

IV.2: REGIONAL MATERIALS AND STUDIES

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The “International of Moscow” or the “International of Buenos Aires”? The Comintern and the Paraguayan Communist Party

Abstract: This article retraces the almost unknown and ideologically distorted history of the Communist Party of Paraguay. It describes the particularities of the small, early communist movement and analyses the process of expulsion of the first party leader Lucas Ibarrola triggered by Vittorio Codovilla in the name of the South American Secretariat of the Communist International. Unexpectedly, the Bolivian-Paraguayan „Chaco“-War highlighted the international role of PCP but served as a blueprint of the didactics and inconstancies of the new Stalinist standards.

The crisis in the Paraguayan Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Paraguayo*, PCP) in the 1960s had caused a discussion on the details of its foundation. The “Marxist-Leninist” part of the CP leadership accused the General Secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the PCP, Oscar Creydt, of serious falsifications of the historical truth and of intentions to create a cult of his personality based on his role of “Party founder”. To counter these accusations, the adversaries of Creydt sent their representative to Moscow to study the documents of the PCP and the Comintern papers accumulated in the Central Party Archive of the CPSU.¹ The PCP itself, which had been an underground party for some decades, exposed to severe prosecutions by the authorities, did not and could not have any documents allowing an objective and serious analysis of its historical past.

Later on, the CP historian Hugo Campos restored some aspects of the party’s history based on his research in Moscow. His book, together with the historical parts of the studies done by the Soviet historians Aleksandr Petruchin, Evgenii Churilov and Vitalii Kharitonov, is still the

¹ Currently the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), Moscow.

main source of information about the first years of the PCP.² However, these studies did not shed light on the highly important issue of the influence of the Comintern and its regional body (the South American Secretariat) on the formation of Paraguayan communism, as well as on the relationship between the national section of the “world party” and its leadership was left outside of above mentioned researches. The present article has the intent to cover these aspects based on previously unused archival documents.

The PCP considers February 19, 1928 as the official date of its foundation,³ although Communist activity had started some years before.⁴ In late 1924, the Communist group of Asunción sent a delegate to Buenos Aires in order to meet the leaders of the Communist Party of Argentina (*Partido Comunista de la Argentina*, PCA) and to discuss with them the issues of the development of a revolutionary working-class movement in Paraguay. Also, their plan was to organize a trip to Paraguay for some Argentinean “comrades” so that they might assist them in the creation of a Communist party.⁵ However, the PCA as well as the South American Secretariat of the Comintern have done practically nothing to support the dispersed Communist groups of the neighboring country. Only during the preparations for the 4th Congress of the Red International of Trade Unions (1928) did the General Secretary of the PCA, Pedro Romo, establish contacts with Moisés Drelijman, one of the Paraguayan communist leaders, in order to get to know about the perspectives of the workers movement and, consequently, the possibility to conduct Communist activity. Romo sent some propaganda materials and instructions for the reorganization of the Asunción Communist group and achieved a goal impossible to realize for the South American Secretariat under the direction of José Penelón – the newly founded Communist Party of Paraguay declared its affiliation with the Comintern on February 19, 1928.

The Party has announced the creation of a workers’, peasants’ and soldiers’ government after the social revolution as its political aim; later on, the Communists planned to build “full socialism [...] and its posterior transformation to Communism”.⁶ Even though these words did not change the political practice of the small Communist groups in Paraguay, politically they were pulled from now on into the orbit of World Communism.⁷ While Lucas Ibarrola informed the Comintern about 3.000 adherents throughout the country, this was not even close to the truth. Effectively, there was only a group of 20 militants in Asunción which had elected a Central Committee. During its session, this Central Committee dealt with the admission of individual members to the Party – another hint towards the small membership number within the PCP. Almost all Paraguayan Communists knew each other personally.

² Hugo Campos: *Panorama del Paraguay*, [Asunción], Editorial Alas, 1970, p. 205; Aleksandr A. Petruchin, Evgenii M. Churilov: *Kebracho – znachit stoikii*, Moskva, Politizdat, 1981; Vilatii A. Kharitonov: *Paragvai. Voennopolitseyskaia diktatura i politicheskai bor'ba*, Moskva, Nauka, 1970.

³ K. I. Zarodov (ed.): *Kommunisty mira – o svoikh partiakh*, Praga, Mir i sotsializm, 1976, p. 188.

⁴ The materials of the National Preparatory Conference for the III Congress of the PCP contain some information about the activity of the Marxist group in Asunción in 1922-1923 and its struggle against the government which “was playing the role of the footman of the American and English imperialism” (Campos, *Panorama*, p. 205; *Relatorio sobre la actividad enemiga de Oscar Creydt*, s.l., abril 1967, p. 16).

⁵ RGASPI, *fond 495, opis' 117, delo 2, list 3*.

⁶ A los habitantes de la República. Partido Comunista. Sección paraguaya de la Internacional Comunista. In: *Los Comunistas* (Asunción), 19 February 1928, as cited in: Petrukhin/Churilov, *Kebracho*, p. 9.

⁷ In the meantime, Ibarrola confirmed that there was no Party program, that the work was carried on only sporadically and the only intent to make the CP attractive for the masses was the slogan “The land to its former proprietary – the Indians – who are periodically pulled out from the land”. The PCP leader had to confess: “[T]he Party doesn't exist, organizationally speaking” (The declarations and information of Comrade Lucas Evangelista Ibarrola from Paraguay, 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/5, 1; Protocol no. 3 of the session of the CC of the PCP, 27 January 1929; Protocol no. 4 of the session of the CC of the PCP, 5 February 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 18, 20).

The Paraguayan question also was an important issue for the inter-factions struggle within the PCA which paralyzed the activity of the South American Secretariat of the Comintern. Romo, who was one of the leaders of the majority faction, managed to demonstrate to Moscow that the Comintern structures can operate successfully on the continent. At the same time, he pointed to Penelón being an obstacle for the organizing work of the South American Secretariat; Romo did particularly stress in his report to the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) that he was obliged to do so “because of the absence of the South American Secretariat which is nowadays reduced to what I am doing personally”.⁸ At the same time, Romo claimed that the Manifesto issued by the Paraguayan communists was an exclusive fruit of their own work and was prepared by local initiative; by that, he wouldn't assume political responsibility for the activity of the CP of Paraguay: “I don't express my own opinion over this issue, *as long as I have no respective powers*”.⁹ That was an unambiguous hint to the ECCI that these powers would be necessary to give the activities of the South American Secretariat a new boost.

Moscow perceived the note about the creation of a new section of the 3rd International in South America with great enthusiasm. It was considered quite important since it coincided with the efforts to widen propaganda activity before the 4th World Congress of the Comintern, and at the same time the situation and the perspectives of the revolutionary movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries were considered a crucial question. Thus, the Secretariat of the ECCI hastened to respond to the Manifesto of the CP of Paraguay and sent a letter to its Executive, expressing hopes for a successful start of its revolutionary activities among the exploited workers' and peasants' masses of Paraguay, and asking to maintain close contact with Moscow while the relations with the South American Secretariat were to be kept as well.¹⁰

At the same time, ECCI secretary Jules Humbert-Droz advised the South American Secretariat to develop contacts with the newly-born CP and to help it within their possibilities.¹¹ However, this message hardly had any effect, as Penelón had almost brought the work of the Secretariat to a halt while devoting himself to inner-party struggle; the CPA leaders and South American Secretariat members Victorio Codovilla and Rodolfo Ghioldi also were focused on the inner-party struggle, and the CPA leaders and militants who participated in the discussion on the Argentinean party crisis in Moscow were still on their way back to Buenos Aires. The only acting member of the Secretariat at the moment was Pedro Romo, and it was him who had initiated the Paraguayans' letter to the Comintern.

The “World Communist Party” has known almost nothing about the new candidate to be affiliated, one more proof of Penelón's inefficiency as the head of the South American Secretariat.¹² The head of the Latin Secretariat of the ECCI had to ask the Paraguayan Communist leader Lucas Ibarrola to send a report on the economic and political situation in the country, the number of the Party's militants, its organizational structure, the Communist

⁸ Report of P. Romo to the ECCI, 12 March 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 2ob.

⁹ Ibid. Italics by the authors of the current article.

¹⁰ Manifesto of the ECCI Secretariat to the Executive Committee of the Paraguayan Communist Party. Moscow, 19 April 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/1, 2.

¹¹ J. Humbert-Droz to the South American Secretariat of the Comintern, 19 April 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/19, 1.

¹² The search for new adherents for the Communist cause had to be one of the priorities of the South American Secretariat's activity. However, Penelón didn't make any notable efforts to expand the Comintern's sphere of influence in the continent within two years when he was the head of the South American Secretariat. For more details on Penelón, see: Lazar JEIFETS: *Missiia Vil'iamsa i rozhdienie penelonizma*, Sankt-Peterburg, Nauka, 2004.

periodicals and the possibilities for legal work, on trade unions and peasants' organizations in Paraguay and the party's influence within these organizations. Moscow was also interested in the issue of imperialist penetration and in the existence of an anti-imperialist movement.¹³

In his response, Ibarrola took a quite realistic attitude to estimate the situation of the Paraguayan workers' movement and noted that it had existed for a long time, but it was not organized and had neither a definite program of action nor any visible ideals. According to Ibarrola, the reason to create a Communist Party was the conviction that the only effective way to achieve the goals of the workers' movement was "the one opened already in Europe". However, he confirmed that there were no relations between Paraguayan Communists and the world communist movement because of fears to be included into the sphere of "influence of the Communist International, which would cause a permanent overshadowing of Communist activity by the government and even the bourgeois mass media".¹⁴ The leader of the newly born CP ensured that it would be truly dangerous to provoke the government which was "afraid of Argentine and Russian influence" and thus would not hesitate to launch anticommunist persecutions; thus the Communists would try to carry on their propaganda work in a cautious form without open declaration of their views and without establishing international links so irritant for the local political elites.¹⁵ This unwillingness to maintain contacts with the PCA was the logical consequence of Ibarrola's personal attitude who considered the PCA as a "Party of squallers" and who limited the international links of his party to correspondence with Penelón.¹⁶

The PCP's propaganda work outside its own ranks was almost invisible, and the workers had no time to attend the meetings because of lack of free time. The Communists, however, did not try to penetrate into the masses and only organized some reunions and meetings with governmental consent. The "tutors" from Buenos Aires had adverted them that it was impossible to limit themselves to talks about the social revolution while the workers did not understand what this meant. The PCA leaders wanted their adherents in Paraguay to express the immediate demands of the working class, and taught them the basics of propaganda and organization.

The Paraguayan Communists also tried to explain Communism to the indigenous peasants as "a simple expression of peasant communal ideas" (the land and the means of production should belong to all people, and exploiters have to disappear), while their propaganda line among city workers was slightly different: the PCP was speaking about the eight-hours working day, the socialization and a rise of salaries, trying to make clear that the socialists only wanted to get some parliamentary positions just as all other parties, while the Communists had started a permanent and open struggle with the purpose to liberate the workers.¹⁷

The Paraguayan communists considered the conditions in which they developed their struggle to be unfavourable because of the country's economic situation. The proletariat,

¹³ Manifesto of the ECCI Secretariat to the Executive Committee of the Paraguayan Communist Party..., RGASPI, 495/117/1, 2.

¹⁴ L. Ibarrola to J. Humbert-Droz, 5 June 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 4-5.

¹⁵ [L. Ibarrola], Memorandum, 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/5, 3.

¹⁶ CC of the PCP to the Latin Country Secretariat of the ECCI, 5 July 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 39

¹⁷ Declaration and information of Comrade Lucas Evangelista Ibarrola from Paraguay, 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/5, 1-2.

“which was meeting Communist ideas with interest”, was, from their point of view, “badly adapted for struggle, and reluctant to follow the path of self-sacrifices for our cause”.¹⁸ At the same moment, Ibarrola noted without any modesty that the achieved successes were “the fruit of efforts of the few persons who were heading the Committee» (of the PCP), and proposed, in obvious contradiction with Comintern theses, that intellectuals should lead the party since “[w]orkers are not prepared yet”. The leadership of the CP of Paraguay consisted, in fact, of a tax inspector, two jewellers, a petty trader and a shoemaker. The Asunción Communist group also included two students and one employee. According to Ibarrola’s estimation, the Executive’s social composition didn’t differ from that of the party.¹⁹

The PCP’s ideological attitude and practical activities did not cause much enthusiasm among the new leaders of the South American Secretariat. There were, at least, three reasons for this: first of all, the young Communist Party didn’t suit to the Comintern’s “21 conditions”, secondly, the new head of the Secretariat, Victorio Codovilla, was not satisfied with Pedro Romo’s role as a founder of new sections of the 3rd International. And, last but not least, Codovilla did not like Lucas Ibarrola, and had immediately declared war on him. However, he had to accept the fact of Ibarrola travelling to Moscow as a delegate to the 6th World Congress, although he was sure that the General Secretary of the PCP lacked a Communist mentality; the motives of Codovilla’s decision were obvious – “the comrades-workers with higher political level”²⁰ had no possibilities to leave Paraguay. The South American Secretariat still tried to make Ibarrola return from Argentine to his country and to find a substitute for him, but there was neither money nor time for such an operation. Thus, Codovilla concluded that it was necessary to send this delegate who was, “unfortunately, also the General Secretary of the Party”.²¹ The South American Secretariat estimated the situation in the PCP as quite characteristic for the colonies where the workers’ and Communist movement was very often headed by intellectuals, and in consequence the Comintern regional secretariat put on its own agenda to provide the Paraguayan left-wingers with “a personal aid”, to form and capacitate the personnel for future leadership of a “mass Communist movement”.

The situation seemed paradoxical. While Ibarrola was on his way to Europe together with the PCA delegation and planned to participate in the World Congress of the 3rd International proving by his presence that the Comintern was gaining more influence in South America, the regional representatives of the Comintern were making plans to oust him from the PCP leadership. On September 1, 1928, the 6th World Congress approved a resolution confirming that the PCP was a section of the Comintern without any reservations,²² but already on July 5 the South American Secretariat organized a two-weeks trip of the Secretariat member Astrogildo Pereira (the General Secretary of the CP of Brazil) to Asunción with the purpose to “reorganize the Party and to lift its political level”.²³

¹⁸ L. Ibarrola to J. Humbert-Droz, 5 June 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 4.

¹⁹ Declaration and information of Comrade Lucas Evangelista Ibarrola from Paraguay, 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/5, 2.

²⁰ The proletarian background of the delegate was one of the prerequisites.

²¹ Report no. 4 of the South American Secretariat of the Comintern to the Latin Country Secretariat of the Comintern, 5 July 1928. RGASPI, 503/1/19, 21.

²² While at the same time, some conditions were highlighted in the Congress resolution concerning the CP of Ecuador and the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Colombia (VI kongress Kominterna. Stenograficheskie otchet. Tezisy, resolutsii, postanovleniia, vozzvaniia, Moskva-Leningrad, Gosizdat, 1929, p. 174).

²³ Information no. 4 of the South American Secretariat to the Latin Country Secretariat of the Comintern, 5 July 1928. RGASPI, 503/1/19, 21.

The "Ibarrola case" was a perfect opportunity for the South American Secretariat (and its secretary) to demonstrate the new character of relationships between the supreme bodies of the Comintern on the continent and the Comintern's national sections, and to show the functioning of international party discipline. Codovilla as an experienced party bureaucrat understood perfectly that some serious arguments were required and that the initiative of the Secretariat headed by him might be insufficient for such changes. That is why the Argentinean communists organized a Manifesto issued by some Paraguayan communists addressed to the CP of Uruguay which, in turn, notified the South American Secretariat about serious discontent with Ibarrola's trip to the USSR within the PCP.²⁴ These activities gave the Secretariat official reasons to send a delegate to analyze the local conditions and "to orientate the comrades".

However, these recommendations remained on paper for a long time. Only after Ibarrola's return from Moscow, the inner-party crisis started and caused immediate reaction of the Comintern and its Secretariat located in Buenos Aires. There was no more time to wait as the situation within the workers' movement changed drastically due to external circumstances. After the Paraguayan army attacked the Bolivian fortress Vanguardia in December 1928, the relations between the two nations were seriously deteriorated and war was imminent.²⁵ This made the PCP appear among the priority issues on the Comintern's agenda. This young party, according to Humbert-Droz, appeared to be "in a very responsible situation, [...] it came to be the first of our sections which has to carry out the historical task of applying the Communist tactics against the war."²⁶

Ibarrola stressed his understanding of the influence of the Paraguayan-Bolivian conflict on the class struggle in the country already in the first report to the Comintern: the capture by Americans and Englishmen of lands in a disputed zone raised a feeling of patriotism among Paraguayans protesting against foreign pressure, and created a "fruitful soil for our activity".²⁷ At the same time, he noted that the "anti-*yanquismo* had become almost a patriotic religious cult of the population because of the international problems and the important role played by Americans in these issues"²⁸ (he referred to the moral support of Bolivia by the United States).

At that moment the Comintern did not notice (or did not want to notice) the "non-Marxist" approach of the PCP's Secretary General to this extraordinarily important issue. Only in the conditions of rising opposition, when chauvinistic sentiments were warmed up by the governments of both countries as well as by British and US monopolists competing for influence in the areas of conflict,²⁹ did the South American Secretary sharply condemn Ibarrola's attitude. The Secretariat regarded the Bolivian-Paraguayan conflict as a possibility to pull the masses out of the influence of governmental chauvinism and to explain to them the inter-imperialist contradictions as the real essence of the conflict, and, finally, to extend anti-war activity in Paraguay. The South American Secretariat was narrowing the

²⁴ Protocol of the session of the South American Secretariat of the Communist International, 14 July 1928. RGASPI, 503/1/21, 53.

²⁵ N. P. Kalmykov (ed.): *Istoriia Latinskoi Ameriki. 1918-1945*, Moskva, Nauka, 1999, pp. 239-240.

²⁶ The Secretary of the Latin American Country Secretariat of the Comintern to the Secretariat of the Communist Party of Paraguay, 18 February 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/1, 5.

²⁷ L. Ibarrola to J. Humbert-Droz, 5 June 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 7.

²⁸ [L. Ibarrola], Memorandum, 1928. RGASPI, 495/117/5, 3.

²⁹ For details, see: L. Iu. Korableva: *Vmeshatel'stvo Ligi Natsii v uregulirovaniie boliviisko-paragvaivskogo konflikta 1928-1938 gg.* In: *Latinoamerikanskii istoricheskii almanakh* (2000), 1, p. 133.

interpretation of the Bolivian-Paraguayan conflict and focused on the inter-imperialist contradictions as the only cause of tension. Victorio Codovilla attacked furiously the attitude of Juan Greco, the editor of the newspaper of the CP of Uruguay, who had pointed out the aggressiveness of Bolivia, and denied that Bolivia unilaterally caused the conflict. The Communist Youth International representative in the South American Secretariat, "Pierre" (t.i. Zinovii Rabinovich), insisted that it was necessary to avoid the vision of the conflict as "a war between an anti-imperialist country and a country which became an agent of imperialism".³⁰

In the meantime, the PCP (or rather Ibarrola) tried to escape the onset of governmental persecution and advocated cautious steps, while the South American Secretariat of the Comintern considered this attitude as passive and insisted in advancing slogans calling for the fight against the imperialist war and for its transformation into an anti-imperialist and class war. The Secretariat invoked the motto of brotherhood of Bolivian and Paraguayan workers, and for the struggle for the Workers' and Peasants' government and for the Federation of Workers' and Peasants' Republics of Latin America.³¹

The PCP appeared to enter in a vicious circle. The acceptance of such a strategy in the given conditions meant for Paraguayan communists to become pariahs in a society possessed by a patriotic delirium. While Ibarrola's intents to adapt to the situation and to interpret the fight against Bolivia as an anti-US movement inevitably would lead to a rupture with the Comintern's continental and worldwide general line, the Paraguayan party seemed to be a divided among its adherents. Moreover, the situation was further complicated by subjective factors as the head of the South American Secretariat did his best to oust Ibarrola from the PCP leadership. This was demonstrated not only by means of attaching negative political labels to Ibarrola's activity,³² but also by Codovilla's conduct to address the leaders of the PCP ignoring the party's General Secretary. In effect, the activity of the South American Secretariat was an open violation of the basic principles of discipline within the Comintern and destroyed the inner-party discipline of the PCP. The General Secretary's response was swift: he expressed his unwillingness to read the South American Secretariat's critical remarks to the concepts he had put forward in the article "My Journey to Russia", as these remarks were neither sent to the Secretariat of the PCP nor to him personally. Ibarrola also offended Codovilla in public calling him an "old Italian swindler".³³

Such a behaviour suited Codovilla very much, as it gave him a pretense to raise once again the question of sending a delegate to Paraguay in order to liquidate the crisis, which, in fact, had been provoked by himself. In order to heighten the tensions, he tried to convince the members of the Secretariat that Ibarrola "has intimidated all good comrades and was leaning

³⁰ Protocol no. 15 of the session of the South American Secretariat of the Comintern, 19 December 1928. RGASPI, 503/1/21, 121, 123.

³¹ Materials concerning the activity of the [Communist] parties prepared for the next Plenum (For the Preparatory Commission of the first point of the agenda). The C.P. of Paraguay. RGASPI, 495/117/ 2, 16.

³² The South American Secretariat characterized Ibarrola as petty-bourgeois declassed "intellectual", vain and incapable to conduct serious work. He was qualified as a caudillo of the individualist type who had absolutely nothing to do with Communism. The Comintern functionaries made Ibarrola responsible for the situation of the PCP which was "a small group of comrades, rather than a real Party in the organic sense of this word". The analysis of the organizational condition of the Paraguayan party just repeated the conclusions made by the same Ibarrola in his reports to Moscow; but now the responsibility was personified and assigned to the leader of the PCP. See: *Ibid.*

³³ Protocol no. 15 of the session of the South American Secretariat of the Comintern, 19 December 1928. RGASPI, 503/1/21, 120; CC of the PCP to the Latin Country Secretariat of the ECCL, 5 July 1929. RGASPI, 503/1/6, 40

on a group of supporters among students”, and threatened “elements with good Communist attitudes” with expulsion. “This is a serious treat at a moment of obvious military danger”, insisted Codovilla, and, finally, he achieved his goal – the Secretariat approved the idea to send a delegate to Paraguay. Moreover, Rodolfo Ghioldi, another member of the Secretariat, proposed in order to avoid possible enormous errors to send someone “with power”, i.e. Codovilla himself, who immediately asked to give him all the rights to “help” the PCP members in their anti-war work. Finally it was Codovilla who went to Paraguay.³⁴

Sabotage of the PCP’s funding was another crucial element in the South American Secretariat’s attack against Ibarrola. Money already had been sent by the ECCI,³⁵ yet Codovilla was not passing it on to the PCP in order to raise a negative attitude within the party against its General Secretary.³⁶ It was made clear that no money would be delivered to Asunción until the party would oust Ibarrola from leadership. The latter considered the financial issue the main reason for the conflict with the Secretariat and insisted that Codovilla had demanded from the Paraguayan delegate (i.e. himself) to ask the Comintern for money, while he was sure that the aim of the journey was “to represent the Party and the proletariat of the country, [...] to elaborate a plan of attack against capital and the war”.³⁷

Finally, Codovilla arrived in Asunción without contacting Ibarrola beforehand, and immediately established contacts with the General Secretary’s opponents. At the meeting of the Central Committee of the PCP on December 28, 1928 (organized without Ibarrola’s permission), Codovilla outlined a “political platform to be used by the Communist Party in accordance with the international discipline”; at the same time, he promised to aid the PCP financially and morally within the possibilities of the South American Secretariat. After these declarations, the participants of the meeting recognized their “errors” and claimed their willingness to “work collectively to enlarge our Party under the control of the S[outh] American Sec[retariat] of the C.I.”.³⁸ The reorganization of the party led to the rise of Martín Baez to the position of the General Secretary, while Ibarrola became editor in chief of the newspaper *Los Comunistas*.³⁹ However, these changes were nothing more than a skillful tactical maneuver. Codovilla, in the meantime, took into account the ex-leader’s considerable influence among the Paraguayan communists and preferred to wait for Ibarrola’s future errors. He did not have to wait for long.

³⁴ Protocol no. 15 of the session of the South American Secretariat of the Comintern, 19 December 1928. RGASPI, 503/1/21, 122.

³⁵ The head of the Comintern’s Department of International Relations, Osip Piatnitskii, sent a telegram offering “Tom Augustine” (coded name of the South American Secretariat in the Comintern’s correspondence) to help provisionally the PCP with “one thousand toys” (US dollars in the same code) from Moscow (RGASPI, 495/117/1, 4). This money never reached Asunción while Ibarrola occupied the position of General Secretary. However, already in the session of the CC which ousted Ibarrola, the PCP’s treasurer Valenzuela affirmed that he “had received \$100 in Arg[entinean] m[oney] (1875 in Paraguayan n[ational] m[oney]) from C. Codovilla as an aid by the Argentinean Communist Par[ty] to our Party”. A decision was taken to use the money to edit a newspaper, to rent a house for the PCP and to buy some furniture was taken. See: Protocol no. 2 of the session of the CC of the PCP, 6 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 17.

³⁶ Moreover, Codovilla denied his own promise to provide Ibarrola’s family (his wife and 6 children) with financial aid during the PCP leader’s long journey to Moscow. According to Ibarrola, Codovilla didn’t send money during two of the five months of his absence from Asunción and that this almost make his family “starve to death”. See: L. Ibarrola to the Communist International, 30 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 28.

³⁷ L. Ibarrola to the Secretariat of the Communist International. January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 25.

³⁸ Protocol no. 1 of the session of the CC of the PCP. RGASPI, f. 495/117/6, 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 15.

On January 6, 1929, Ibarrola expelled the adherents of the South American Secretariat line (Baez, Moisés Dreljman and Victor Valenzuela) from the party and accused them to split the PCP at the crucial moment of “its illegal work due to the war between Bolivia and Paraguay”. He also declared that the South American Secretariat was supporting a mutiny of people “without the slightest moral authority as they were ignorant and incapable to lead a political party”.⁴⁰ Ibarrola was convinced that the main reason for such an attitude of the Secretariat were personal feelings of Codovilla who couldn't forget the accusations made by the Paraguayan communist leader concerning financial issues and the declarations that “Communists as brothers should bury lies”.⁴¹

The ousted General Secretary of the PCP appealed to the Comintern and accused Codovilla of causing contradictions and divisions, demanding to put an end to “unworthy intervention into the internal issues of the Party”. Ibarrola pointed out that he was not arguing against the Secretariat's participation in the elaboration of the “political line” with a purpose to achieve the goals of the Communist Party which “had enforced its doctrine and was developing its activity among the urban workers and peasants”.⁴² But he declared implicitly that the South American representatives of the Comintern had exceeded their competencies and assumed the authority of the supreme bodies of the 3rd International while intervening into the internal Party issues and acting against the Secretary of the PCP who was recognized as such by the Congress of the CI.⁴³ “The Party knows how to act, it is able to expel all the Judases and not to give them credits, as they [the members of the South American Secretariat] try to do”,⁴⁴ were the words of Ibarrola sent to Moscow. The Paraguayan communist expressed his readiness to obey “the International of Moscow”, but was unwilling to accept the dictate of “the International of Buenos Aires”.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, Ibarrola's adversaries declared that the leader had decided to resign on January 2 and “offered to create a new Communist Party which would not be affiliated to the C.I., and to start once more the newspaper as the organ of the Communist Party of the Paraguayan Rep.[ublic]”.⁴⁶ They claimed that Ibarrola had promised to communicate these ideas to Moscow and to keep them in secret until the Comintern would have taken a final decision. After Ibarrola's expulsion from the CPP,⁴⁷ his persecutors addressed the South American Secretariat asking for a confirmation that their party was the only section officially recognized by the ECCI in Paraguay. According to them, such a document would help them to explain the “treason” committed by the ex-leader who “had usurped the name of the Party using it in

⁴⁰ L. Ibarrola to the Communist International, 30 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 28.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² L. Ibarrola to the Secretariat of the Communist International, January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 27; L. Ibarrola to the Communist International, 30 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 29.

⁴³ CC of the PCP to the Latin Country Secretariat of the ECCI, 5 July 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 40.

⁴⁴ L. Ibarrola to the Secretariat of the Communist International, January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 27.

⁴⁵ Stenogram of the report by Humbert-Droz in the South American Secretariat about the results of the Trade Union Conference in Montevideo and about the 1st Latin American Communist Conference, 12 July 1929. RGASPI, 495/79/53. As cited in: N. P. Kalmykov e.a. (eds.): *Komintern i Latinskaia Amerika*, Moskva, Nauka, 1997, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Protocol no. 2 of the session of the CC of the PCP, 6 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 15. Emphasis in the document.

⁴⁷ The motives for his expulsion were named in the resolution, among them: “absolute lack of the Communist discipline; transformation of the Party organ into a personal organ and its usurpation; violation of the CC's decisions; fight against the CC and against the Party”. La expulsión de Ibarrola. In: *La correspondencia sudamericana* (1929), 9, p. 21.

his own interests".⁴⁸ The South American Secretariat gave its immediate approval to the expulsion of Ibarrola and made it public through its journal. Moreover, the members of the Secretariat decided to strengthen their arguments by publishing the materials of the "Ibarrola case" in three issues of *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* preceded by the report of Codovilla on the political and economic situation in Paraguay.⁴⁹

The toppled Secretary General counted on the support of the ECCI and categorically refused to hand the seals and the archive of the PCP over to the new leadership.⁵⁰ The Comintern's Latin American Country Secretariat (as part of the ECCI) did not intend to listen to Ibarrola's arguments, assuming that the South American Secretariat in Buenos Aires "was following the situation". Consequently, Moscow decided not to intervene, thus approving the activity of its South American representatives.⁵¹ The reaction of the Moscow tutors of South American communism was natural: they could not desavow the leaders of its own regional structures who, in turn, were just recently assigned to their positions. Otherwise it would have meant the continuation of the crisis in the PCA and in the Secretariat. Humbert-Droz explained that neither the South American Secretariat nor the ECCI had any intentions to fight against the CC of the PCP if it "follows the Communist way and accomplishes its mission as the head of a section of the Communist International", moreover, the Swiss Communist promised aid and advices to help the PCP "to have a better orientation in the complicated problems [...] of the revolutionary struggle and the development of the Communist Party into an authentic proletarian party". All the decisions and activities of Codovilla in Asunción were unconditionally supported by Moscow, while Ibarrola was declared a "renegade being outside of the ranks of the Communist International and having nothing in common with it". Humbert-Droz even found a comfortable explanation for the contacts established by Codovilla with Ibarrola's opponents: the secretary of the South American Secretariat had to be very cautious in the conditions of war preparations and police surveillance over the leaders of the revolutionary organizations; according to Moscow, it were "elementary security measures".⁵² With the obvious intention to strengthen the prestige of the South American Secretariat and to show the responsibility of national sections to obey the decision taken in Buenos Aires, the Secretariat of the ECCI accused the former General Secretary of the PCP of refusal to follow the resolutions approved by the South American Secretariat, and stressed the impossibility to use the Executive of the Comintern against its regional structures.⁵³ Moscow also adverted all "revolutionary workers" against an activity "within the Communist forces led by Ibarrola" expressing that any mention of the name of the 3rd International and of its authority by Ibarrola would mean "an usurpation and a lie".

While the "Penelón case" was in discussion, the ECCI was convinced that there was a necessity to maintain the unity of the PCA as a basis for South American communism as a whole. It was also quite clear that the secretary of the South American Secretariat was a key person not only on the continental scale, but in the worldwide movement as well. However, neither Ibarrola would be able to play the same role as Penelón, nor was his Party

⁴⁸ The CC of the PCP to the South American Secretariat of the Comintern, 16 February 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 32.

⁴⁹ *La correspondencia sudamericana* (1929), nos. 7, 9, 10, 11.

⁵⁰ Protocol no. 2 of the session of the CC of the PCP, 6 January 1929; Protocol no. 3 of the session of the PCP, 27 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 17-18.

⁵¹ Secretary of the Latin American Country Secretariat of the ECCI to the South American Bureau, 11 March 1929. Draft resolution on Ibarrola case proposed by the Latin American Country Secretariat. RGASPI, 495/117/1, 6, 8.

⁵² Secretary of the Latin American Country Secretariat of the ECCI to the Secretariat of the PCP, 18 February 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/1, 6.

⁵³ Secretariat of the CI resolution on the case of Ibarrola. RGASPI, 495/117/1, 13.

significant enough. It is obvious that the situation changed drastically after the 6th World Congress, and from that point onwards, Moscow considered it of utmost importance to demonstrate that dissident behaviour within international communism would be defeated by all means. Moreover, Ibarrola committed a serious tactical mistake since he knew almost nothing about the internal situation within the Comintern. The ousted leader of the PCP presented himself as a confidant of the 3rd International who had received the confirmation of full personal confidence upon his return from Moscow and alleged that it was expressed by the “Foreign Affairs Commissar Humbert-Droz” (!).⁵⁴

However, Ibarrola’s call for help addressed to the Swiss Communist couldn’t provide him with any possibility for a triumph in his conflict with Codovilla, as Humbert-Droz himself was at the moment the victim of Stalin’s attacks as one of the leaders of the “right wing” within the Comintern. In other circumstances, Humbert-Droz might have analyzed objectively the situation, but now, however, he faced the necessity to save his own positions; the eventual defense of the Paraguayan “chauvinist” would have only deteriorated his own situation in the Comintern. Moreover, Codovilla used his chance to demonstrate that Ibarrola didn’t see any difference between “Soviet” and “Communist International”, referring to Ibarrola’s reference to Humbert-Droz as “Foreign Affairs Commissar” various times. This was supposed to serve as another proof of Ibarrola’s “limited capacities” and “lack of political serenity”.

Codovilla’s personal triumph – the destitution of Ibarrola and his expulsion from the Communist party – was presented by the South American Secretariat as a fundamental act. The new wording convention was that “more or less serious activities to create the C.P. of Paraguay” began only with the visit of the head of the Secretariat to Paraguay, when the new leadership of proletarian origin was formed and began to carry on the collective work in a proletarian way.⁵⁵ Thus, the work done by Romo was disavowed, and all the achievements of Paraguayan communists in the 1920s were crossed out. From now on, the history of the PCP was re-written as a *tabula rasa*. The South American Secretariat head Victorio Codovilla became the “father-founder” who noted with a kind of “modesty”: “We prepared the base for the development of the future Communist movement”.⁵⁶ For the second time during just one year, the Argentinean communist achieved to change the course of events for his own profit and the enforcement of his own position.⁵⁷ He also proved to be able to create an image of himself as leader and theoretician of the South American communist movement, in full accordance with the development of the 3rd International and the rise of Stalin, when Moscow was in need to have more of these continental leaders of the same type.

However, the victory achieved by Codovilla was, in effect, a Pyrrhic victory from the perspective of the development of South American communism in a sense of influential and capable national sections with a high level of authority in the respective countries and without being affected by adventurism. This had to do directly with the analysis of the conflict between Bolivia and Paraguay made by the secretary of the South American Secretariat and the conclusion made by the Secretariat that the PCP which (in spite of its small number of

⁵⁴ Report of V. Codovilla on the PCP, 18 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/3, 7.

⁵⁵ Materials concerning the activity of the [Communist] parties prepared for the next Plenum (For the Preparatory Commission of the first point of the agenda). The C.P. of Paraguay. RGASPI, 495/117/ 2, 16.

⁵⁶ Report of V. Codovilla on the Communist Party of Paraguay, 18 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/3, 10.

⁵⁷ During the crisis in the CP of Argentine and the respective discussion in the Comintern Executive, Codovilla originally supported Penelón. However, when the perspective of Penelón’s inevitable defeat became more evident, the Argentinean representative in Moscow changed his attitude, so that he appeared to be in Moscow’s and the communist parties’ eyes as one of the initiators of struggle against *penelonismo* and the main defender of the Bolshevik principles. For details, see: Jelifets, Missia Vil’iamsa.

militants)⁵⁸ had a real chance to become “the only leader of the coming struggle” and to convert the mass movements “into the fight for the people’s democratic revolution” presenting “adequate slogans” in circumstances of armed conflicts provoked by the inter-imperialist contradictions concerning domination in Latin America.⁵⁹

The same line carried out by Codovilla was feasible during the First Latin American Communist conference in Buenos Aires in 1929. The Argentinean communist leader accused the Bolivian and Paraguayan communists of “provincialism” and underestimation of international problems, especially of the war issue. According to Codovilla, this was the main obstacle for communist agitation among the working masses about the imperialist essence of the war and about the possibilities to prevent it. The head of the South American Secretariat accused the Bolivian and Paraguayan communists to having been incapable to follow their revolutionary obligations while “objective conditions” for such a work were present. Codovilla claimed that the principal reason was the PCP’s and Communist Party of Brazil’s lack of political experience and confusion of their ideological postulates.⁶⁰ He declared that the global task of the two parties was to show their willingness to “fight against imperialism and its agents represented by the national governments”.

Paulino González Alberdi, an Argentinean member of the South American Secretariat, noted that their behaviour was not the one of consequent communists: “[T]he communists were afraid of repressions, and didn’t start active work among the masses and the army”.⁶¹ These accusations of cowardness caused a shock among the new leaders of the PCP, causing them to strive for rehabilitation from the Secretariat. As a consequence, the leadership of the PCP lost every grasp of reality, wishing anxiously to be declared authentic communists, without being aware how they fell into an euphoria in the light of future victories. This kind of apprehension, however, led themselves and their party into a catastrophe.

In effect, the communists had no financial means and forces to carry out such tasks. But, inspired to struggle by the Comintern functionaries in Moscow and Buenos Aires, the PCP leaders completely changed their tactics, taking into consideration the enlargement of the party’s outreach while the socialists and anarchists were “discredited” by various defeats of the trade unions.⁶² The Paraguayan communists were so convinced about their future victory that they demanded to send them more and more propaganda materials. According to them, “the level of workers’ mistrust to the government and bourgeois parties” was extremely high, and the only abstacle for communist activity was the insufficiency of money.⁶³ The CC of the PCP expressed the hope that the Latin American Secretariat and the ECCI would acknowledge the work of their small party and would try to help them with all means in view of the crucial role of Paraguay in the fight between the two imperialisms.⁶⁴

However, the circumstances for the PCP’s anti-war activities were absolutely unfavorable. One has to give credits to Codovilla who was quite adequate in his analysis of the local conditions while writing his report on the trip to Paraguay. However, he proved to be

⁵⁸ Jules Humbert-Droz had declared after the First Latin American Communist Conference that the whole PCP didn’t have more than a few dozens of militants.

⁵⁹ Report of V. Codovilla on the Communist Party of Paraguay, 18 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/3, 11.

⁶⁰ V. Codovilla: *Izbrannye stat'i i rechi*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1970, pp. 63-64.

⁶¹ As cited in: Kharitonov, *Paragvai*, p. 156.

⁶² The CC of the PCP to the Latin Secretariat of the ECCI, 5 July 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

incapable to make correct conclusions, and the South American Secretariat was not able to do so, either. The Paraguayan government was exerting a strong influence on public opinion with the slogan of “defensive war”, and many Paraguayans perceived the activities of the military as a “popular war”. According to Codovilla, this situation was determined by several factors. The Liberal government was supported by broad masses which remembered its long fight against the oligarchic regime. The campaign against Bolivia was perceived as a movement against US imperialism. The pro-governmental newspapers declared that Bolivia was a tool for the US and called the population to defend the country against the danger of foreign intervention.⁶⁵ Trying to put an end to oppositional moods, the government gave large guarantees and rights to its political adversaries which had been previously arrested for participation in mutinies, and made a public declaration confirming the stability of the democracy and civil liberties. A similar ideological campaign under the slogan of a “holy alliance in order to defend the Homeland” caused almost all the political forces and the majority of the workers’ organization (for example, the influential League of the Seamen) to support the government. Even those groups who had no “patriotic” attitudes, like Socialists and Anarchists, did not resist against war preparations, and only few Anarchists deserted from the army.⁶⁶

In order to organize anti-war propaganda, the communists established contacts with one of the few groups not conquered by chauvinist sentiments – the anarchist Council of Workers and Students within the National University, particularly with the Council’s prominent leaders, Obdulio Barthe and Oscar Creydt. The path to cooperation was not easy, since it was necessary to overcome the negative attitude of the Council members towards all political parties, including the PCP. The Council had some sympathies towards Communist ideas, but at the same time its members didn’t want to maintain relations neither with the PCP nor with the Comintern. However, the negotiations between the PCP and the Council culminated in the foundation of a joint committee which organized an anti-war propaganda campaign on the basis of the slogans sent from Buenos Aires, adding some local demands.⁶⁷

Before this new period of actuation of the PCP triggered by the intervention of the South American Secretariat, the Paraguayan government paid that little attention to the PCP “that it actually ignored it and didn’t act against our comrades”, as Codovilla informed Moscow.⁶⁸ Soon after, however, the authorities tried to make this “error” undone, arresting some CP militants.⁶⁹ Later on, after the rebellion of 1931 headed by the new allies of the Communists was defeated, the government organized strong repressions against the opposition, which almost extinguished the Communist Party. The PCP was then reborn as a result of a National Conference held in Lobos (Argentina) in 1934, and the ex-anarchists Aurelio Alcaraz, Obdulio Barthe and Oscar Creydt became the new leaders of the Party; this is why they later on insisted that the Communist Party was founded in 1934.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ An example was the article in *El Liberal*: “The Bolivians mock the whole world as they feel comfortable with the Yankees who have stuck the teeth in oil deposits of Paraguay’s Chako, who provide with weapons and all means the penetration into this territory to create there a colony under the protectorate of the star spangled banner.”

⁶⁶ Report of V. Codovilla on the PCP, 18 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/3, 5-6.

⁶⁷ Protocol of the session of the CC of the PCP, 5 July 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 43-44.

⁶⁸ Report of V. Codovilla on the PCP, 18 January 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/3, 7.

⁶⁹ The CC of PCP to the Latin Secretariat of the ECCI, 5 July 1929. RGASPI, 495/117/6, 40-41.

⁷⁰ For more details, see: *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional pered VII Vsemirnym kongressom (Materialy)*, Moskva, Partizdat TsK VKP /b/, 1935, p. 407; Campos, *Panorama*, p. 207.

The relationship between the Paraguayan CP, the South American Secretariat of the Comintern, and the ECCI was the clear expression of a new phase of interaction within the 3rd International. The “romantic era” of the Comintern has come to an end and was followed by a thorough bureaucratization, depending enormously on subjective factors such as the leaders’ willingness and direct instructions. While Stalin was the main leader of the “World Communist Party”, Codovilla became his small copy in South America for several years.