COMMUNICATIONS

KALMAN HIRSCH SILVERT
10 March 1921 – 15 June 1976*

When Kalman Silvert died of a heart attack, Latin Americanist scholarship lost its greatest protagonist; American scholars lost one of the most active opponents of intellectual technocracy, and, thereby, the American public lost an important proponent of democracy; the Ford Foundation lost a guiding figure in international social science planning; his family and friends lost an individual of inestimable and irreplaceable personal worth; and Kal, himself, lost the opportunity to pursue his own course toward the development of a humanistic politics for the Western world. In the fall of 1976, Kal and Frieda Silvert were to have taken up residence in Mexico, to continue to work for the Ford Foundation, but in a new direction and with much more time for him to dedicate to the problems that interested him the most. Leaving some part of his task undone was inevitable; it is difficult to imagine anyone being able to achieve the goals that Kal set for himself.

The road to this now unfinished future was determined in great part by the nature of the man himself. Kal did not hide his nature. To know him even briefly was to be brought face to face with an individual of strong moral principles, broad cosmopolitanism, profound secular Jewishness, sensitive humanitarianism, rich humor, great loyalty, sense of kinship, and substantial intellect. Behind these almost iron dimensions was a constant moral and intellectual drive. While hardly consumed by it, he had ambition; he was intolerant of menial corruption, not always ready to forgive, and strived to discover and teach the theoretical soundness in what he was convinced was the morally right and good. Intensively suspicious of the American establishment as it was manifest in

*A bibliography of Kalman Silvert's published works will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Hispanic American Historical Review*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100030776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the world of intellectual technocrats, he felt obliged to counter their ahumanism with active consulting, lecturing, writing, and teaching; indeed, irrespective of his particular titles, Kal was always a teacher.

Kal grew up in Philadelphia, the youngest of five siblings. His father's business suffered a number of financial reverses, with the result that he was the only child to finish college. In the home, political social democracy and musical virtuosity were both important. In school, he went the course with full scholarships. After four years at the University of Pennsylvania, he married Frieda Moskalik, a student of economics, whom Kal had known since their days in high school. Three months later he was drafted. From 1942 until 1945 he worked in the Air Transport Command intelligence in Africa. The marriage was to be a rich one, yielding not only three active young men, but also a constant climate of political, intellectual, emotional, and artistic concern. Frieda's own professional future in economics was temporarily set aside (as has so often been the case in this society) before the demands of raising children and the work of her husband.

When Kal returned from Africa at the end of the War, he was uncertain as to where to turn. He tried writing children's books, but finally decided to begin graduate work with his old mentor, Wieschhoff, in the University of Pennsylvania's anthropology department. Internal academic political struggles led him to move over to political science where he took an MA and PhD, maintaining a straight "A" record while simultaneously teaching twenty hours a week at Lincoln Preparatory School. Although it was traditional in the political science department to offer a position to the leading student, Kal was passed over and, instead, given a Penfield Fellowship to go to Chile, a fellowship that did not even cover the travel costs of the trip. His research concerned the Chilean Development Corporation and Kal wrote his dissertation in nine months. Following his return, Tulane University hired him and, somewhat later, Leonard Reissman, a sociologist; the two were to become life-long friends and collaborators.

Work at Tulane began in the fall of 1948, and Kal was to keep this affiliation until 1961. Following a summer in Quezaltenango, Guatemala, in 1951, he returned to Guatemala for the full year of 1952–53. That year produced what was at the time one of the very few studies of a Latin American government. It also led to plans for another visit for the summer of 1955. When driving south from New Orleans for the second Guatemalan session, his car was struck by a truck; the accident resulted in the instant death of the student driver, and multiple injuries to the other occupants. Especially seriously injured was Hanky Silvert, Kal's six-and-one-half-year-old son, whose long recovery and subsequent development was a constant preoccupation for both parents. The many shadows of the accident continued to affect Kal for the rest of his life.

In 1955, the American Universities Field Staff invited Kal to become one of their field reporters. This was an extraordinary opportunity for a person of Kal's propensities. The arrangement was that he spend a portion of each year in Latin America, reporting on events there to a number of subscribing universities. On his return, he would resume lecturing at Tulane, but also visit the AUFS member universities and lecture and work with students. The combination of

having a free hand to investigate what seemed important and intriguing in Latin America, and the opportunity to visit a variety of universities, to become known to faculty and students, provided Kal with both a laboratory and a platform that he embellished with work of uniformly high quality.

There is little question that the AUFS work was rewarding, if somewhat demanding of the family. Of greater issue, however, was that Kal's growing interests were able to expand beyond the more limited Tulane base. With increasing frequency, he was being asked to participate in events on the East Coast, and his own antecedents were that of an East Coast city dweller.

This fitted with a long concern, first more an ache than ambition, that developed into a philosophical matter of serious concern. As Kal's own humanistic and democratically oriented interpretation of events in Latin America became more widely disseminated, they came more openly into sharp contrast to the careless ignorance of Latin America current at most eastern universities. There the orientation had always been towards Europe and the United States, and Latin America continued to be of little consequence. Kal wanted to sensitize the American intellectual establishment to both the importance and the potential of Latin America. The crucial audience for his efforts was in the East and he needed a place there. His performance in his travels with the AUFS afforded him many offers of jobs, but he finally fixed on a combination that seemed right for the moment. In 1962 he took up a professorship at Dartmouth, and at the same time ended his field travels for the AUFS and took over as their research director. This kept him in touch with their activities and permitted him some leeway in the preparation of AUFS books. Teaching at Dartmouth proved stimulating, and provided the home that was to become the family's *querencia*.

In the same year he began what was to be a continuing relationship with the Ford Foundation. Five years later, Kal made his final professional move. He again concocted a double job, but this time with halftime work at the Ford Foundation as advisor in social science development in Latin America, combined with a halftime appointment as professor of political science and director of the Ibero-American Center at New York University. For the rest of his life Kal carried on what were really two full-time jobs. While he never slighted his responsibility to his students, his work at the Foundation rapidly grew into an activity of national importance.

A great deal of his work during the following decade can be found in working documents of the Ford Foundation; more is scattered among the host of efforts that concerned United States foreign policy in Latin America, variously given in an unending series of seminars and lectures offered at many universities. He was early and long active in the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York, and participated in the Linowitz Commission on United States-Latin American Relations.

Certainly his position at the Foundation aided the impact of his work in the United States. In the Foundation itself, he was a strong influence for a gradual reorientation of policy. His research in Chile, Venezuela, Brazil and elsewhere continued with Lenny Reismann, Frank Bonilla, Frieda Silvert, and various of his students. He was the first president of the Latin American Studies

Association, and received an honorary degree from the Faculdade Candido Mendez of Rio de Janeiro (1971). His research in education, some very important portions of which have yet to be issued, was sponsored by the United Nations, the Organization for American States, and the Brookings Institution, and funded by the Carnegie Corporation. He was advisor on a half dozen editorial boards and visiting professor at an equal number of major universities in this country and Latin America.

But what is most significant about Kal will not be found in the traditional listings assembled for a curriculum vitae. Rather, it lay in his perspective and the gradual shift it took as the world changed about him. It is no secret that most of the countries where the Ford Foundation invested a very large amount of its Latin American social science funding are now in the hands of military governments, authoritarian regimes that have in some instances all but obliterated the social science communities that the Foundation was dedicated to aiding. The policy that Kal had introduced for Foundation guidance was to provide alternatives; to make it possible for the social scientists to take advantage of the methodologies and theories that were emerging elsewhere in the world. At the time he was trying to do this, the Latin American community itself was turning increasingly away from U.S. intellectual resources. For the Southern Cone countries and Brazil, Europe had always been a preferred source of intellectual stimulation, as had been the case with things cultural in general. The growth of North American influence had been primarily a post-World War II phenomenon.

While Kal was a wholly North American product, many things consorted to mold him as a European cosmopolitan in scope and taste. A Jewish background and experience lent him a sense of worldliness to be expected from a people who have traditionally claimed many nationalities. Early work with Wieschhoff, himself an Old World refugee, together with almost three years in the European colonial areas of Africa imbued him with a sense of Europe unaffected by contemporary North American influences. His work in Chile and Argentina in the 1940s and 1950s allowed him to identify the strong European component in the cultures of those countries, and to form a basic view of Latin America as an extension of the Mediterranean.

The work of the 1960s and early 1970s in the Foundation was overtly concerned with the development of social science institutions in Latin America. The philosophy was still basically the "institution building" development policy that marked not only the Foundation but other development agencies as well. The basic problem in this kind of policy was becoming evident in the 1960s with the disappearance of democratic regimes in Brazil, Argentina, and Peru. The complete vulnerability of the social science establishments and their members before the military authoritarian regimes became crushingly clear, as had the investment in local institutions proven to be before the forces of inflation. While the Foundation underwrote the development of aptitude and capability, a flood of talent left for the United States and Europe to either a voluntary or forced exile. The growth of authoritarianism on the one hand, and the declining prestige of the Ford Foundation and the United States on the other, made this kind of assistance increasingly difficult.

During the first half of the 1970s Kal's influence was strongly felt on the Foundation's Latin American policy. Pulling away from countries which seriously constricted social science was an important ingredient. The development of sociology as a central social science element was keenly recognized. And the increased orientation towards European roots also had its more subtle, but telling effect.

Latin American social scientists were also moving in this direction. The Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO) had been formed through joint U.S.-Latin American efforts in the late 1960s. A cardinal Foundation principle was that the basic organization would be funded solely through Latin American sources and not as a dependency of North American or European largess. The Foundation, however, made important grants to permit the effective operation of its working committees. CLACSO not only oriented itself intentionally towards a wide variety of external financial sources, but it also initiated dialogues and then pursued cooperative efforts with the recent international social science institutions in Africa and Asia in an attempt to promote greater coordination and unity of effort among the "Third World" nations.

By the mid 1970s, it was obvious that the future work of the Foundation in social science development was to be seriously handicapped if restricted to a Latin American focus. The political authoritarianism increasingly manifest in Latin America was a clear threat to the humanist ideal to which Kal was devoted. The efforts of the U.S. to economically dominate were still strong and intellectual freedom was clearly imperiled or actively under attack in many countries. There was little effect to be seen from a policy of opening intellectual doors if they were to be immediately shut by the local governments. The importance of socialist policies were becoming increasingly evident, in part as the only answer to the achievement of decent human levels of living in desperately poor countries, but also in part as an answer to the evident short-run ability of enlightened democracy to withstand the battering of military authoritarianism.

In the spring before his death, Kal was invited to deliver the Hackett Memorial Lecture at the University of Texas at Austin. The lecture, entitled "Coming Home," was in some degree a series of remarks that he had developed as a part of a distillation of his political philosophy (*The Reason for Democracy*, New York: Viking Press, 1977). It was in part concerned with the move of his focus of interest away from Latin America and toward the United States. It was, however, much more profoundly concerned with a return by Kal to an early cosmopolitan orientation that was now informed by almost three decades of experience, reading, and changes in the world.

It is not possible to be sure what was generating in Kal's mind as he prepared himself for the move to Mexico. It had not been his first plan. An earlier arrangement with the Foundation that proved financially unfeasible would have sent him to Paris and enabled him to work more directly in the complex political world of Europe. The events in Italy and Portugal suggested strong and important changes in the popular model of socialism. Russia, with China on its flank, needed Europe more than Europe needed it. In the New World, the Cuban experience was teaching much, but neither its history nor its present circum-

stances permitted it to be a model for Latin America. The Chilean experiment had clearly collapsed. "Coming Home" also meant a return to Europe as the source of a model for the future.

For many of his audience at the Hackett lecture, "Coming Home" meant the return of attention to North American problems, the need to set one's own house in order. This, too, was part of Kal's concern, but it was only part of it. His interest in the United States was profound, as his work clearly manifests. Evidence that the United States was losing its course was all too evident to him: the vulgar developmentalism long promulgated by the eastern establishment; the war in Vietnam; the U.S. government backing of authoritarian regimes in Latin America; and expansive and uncritical support of multinational corporations. There was little question that the United States needed attention too. The evidence, however, seemed to Kal to suggest that the future influences of importance in Latin America and probably elsewhere in the Third World were not going to come from the United States. Rather they were to be coming from Europe and the Third World itself. If that were to be the case, then moving to Mexico could serve his purpose much better than remaining in New York.

Kal Silvert affected the lives of countless Latin American, North American, and European scholars and students. There is probably no other single North American of his generation who had such innate capabilities of acting as a leader in the necessarily anarchic arena of Latin American studies. He had the opportunity and capability to influence various institutions to his own policy orientation, and through them the work of an uncountable number of scholars. The American Universities Field Staff, the Ford Foundation, the Council on Inter-American Relations, the American Assembly, the Conference at Bellagio, the New York University Ibero-American Center, Education and World Affairs, the Linowitz Commission, the Latin American Studies Association, the Council on Foreign Relations—all served as devices through which he tried to orient the American public to the ways of Latin America, and to assist the Latin American scholarly community to find solutions to the myriad intellectual and political problems confronting them. Kal attempted few simple things. Where his efforts failed, it was more often due to the fact that he was asking more than either his colleagues or the times could deliver. If his achievements seem to rest more in our understanding and in our perspectives than in institutional monuments, it was because he recognized that institutions are transitory, and chose to use them as instruments rather than as ends in themselves.

His place cannot be filled. The Ford Foundation decided that it would be impossible to find another Kal Silvert, and essentially abolished the position. Hopefully his departure and the loss of his guidance will not encourage the growth of the intellectual technocracy that Kal fought so continuingly. Latin American and North American intellectual communities, and the democratic future that they seek, lost an important proponent; but they did not lose his ideas. The greatest loss is Kal's own pursuit of this future.

RICHARD NEWBOLD ADAMS
University of Texas at Austin

Editors' Note: Under ordinary circumstances, an author would have the right to respond to a reviewer after *the essay had appeared in* LARR. *In this case, the following review came in to us unsolicited. Given the nature of the reviewer's comments, we felt constrained to invite a reply from the author.*

FIGURES, FACTS AND FALLACIES: THE POPULATION OF COLONIAL VENEZUELA

PEOPLE AND PLACES IN COLONIAL VENEZUELA. By JOHN V. LOMBARDI. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976. Pp. 484. $25.00.)

The impressive contribution of population history to our understanding of the past has generated extraordinary interest in new demographic methods and old population figures. Most research in the field of late colonial Latin American demography, aside from the studies of Cook and Borah and a few others, has been aimed rather modestly at enhancing our understanding of the population dynamics of a village or small community.[1] This book may indicate a new trend: the attempt to establish the population structure of a large region by bringing together population reports for hundreds of parishes. Lombardi argues that through the development of a broad demographic context, analysis of the history of Venezuelan population can be most economically realized and the findings of micro-level studies properly interpreted.

This initial volume lays the groundwork for future studies and presents the massive database developed by the author. In addition to making these figures available to the public, he wishes to establish "a baseline" for the Bishopric of Caracas at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a "frame" from which proper samples may be drawn, and a "standard for the evaluation and analysis of the less consistent data available for earlier and later time periods" (p. xi). While these goals are noteworthy, the book will probably be ambivalently received within the academic community. Researchers who carefully study Lombardi's arguments will be rewarded. Nevertheless, as a demographic historian, I find the baseline insecure, his standards deficient, the published data unnecessarily abbreviated, and the quantitative arguments at times mistaken.

The book is divided in two parts: several essays in which the context and meaning of the parish reports are elaborated, and some three hundred pages of data. A brief description of the dataset is necessary before discussing the arguments developed in the text. In part two we find in a set of seven tables an extraordinary listing of over two thousand selected reports from some two hundred parishes of the Bishopric of Caracas during the period 1771–1838. Lombardi informs us that even more reports exist but are not included because they contain internal inconsistencies or their formats make them incompatible with this set. The tables present the figures, ordered by parish and date, in a uniform