly disputed for control over the party.¹⁵⁰ Even party militants such as Ayala Mora who denied that the Communist/socialist split was along left/right lines now spoke of such a

comunista del Ecuador”, 98.

¹⁴⁶ “Proletarios de todos los paises, unidos!” (Spanish) and “Tucuy llactacunapac huacchacuna, shuella tucuichic!” (Kichwa). See *Frente Obrero* (Quincenario, Organo del Comité Regional del Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano, Sección de la Internacional Comunista, Quito) 1, no. 3 (October 1934): 1. Other Communist party activists also advocated the publication of literature in Indigenous languages, including Guaraní and Kichwa. See *Los partidos comunistas de América del Sur y del Caribe y el movimiento sindical revolucionario*, Doctrina y documentación (Barcelona: Publicaciones Edeya, 1933), 51.

¹⁴⁷ *Socialista*, quoted in Aguirre, “El marxismo, la revolución y los partidos socialista y comunista del Ecuador”, 99.

¹⁴⁸ Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 222.

¹⁴⁹ Enrique Ayala Mora, *Resumen de historia del Ecuador*, Biblioteca General de Cultura, Vol. 1 (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1993), 94.

¹⁵⁰ Ycaza, *Historia del movimiento obrero ecuatoriana*, 224.

split in the Socialist Party, with the “left wing” embracing an ideology closer to that of the Communists with the logical exception of its “international dependence.”¹⁵¹ The dominant current continued the reformist tradition of nineteenth-century liberal radicalism, including leading struggles for secularism and educational reform.

Although the Communist left subsequently was most closely associated with indigenous concerns, the reconstituted Socialist Party in 1933 also included in its platform a demand for the “liquidation of the Indian problem and for its economic, social, political, and cultural exaltation.”¹⁵² Three years later the party declared that it would fight “in favor of the Indian and *montuvio*, subjected to the inhuman exploitation of the semi-feudal regime that persists in the fields.”¹⁵³ Reflecting a certain growth in its thinking, in 1938 the socialist congress expanded this statement to note that “the indigenous race, knocked down by the exploitation of which they have been victim since the conquest, will not only enjoy the same rights of other ethnic groups in the country, but rather they will receive the state’s economic support and cultural attention for its complete social liberation.”¹⁵⁴ Despite the stated commitment to indigenous issues, it was not expressed as visibly or forcefully as in the Communist Party. Naturally, they did not use the language of indigenous nationalities, a discourse that remained the exclusive domain of the Communists. While the Communists actively organized in indigenous communities, the PSE remained a largely urban, middle-class party of intellectuals and problems based primarily in Quito. In the 1948 party congress, for example, 20 of 34 delegates were lawyers.

¹⁵¹ Ayala Mora, *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano en la historia*, 13.

¹⁵² Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, *Estatutos, programas ideológicos de acción inmediata del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano* (Ambato: Cap. A.M. Garcés, 1933), 9.

¹⁵³ Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, *Estatutos; Declaración de Principios del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Editorial de El Correo, 1936), 4. *Montuvio* refers to poor coastal peasants.

¹⁵⁴ Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano, *Estatutos, declaración de principios y programa mínimo del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Editorial Editora

Indigenous issues and Ecuadorian Communists

After reviewing this long history of internal divisions, conflicts, failed alliances, and intrigues, it would be tempting to conclude that the Communists, and in particular Ricardo Paredes, had made a serious error in deciding to ally with the Communist International. The resulting party always remained quite small, while the socialists grew into a potent force able to contest state power. Would it not logically be preferable to build a mass party rooted in local realities rather than adhering to a centralized policy of an organization based on a far-off continent?

This might be an easy argument to accept were it not for the PCE's deep engagement with and dedication to indigenous issues, the most marginalized of Ecuador's subaltern masses and the people for whom communism specifically held out the promise of liberation. When viewed through this lens, it begins to appear that perhaps the Communists had pursued a correct path, and rather than functioning as an agent of foreign imperialism the Comintern was a distant but driving force behind liberation struggles.

Once the Comintern raised the issue of indigenous nationalities, it became an urgent and pressing issue across South America. For example, the Bolivian Communist Party stated in 1932 that

The indigenous problem, completely ignored by "leftist" intellectuals, undervalued and misunderstood by anarchist intellectuals and, it goes without saying, by yellow union bosses, was solidly proposed by our grouping in La Paz.¹⁵⁵

Leftists in Ecuador also exhibited an appreciation for the role ethnicity played in the structure of class societies. "The working class is subjected to

Moderna, 1939), 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Revista Comunista* (Buenos Aires), October 1932, p. 99, cited in Liborio Justo, *Bolivia la revolución derrotada (del Tahuantinsuyu a la insurrección de abril de 1952 y las masacres de mayo y setiembre de 1965: raíz, proceso y autopsia de la primera revolución proletaria de América Latina)*, 2. ed. (Buenos Aires: Juárez Editor, 1971), 119.

a double yoke,” Paredes noted. They face “racial oppression (prejudice as the ‘inferior race’), and economic oppression.” This double oppression led to a growing “consciousness of their distinct class interests.”¹⁵⁶ Paredes recognized the nature of ethnic and economic structures in the Andes, and argued that they led to a high degree of class consciousness among the Indians. Under Comintern guidance, activists increasingly spoke of the presence of oppressed Indigenous nationalities in Ecuador.¹⁵⁷

In Ecuador, Communist actions reflected what Mariátegui said in neighboring Peru: “The problem is not racial, but social and economic; but the race has its role and the means to confront it.”¹⁵⁸ There is little evidence of Communists decrying race as a “false consciousness” that needed to be replaced with class rhetoric as seemingly became the case in neighboring Peru and has often been assumed to be the case in Ecuador as well.¹⁵⁹ Rather, as would become common in the 1980s, the Indigenous peasantry was seen as facing the “double dimension” of class exploitation and racial discrimination that needed to be addressed on both fronts.¹⁶⁰

Similar to Mariátegui, Ecuadorian leftists understood that “the indian peasants will only understand individuals from their own midsts

¹⁵⁶ Paredes, “El movimiento obrero en el Ecuador”, 77, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-isr-agosto28.php>

¹⁵⁷ Presídium de la Conferencia de Cabecillas Indígenas, “Hoy se Clasura la Conferencia de Cabecillas Indígenas” (Quito: Editorial de El Correo, November 7, 1935), Hojas Volantes, 1933-1938, 298, BEAEP

<http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/1935nov7.pdf>; Conferencia de Cabecillas Indios, “Indicaciones,” *Nucanchic Allpa* 1:8 (March 17, 1936): 2, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/nucanchic/1936marzo17.pdf>

¹⁵⁸ José Carlos Mariátegui, “El problema indígena”, 159.

¹⁵⁹ Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, 1919-1991* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 140, 187, 193, 312.

¹⁶⁰ Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), *Las nacionalidades indígenas en el Ecuador: Nuestro proceso organizativo*, 2d ed., 1992: 500 años de resistencia india, no. 0 (Quito: Ediciones Tincui-Abya-Yala, 1989), 223, 261, 281. Also see Xavier Albó, “From MNRistas to Kataristas to Katari,” in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean World, 18th to 20th Centuries*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987): 379-419; Shannan L. Mattiace, *To See With Two Eyes: Peasant Activism & Indian Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

who speak to them in their own language” and proposed training Indian leaders who would then return to work for the “emancipation of this race.” Leftist outsiders would not indoctrinate the indians as to the nature of the demands they would make, but rather their role would be to help give an organizational cohesion to those demands. Pointing to a long history of insurrections, Mariátegui rejected the notion that Indians were incapable of a revolutionary struggle. Indigenous uprisings already had demonstrated a remarkable level of resistance in rural communities. Once Indigenous peoples were introduced to a revolutionary consciousness, they would be unequaled in their struggle for socialism.¹⁶¹

Ideologically, the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Marxists, as well as those elsewhere in the Andes, were not that far apart on how they viewed the indigenous question. Paredes and Mariátegui both agreed on the revolutionary potential of the indigenous masses, and believed that they were capable of leading themselves to liberation in alliance with a class-based party. Nevertheless, over the course of the twentieth century indigenous organizing efforts took radically different directions in the two countries. Following Mariátegui’s lead, Peruvian Marxists pursued a class-based approach that downplayed ethnic identities. In accordance with Comintern dictates, their Ecuadorian counterparts appealed to the discourse of indigenous nationalities. Over time, indigenous peoples claimed this language as their own, and used it to build one of the strongest social movements in the Americas.

¹⁶¹ Mariátegui, “El problema indígena”, 158; José Carlos Mariátegui, “El problema de las razas en América Latina” in *Apuntes para una interpretación marxista de la historia social del Perú*, ed. Ricardo Martínez de la Torre, t. 2 (Lima: Empresa Editora Peruana, 1948): 440-41.