

# GERMANS AND ITALIANS IN LATIN AMERICA: Recent Immigration Research

*LES ALLEMANDS AU CHILI (1816–1945)*. By JEAN-PIERRE BLANCPAIN. (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1974. Pp. 1162. DM 220.)

*REMITTANCES OF ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS: FROM BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, URUGUAY AND U.S.A., 1884–1914*. By WARREN DEAN. (New York: New York University, Ibero-American Language and Area Center, Occasional Paper No. 14, 1974. Pp. 11.)

Half a century ago, Robert Foerster and Mark Jefferson made a promising beginning in the study of foreign immigration in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> But when international migration declined after 1930, scholarly attention flagged and research remained scattered and sparse. The impact of immigration on social and economic mobility patterns, cultural values, and economic dependency still largely is unknown, even in the cases of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. In this context, two recent studies—a monumental book by Jean-Pierre Blancpain and a provocative essay by Warren Dean—are especially welcome. Hopefully, they signal the emergence of a group of scholars dedicated to systematic analysis of the effects that the great international migrations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made on Latin American life.

Part of a series of studies on Germans abroad sponsored by the University of Cologne and supported by the Volkswagen Foundation, Blancpain's work is the most comprehensive examination of Latin American immigration since the publication, nearly two decades ago, of Jean Roche's work on German colonization in Rio Grande do Sul.<sup>2</sup> The scope and detail of the Blancpain volume are impressive. The bibliography, which contains over fifteen hundred entries and covers 131 pages, provides ample proof of the author's patient labor in both Chilean and German archives. The book is in three sections, of which the first and shortest examines the historical and geographical background of German colonization in southern Chile. Blancpain emphasizes the geographic isolation and virtual prostration of Valdivia and Chiloé during the opening decades of the nineteenth century and examines in great detail the "pioneers" of German colonization, particularly Bernardo Philippi. Chapters on the German "national colony" idea, the utopian images of Chile presented in contemporary German literature, and the Chilean government's 1845 decision to encourage immigration are particularly informative.

The second section, really the heart of the book, is a detailed description of German immigrant colonies in Valdivia and Llanquihue as well as in the "frontier" provinces and Chiloé. The examination of the origins of the 5,500 Germans who arrived in southern Chile prior to 1875 does much to explain the remarkable cultural unity that this immigrant group maintained. A large part of the influx

came from forested and mountainous parts of Germany, regions whose climate and geography were not dissimilar to southern Chile. Many whole families came together, and groups even migrated from the same villages. Most were both Protestant and literate. Their occupational backgrounds were diverse, and the settlers of Valdivia and Llanquihue included middle-class businessmen and professionals as well as artisans and farmers. Blancpain points out that this occupational diversity actually fostered the unity of the original colonies, which became virtually self-contained communities isolated from the rest of Chile for two generations.

Profound admiration for the accomplishments of the German settlers, which Blancpain views as a "history of pioneers" (p.235), pervades this section, but the other side of the coin is the author's conviction that the existing Chilean population was of a hopelessly low cultural level. He attributes the native population's plight to the government in Santiago, which had treated Valdivia like an "external dependency" (p. 8), and to the Valdivia Chilean elite, portrayed as egoistic, lazy, and avaricious. After developing this background of poverty and stagnation, Blancpain examines the rapid and spectacular prosperity of the Germans, which he ascribes to "an aristocracy of effort" (p. 418). By 1920, the German community not only owned most of the land in the provinces of Valdivia and Llanquihue but had founded thriving industries, banks, and commercial houses. Some German families took trips to the Riviera, built elaborate mansions, and entertained visiting royalty.

The second wave of German immigration, which arrived between 1882 and 1895 and settled in the newly-conquered "frontier" and in Chiloé, formed a marked contrast with the earlier communities. From proletarian backgrounds in eastern Germany, the immigrants of the 1880s were settled in mixed communities along with other Europeans, and sometimes on marginal land, as in Chiloé. The result was frequent abandonment of the soil, migration to the cities, and assimilation into Chilean culture.

This section concludes with detailed discussion of the institutions through which the Valdivia and Llanquihue settlers preserved their cultural and ethnic homogeneity. "For three generations," Blancpain writes, "Valdivia was closer to Berlin than to Santiago" (p. 574). To maintain their German heritage, the communities founded schools, fraternal associations, and churches. Particularly among Protestant colonists, German long remained the primary language, often for four or five generations, although bilingualism became increasingly common. Resistance to assimilation was high, although the minority of Catholic settlers married Chileans and spoke Spanish far more frequently than the Protestants.

The "German bewitchment" over Chile between 1885 and 1945 forms the theme of the book's concluding section. This adage, coined by nativist educator Eduardo de la Barra in 1899, aptly summarizes the fascination with which the Chilean elite viewed German culture and institutions, particularly during the quarter-century preceding the First World War. In an interesting chapter, Blancpain portrays the public education system prior to 1885 as stagnant, analyzes the large-scale introduction of German professors during the Balmaceda presidency and later regimes, and concludes that the Germanization of Chilean education was a

progressive and modernizing policy, if not an altogether successful one. The Prussian military impressed the Chilean elite no less than did the German educational system. Blancpain carefully examines General Emil Koerner's enormous impact on the Chilean army and, in an intriguing analysis of the 1891 civil war, suggests that Koerner turned against Balmaceda partly because of personal ambition and partly because he believed that the nationalistic president threatened the established socioeconomic order. During this same period, German-Chilean trade also grew impressively, while German capitalists invested heavily in banking, commerce, and utilities. One of the few gaps in the otherwise thorough analysis concerns German investments in the nitrate industry and possible relationships between these investments and Koerner's ability to recruit, on short notice, a 15,000-man army at Iquique in 1891.

Only about eleven thousand Germans had emigrated to Chile by 1914; during World War I, however, the relatively small German population, mobilized by the *Deutsch-Chilenischer Bund*, successfully struggled to defend the government's policy of neutrality. But the homeland's defeat left the Chilean Germans in a mood of angry despair. Antagonistic to the Weimar government, many of them supported fascism and applauded the emergence of Jorge González von Marées and his *Partido Nacional Socialista* during the 1930s. In comparison with the painstaking detail presented in earlier sections, the last chapter on the 1933–45 period is disappointing: It neglects Hitler's policies towards Chile, as well as the attitudes and role of Chile's German population during World War II.

A few observations about the Blancpain book are in order. First, the volume must be praised for the vast amount of information it presents. The result of the author's laborious research, literally in thousands of sources, is a reference that all later scholars of Chilean immigration will find of great value. But while the book is long on information, it is short on analysis and interpretation. Although the author states his doubt that German influence fundamentally changed Chile, his reasoning on this point remains unclear and much of the information he presents leads the reader to conclude otherwise. Second, the author fails to analyze systematically the German immigrants' impact on Chilean economic and social structures. Although Blancpain often states that the German population wielded considerable economic power, he avoids statistical analysis of class composition and social mobility. What proportion of the German population was middle class or upper class by 1914? Was German upward mobility more rapid than that of other immigrant groups? What proportion of industry and commerce did the German population own? These questions remain to be answered. A third point, and one related to the preceding observation, concerns the economic and social status of the Chilean population of Valdivia and Llanquihue after the German colonization. Blancpain handles the whole question of the fate of the local Chileans and their dispossession by the new German landowners in a cavalier fashion. Although he admits that a rigidly stratified society emerged, with Chileans on the bottom, he simply ascribes this stratification to the national population's alleged indolence and ignorance and to the "parasitic" (p. 431) upper class of central Chile. Did the Germans, who controlled power structures and local governments in the southern provinces, concern themselves with the

amelioration of the Chilean lower class? Or were they content to keep the Chileans subordinate as a pool of cheap labor? George Young's recent study concludes that "in relatively poor and underdeveloped Chile the Germans, and the English and other Europeans as well, felt themselves to be a truly superior people. In a word they tended to become arrogant and overweening."<sup>3</sup> Might attitudes such as these be related to the rise of Chilean nativism and nationalism during the decade preceding World War I?

In sharp contrast with the encyclopedic Blancpain study, Dean's essay on the remittances of Italian immigrants is basically a report of research in progress. Dean proposes to investigate "the great experiment of mass migration from the immigrant point of view" (p. 1) in the United States, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay through a study of Italian immigrant remittances to the homeland. The Italian Postal Ministry's records of money orders cashed from overseas sources compose the study's major source material. These records demonstrate a startling difference between money order remittances from Italians in the United States and those in Latin America. In the 1913–14 fiscal year, for example, they sent 114.1 million lire from the United States but only 3.2 million from Brazil, .5 million from Argentina, and .2 million from Uruguay. On the basis of this data, Dean hypothesizes that Italians in Latin America "chose to invest their savings locally because their opportunities seemed more profitable, or their social acceptance was greater" (p. 10).

The major problem with this essay is the narrow base of its data. Many Latin American immigrants sent money back to the homeland via bank draft, a form of remittance Dean admits was important but difficult to measure. Moreover, particularly in the case of Argentina, both seasonal immigration of harvest workers (the famous *golondrinas*) and other forms of re-emigration reached very high totals in the pre-World War I decade. Argentine government statistics show that the total number of emigrants from Argentina amounted to 53.7 percent of the arrivals between 1900 and 1913. The rate of return consistently was much higher from Argentina than from the United States.<sup>4</sup> Many of these transitory immigrants, who came specifically to work for a short while and then to return, carried money back with them or sent bank drafts. In fact, the well-developed network of Italian-owned banks in Argentina specialized in facilitating immigrant remittances. Some data are available: John Williams's classic study of the Argentine international accounts reports bank draft remittances of two million gold pesos as early as 1878; and Carlos Pellegrini estimated total remittances at five million in 1890.<sup>5</sup> Along with the great wave of Italian immigration during the century's first decade, immigrant remittances grew enormously and reached 30 million gold pesos in 1913–14, according to the balance-of-payments research conducted by Buenos Aires' Banco Tornquist.<sup>6</sup> Since about 40 percent of Argentina's immigrants were Italian, it is reasonable to assume that an equivalent proportion of total immigrant remittances flowed to Italy. In any case, they made up an important segment of the Argentine balance of payments and in 1913–14 amounted to about 7.4 percent of the republic's total export earnings. While many Italians did remain in Argentina and did invest heavily in real estate, commerce, and light

industry, hundreds of thousands of Italians viewed Argentina not as a place to settle permanently but simply as a place to make money. Viewed from the perspectives of massive remittances and re-emigration, Italian migration to Argentina may well have fostered as much social mobility in the Old World as in the New. Perhaps future research will demonstrate that rather than promoting integrated social and economic development in Latin America, immigration slowed the rate of native-born social mobility and fostered inequality by importing labor rather than educating and training it at home.

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#### NOTES

1. Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919); Mark Jefferson, *Peopling the Argentine Pampa* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1926); Mark Jefferson, *Recent Colonization in Chile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921).
2. Jean Roche, *La colonisation allemande et le Rio Grande do Sul* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique Latine, 1959).
3. George F. W. Young, *Germans in Chile: Immigration and Colonization, 1849–1914* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1974), p. 169.
4. For immigration and emigration statistics, see Ernesto Tornquist & Cía., Limitada, *El desarrollo económico de la República Argentina en los últimos cincuenta años* (Buenos Aires: Ernesto Tornquist & Cía., Limitada, 1920), p. 9. For analysis of re-emigration, see Juan F. Marsal, "Retorno de inmigrantes españoles de la Argentina," in Marsal, ed., *Hacer la América: Autobiografía de un inmigrante español en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial del Instituto, 1969), pp. 377–406. At least 50 percent of the golondrina immigration was Italian. See Vernon L. Phelps, *The International Economic Position of Argentina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938), p. 19.
5. John H. Williams, *Argentine International Trade under Inconvertible Paper Money* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), pp. 47, 106. For background on the Italian banking system in Argentina, see Jorge F. Sergi, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editora Italo Argentina S.A., 1940), pp. 359–62.
6. The Tornquist balance-of-payments data appear in Phelps, *The International Economic Position of Argentina*, appendix table I, facing p. 238.