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Late Institutionalisation and Early Modernisation: The Emergence of Uruguay's Liberal Democratic Political Order

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Abstract. The way in which ruling elites originally responded to pressures for increasing mass participation in the polity is one of the most crucial variables in the path to democracy. In the case of Uruguay, the first two decades of the century – a period dominated by the historical figure of José Batlle y Ordoñez, – were crucial in the setting up of democratic institutions. During this period, because of its late consolidation as much as its early modernisation, the institutionalisation of the political order coincided with its phase of democratic incorporation. This article argues that it was Batlle's strategy for advancing his political project, as much as the substantive aspects of the policies themselves, that would crystallise the working of Uruguay's democratic politics. While the article focuses mainly on Uruguay, a comparative analysis with similar historical developments in Argentina is used to illustrate some specific aspects of the Uruguayan case.

Contemporary debates on democracy in Latin America have mostly focused on the social, political and economic transformations experienced by the region since the 1980s.[1] Without underestimating the importance of such contemporary events, other scholars have taken a longer view of the factors affecting the status of democracy in the region. On the one hand, it may be that the weight of history can affect the prospects for democracy, when one considers that countries with a long tradition of democracy, such as Chile and Uruguay, may have a better chance of consolidating it than those in which it is a recent innovation. On the other hand, it has been argued that the way in which the ruling elites originally

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[1] There is a vast literature on democratisation in Latin America. See, among others, G. O'Donnell, P. C. Schmitter and L. Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore, 1986); J. M. Malloy and M. A. Seligson (eds.), *Authoritarians and Democrats: Regime Transition in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, 1987); L. Diamond, J. J. Linz and S. M. Lipset (eds), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, (Boulder and London, 1989); S. Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell and A. Valenzuela, (eds.), *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (Notre Dame, 1992).

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responded to the pressures for increasing mass participation in the polity is one of the most crucial historical variables on the path to democracy.[2]

Charles Gillespie and Luis Gonazález have claimed that Uruguay has had the most enviable democratic record in Latin America this century.[3] It is not necessary to endorse this claim fully in order to agree on the importance of analysing the sequence of historical developments which, by persisting beyond their initiating conditions, have contributed to the consolidation of democracy in Uruguay over most of the twentieth century. While this article focuses mainly on Uruguay, a comparative analysis with similar historical developments in Argentina will be used to illustrate some specific aspects of the Uruguayan case and, hopefully, to shed some light on the very different political histories of the two countries.

There is a general consensus among historians that the first two decades of the century were crucial in the setting up of democratic institutions in Uruguay.[4] This period was dominated by the historical figure of José Batlle y Ordoñez, twice President and generally regarded as the founder of modern Uruguay. Why was the influence of Batlle so important in the constitution of Uruguay's modern political order? To answer this question it is necessary to focus on the relations between the social structures, political institutions and political strategies that resulted in the early consolidation of the country's liberal democracy. This article argues that two aspects of this historical period have to be given special consideration if we are to understand the long-term characteristics of the country's democratic institutions: (*a*) because of its late consolidation as much as its early modernisation, the institutionalisation of the political order in Uruguay coincided with its phase of democratic incorporation; (*b*) it was Batlle's strategy for advancing his political project, as much as the substantive aspects of the policies themselves, that would crystallise the working of Uruguay's democratic politics.

The late institutionalisation of Uruguay's political system

The records of the proceedings transcribed below cannot give us an adequate idea of the complex and subtle negotiations that were simultaneously going on: summons to the Presidential House; discreet meetings in tea houses at Plaza

[2] Diamond, Linz and Lipset, *Democracy in Developing Countries*, p. 9.

[3] C. Gillespie and L. E. González, 'Uruguay: The Survival of Old and Autonomous Institutions', in L. Diamond *et al*. (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries*, pp. 207–246.

[4] Among the more important works on the period are J. P. Barrán and B. Nahum, *Batlle, Los Estancieros y el Imperio Británico*, 8 vols (Montevideo, 1979–1987); G. Lindhal, *Batlle, Fundador de la Democracia Uruguaya*, (Montevideo, 1971); M. Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordoñez of Uruguay, The Creator of His Times* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963) and *Batlle of Uruguay, The Model Country*, (Hanover, New Hampshire and London, England, 1980); and C. Real de Azúa, *El Impulso y su Freno*, (Montevideo, 1964).

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Matriz; visits to Santa Clara; dinners at villas in Paso Molino; secretive conclaves in newspaper offices (...) (Batlle had been forced to set aside the activities of the capital city's Party committee) in order to devote his energies towards the political circles that were paramount for victory in the presidential election. The last big public gathering had taken place in February 1901 at the Colón Theatre.[5]

The above excerpt vividly recalls the way the Uruguayan political system worked at the beginning of the century: it was the business of a small elite. These people – all men – recognised themselves as part of the same social group. They lived in the same quarter (the villas in Paso Molino), they frequented the same places (the tea houses in Plaza Matriz). Despite their bitter, often bloody political struggles, they shared similar values; those of nineteenth century South American oligarchical liberalism.

Leaving aside names and details, the above picture could well fit as a description of liberal oligarchical politics in most Latin American countries at the same period. In most of them, little now remains of the people, parties and politics of the time. Uruguay's politics, however, were dominated for more than half a century by Batllismo, the political movement named after the man whose presidential election is recalled in the above excerpt. Batlle was first elected President of Uruguay in March 1903 and served a second term from 1911 to 1915. He subsequently remained the dominant figure of the ruling Colorado party until his death in 1928. During this period, and up until the 1960s, Uruguay was 'Uruguay Batllista', a term implying that the ideas, institutions and policies of the early Batllista period played an enduring role in shaping Uruguayan politics and society. To a large extent, Batllismo became identified with Uruguay's modern political system and with the shortcomings that led to its collapse in the coup of 1973.

When not taking the form of a civil war, politics was an activity organised from above by a narrow social elite – although the composition of this elite was not necessarily based upon wealth. The Presidency, and not the people or even Parliament, was the real source of power.[6] As the above excerpt highlights, in the race for the Presidency, the last big public gathering had taken place... nearly two years before the election. Politics was thus an activity engaged in by closed groups behind closed doors, in newspaper offices and tea-houses. However, the dawn of the twentieth

[5] From R. Capurro, *Actas de las Reuniones de los Legisladores Colorados para la Proclamación de la Candidatura de José Batlle y Ordoñez a la Presidencia de la República por el Período 1903–1907* (Montevideo, 1972).

[6] In Uruguay the President was historically much more powerful than in other Latin American countries, with the exception perhaps of Chile. This was due to the fact that in Uruguay the power of regional elites was weaker than elsewhere in the region. Presidential support was usually decisive for the nomination of each successor. Batlle's achievement was precisely to break this rule, as he was elected against the wishes of his Colorado party predecessor in office.

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century notwithstanding, the urban political elite in this, the most urbanised of Latin America's societies, had still to take into account the political and military muscle of the rural *caudillos*. Hence the trips to Santa Clara, the *estancia* in the distant, backward, eastern border with Brazil, where Aparicio Saravia, the main *caudillo* of the period and the leader of the Blanco opposition, had his headquarters. As the two excerpts below help to illustrate, the combination of a society in which politics was simultaneously about the demands of newly emerging urban sectors and the threat of political rebellion backed by traditional rural militias was the defining characteristic of the period:

Saravia began taking the necessary steps for war. His son started passing out arms on December 22. He called his Nationalist unit commanders to his ranch for a Christmas Day meeting. They came, they analysed the situation, they prepared war plans; they were alerted. Then, they returned to their departments to await orders.[7]

Batlle's labour policy was also becoming more affirmative. The Chief of Police, instead of stamping strikes out – and it almost seemed that Montevideo was going through a strike wave – acted as mediator. Striking cigarette workers paraded in front of Batlle's house and cheered him.[8]

The first example refers to the preparations for war by the Blanco rural *caudillos*. These took place in almost the same way as they had done throughout most of Uruguay's independent life. It shows that the question of the consolidation of the political order was still unsolved and would become the main issue of Batlle's first presidency. The second example is chronologically contemporary to the first, and yet a huge social time-gap seems to separate the two. It describes the increasing activity of the first working class organisations by the end of 1903. It also points to a change in the government's attitude: while the social question may still have been a matter for the police – as the liberal elite had always regarded it – at least mediation was now preferred to repression. The political conflict led to civil war, but ended in a political agreement which effectively put an end to the long historical cycle of civil wars and thus consolidated the state's monopoly over legitimate violence. The social question in turn ceased to be a matter for the police, and instead became a crucial element in the Batllista strategies of political institutionalisation and democratic incorporation.

A brief comparative analysis between Uruguay and Argentina illustrates different sequences concerning the consolidation of state power and the democratic incorporation of the political system in each country. As in other Latin American countries, the first Uruguayan Constitution (1830)

[7] Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordoñez of Uruguay – the Creator of His times*, p. 109.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 106.

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provided for a liberal institutional order and a unitarian state.[9] However, for most of the nineteenth century, particularly in the first three quarters, the Uruguayan state showed itself unable to maintain peace and order across the national territory. Between independence and Batlle's second presidency, 27 individuals occupied the presidency. Of them, nine were ousted from power, two were murdered, one seriously wounded, twelve had to face one or more serious uprisings, and only three completed their terms of office peacefully. Even in the allegedly more peaceful years that followed the so-called militarist period (1866–76), two presidents were forced to resign (one of them twice), one was murdered, and one seriously wounded. In addition, there were four major uprisings, one *coup d'état* and one attempted military coup.[10]

It is true that by the last quarter of the nineteenth century there was a progressive consolidation of state power. This process coincided with the long period of political domination by the Colorados which led to Batlle's first presidency. However, the two major civil wars of 1897 and 1904 exposed the underlying fragility of the country's political order. Significantly, the 1897 uprising ended with an agreement that conceded *de facto* politico-military control over a number of departments to the Blanco opposition, in practice sanctioning the division of the national territory on questions of public order. The extent of this division can be inferred by the fact that the 1904 uprising was prompted by President Batlle's decision to send troops to the Uruguayan–Brazilian border in the Blanco-controlled department of Rivera, without the previous agreement of the Blanco party authorities. As J. P. Barrán and B. Nahum point out, the Blancos were effectively a state within the state, enjoying political and military autonomy in the departments under their control.[11]

In Argentina, in comparison, from Mitre's presidency in 1862 up to the deposition of Irigoyen in 1930, almost seventy years of constitutional continuity prevailed. Of course, this is not to claim that Argentina was either democratic or free from upheavals. During the 1870s two major rebellions led by López Jordan posed a serious threat to internal peace, and in 1880 the militias of Buenos Aires province, led by Governor Tejedor, rose in arms against the national authorities. The Radicals in opposition repeatedly sought to promote army uprisings against the conservative governments of the period, and in 1893 and 1905 army

[9] For an analysis of Uruguay's first constitution, see H. Gross Espiel, *Esquema de la Evolución Constitucional del Uruguay* (Montevideo, 1971).

[10] This account of Uruguay's nineteenth century and early twentieth century political upheavals was offered by Batlle himself in his campaign against presidentialism and for Constitutional reform. *El Día*, 7 March 1913.

[11] J. P. Barrán and B. Nahum, *Historia Social de las Revoluciones de 1897 and 1904* (Montevideo, 1993), p. 53.

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insurrections unsuccessfully challenged autonomist rule. But these failed army uprisings in Argentina did not have the same social and political significance as the civil wars in Uruguay in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As Ezequiel Gallo put, from 1880 Argentina enjoyed several decades of relative political unity and stability, underpinned by exceptional economic growth and the monopoly of force acquired by the Argentine army.[12] Similar conditions were not to be achieved in Uruguay until the final military defeat of the Blancos in 1904.

It was because of its late consolidation, as much as its early modernisation, that the institutionalisation of the liberal political order in Uruguay coincided with the phase of democratic incorporation. Socially and politically it was by then too late for the institutionalisation of a purely liberal oligarchical political order, without allowing for a larger degree of popular participation. Batlle first came to power in 1903, that is 13 years earlier than Irigoyen, to whom he has been compared so many times. This time-gap was crucial, both politically and economically.

After the crisis of the first half of the 1890s, the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth were a buoyant period for the economies of both countries. In Argentina, between 1895 and 1913, there was strong growth in all major sectors. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by around 6 per cent a year, and the rural sector grew by 7 per cent between 1895–1908 and by 9 per cent between 1908–14. Farmland in use increased from under 5 million hectares in 1895 to 24 million hectares in 1914. The wheat acreage tripled during this period, corn acreage quadrupled and linseed quintupled.[13] Over this period, *per capita* incomes in Argentina compared with Germany and the Low Countries, and were higher than in Spain, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland. The years between 1905 and 1920 were a peak for economic indicators such as total investment as a percentage of GDP (1907), total foreign investment (1913), rate of population growth (1906) and land under cultivation (1914).[14]

Comparative economic figures for Uruguay over the same period are scarcer and less reliable.[15] However, there is no doubt that during the first

[12] E. Gallo, 'Argentina: Society and Politics, 1880–1916', in L. Bethell (ed.), *Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. V (Cambridge, 1986), p. 362. See also D. Rock, *Argentina 1516–1987* (London, 1987), chs. IV and V.

[13] D. Rock, 'Argentina in 1914: The Pampas, The Interior, Buenos Aires', in L. Bethell (ed.), *Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. V, p. 393 and Rock, *Argentina 1516–1987*, p. 165.

[14] D. Rock, 'Argentina in 1914: The Pampas, The Interior, Buenos Aires' in L. Bethell (ed.), *Cambridge History of Latin America*, p. 394.

[15] The most authoritative study of Uruguay's economy over the period is M. H. J. Finch, *A Political Economy of Uruguay Since 1870* (New York, 1981).

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decade and a half of the twentieth century Uruguay was also a prosperous country, although the economy was not as dynamic as that of Argentina. The effective end of the cycle of civil wars in 1904 greatly contributed to a general increase in confidence in the country's economic future, particularly within the rural sector. It has been calculated that between the end of the 1904 civil war and 1911, the annual rate of growth of GDP was around 5 per cent and that rural land values rose by 80 per cent between 1906 and 1910.[16] The general prosperity of the years 1905–15 meant that expansive and redistributive policies were possible in both countries. However, while in Argentina this was to the political advantage of conservative governments, in Uruguay it was to the political benefit of the founder of Batllismo.

On the political side, while Irigoyen was *fighting* for power over most of this period. Batlle was *acting* from power. When the Radicals eventually achieved power in Argentine in 1916 as a result of the Saenz Peña law (1912), it was against a well institutionalised political order under oligarchical hegemony. This oligarchy was neither conquered, nor was it totally removed from the control of the Argentine state, during the radical years. In Uruguay, on the other hand, the absorption of some important social and economic working class demands preceded the enlargement of the electoral franchise. When the Argentine conservative governments were responding to the challenge of the working class by having recourse to the Residence Laws, Batlle was proposing the 'eight hour day'. In other words, from 1880 to 1916 the Argentine political oligarchy enjoyed a period of economic prosperity, political hegemony and control over the state apparatus not experienced by their counterparts in the Uruguayan case.

The relative political weakness of Uruguay's landed upper class

Guillermo O'Donnell claims that the modern Argentine state was the creation of the landowners of the Buenos Aires province (the so-called *burguesía pampeana*). According to O'Donnell, the economic centrality of Buenos Aires' landed upper classes also signified their political centrality. In other words, in Argentina, as in most other Latin American countries of the period, nineteenth century liberal institutions took the form of political representations of oligarchical hegemony.[17] The landed upper class in Uruguay, although as elsewhere in Latin America the dominant economic force with a by no means negligible political power, lacked a

[16] Vanger, *The Model Country. José Batlle y Ordoñez of Uruguay 1907–1915*, p. 9.

[17] G. O'Donnell, 'Estado y Alianza de Clases en la Argentina', *Documento CEDES/G.E. CLACSO* No 5, 1976, p. 10.

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similar degree of political centrality. As a result, during the early Batllista period the modern Uruguayan political system was consolidated as a liberal state under non-oligarchical hegemony.

Why did the landed upper class in Uruguay lack the political centrality it possessed in other Latin American nations? A detailed answer to this question would require a historical overview of Uruguay's nineteenth century history that is beyond the scope of this essay.[18] There are, however, a number of elements that can be suggested. Three deserve brief consideration here: (*a*) the endemic social and political violence of the nineteenth century; (*b*) the early importance of Montevideo; and (*c*) the shortcomings of the late nineteenth century process of agricultural modernisation.

Anarchy and disorder were endemic problems in Uruguay's rural society for the first three quarters of the nineteenth century.[19] It was both a 'private' and a political violence. The former arose from the cattle culture and conflicts over property rights. The latter materialised in the political conflict between Blancos and Colorados which led to an almost uninterrupted cycle of civil wars. This political violence had a devastating effect over the agrarian economy. It has been calculated that, as a result of just one of these conflicts – the Great War, of *La Guerra Grande*, (1839–51) – the number of livestock fell from six and half million to about two and half million.[20]

Livestock was not the only casualty. The armed conflicts affected the whole fabric of rural society. Intentional damage was inflicted by the warring factions on the property of their enemies; horses and men were forcibly requisitioned to serve in the armies. Referring to the 1822–51 period, but in terms that, with certain qualifications, could well be extended for another quarter of a century, Carlos Real de Azúa wrote:

> The only possible summary of those forty years is that – voluntarily or by force – the cattle ranchers paid the heaviest toll for these regional and civil wars. They were fought in their lands and with their horses. The troops ate their cattle. Their houses were burned and their land seized when they happened to be on the wrong side of the conflicting factions.[21]

It is true that many other Latin American countries at that time suffered from political violence, but the civil wars in Uruguay stood out both for

[18] The question of the relative political weakness of Uruguay's landed upper classes was first raised by Carlos Real de Azúa in his paper *Uruguay: Una Sociedad Amortiguada*, (Montevideo, n/d).

[19] The most authoritative study of Uruguay's nineteenth century rural society is the classical study of José Pedro Barrán and Benjamín Nahum, *Historia Rural de Uruguay Moderno* (Montevideo, 1972).

[20] Barrán and Nahum, *Historia Rural*, vol. 1, p. 29.

[21] C. Real de Azúa, *El Patriciado Uruguayo* (Montevideo, 1981), p. 43.

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the devastation they produced and their continuation. What made the effects of the wars so pervasive was on the one hand, the small size and particular characteristics of the territory, which meant that the whole countryside was affected, and on the other, that as a cattle ranching economy the organisation of production was particularly suited for, and affected by, the ravages of war.

The precariousness of any sort of social order in nineteenth century Uruguay did not just affect people, but also property. Large areas of land had been appropriated since early colonial times, but this had not generated anything like a stable system of property rights. For certain sectors of the population, access to land was not impossible but was precarious. Aside from conflicting legal claims, land-property limits were usually ill-demarcated. Estates were not fenced, partly to allow cattle to move freely in search of grazing and water in periods of drought. Until the 1870s the most usual form of land appropriation was simple possession without any legal title.

The outcome of land conflicts depended more on the support of local *caudillos* than on the protection afforded by a weak central state. So it was not land property that generated political power, but rather political power that generated, or at least secured, land property.[22] Because of the wars and political divisions throughout the nineteenth century, and of the isolating effects of the *estancias*, of poor communications and unstable land tenure, the landowners as a class lacked social cohesiveness and were never very successful in translating their economic weight into political influence.

The counterpart to the relative weakness of the landed upper class was the early political, economic and demographic importance of the capital city, Montevideo. By 1867 Montevideo already housed almost one third of the Uruguayan population and was the only city of any importance.[23] The only natural deep water port in the platine region, its importance, in terms of trade, was international rather than national.[24] Imports and exports,

[22] For the links between land property and political violence, see B. Paris de Oddone, L. Sala de Tourón and R. Alonso, *De la Colonia a la Consolidación del Uruguay* (Montevideo, 1973).

[23] By 1869 the population of Montevideo was 126,096 inhabitants against a total population of 384,259. Well over 50 per cent of the capital's population were foreigners. Eduardo Acevedo, *Anales Históricos del Uruguay* (Montevideo, 1933), p. 430.

[24] The importance of Montevideo was increased during the frequent periods of political unrest in the region. So, during the 1840s, due to the blockade of the port of Buenos Aires by the British and French fleets, the Argentine province of Corrientes exported more than 445,000 hides through the port of Montevideo, as well as tobacco and other commodities. Sala de Touron *et al*., *De la Colonia*.... During the war of the 'Triple Alliance' against Paraguay, Montevideo went through one of its most prosperous

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supplying merchant and navy ships and the bulk sale of commodities provided the economic basis for the early emergence of a powerful class of urban merchants, the so-called *Alto Comercio*. However, while the scant division of capital in nineteenth century Uruguayan society meant that urban and agricultural interests were closely related to each other, their economic interests did not always coincide. For instance, on the important question of the maintenance of the gold standard, the Government historically leaned towards the financial and commercial interests and against the cattle ranchers.

How did rural and urban interests relate to the state? Closely involved in the financing of the state and therefore able to exert strong influence on its decisions, the members of the *Alto comercio* were not, as a rule, involved in the direct administration of state affairs. Nor were the landed upper classes. Politics was left to another social group, the so-called *patriciado*, socially and politically differentiated from the economic elite. Descendants of the founding fathers of the Uruguayan nation, the *patriciado* preserved a strong sense of identity throughout the nineteenth century. As a group specialised in the management of public affairs, towards the end of the century they constituted a self-perpetuating elite with different class origins, sources of income and political affiliation from the economic elite. While the landed upper classes (many of whom were foreigners) remained outside politics or belonged mainly to the Blanco party, the *patriciado* remained in control of the state (and the state's budget) through their control of the Colorado party machine and the state's influence over an electorate largely composed of public employees and the police.[25]

However, in the nineteenth century the state did not exercise a strong presence in the national territory as a whole, at least not until the last quarter of the century. Chronically short of revenue and haunted by debts, the state had no chance of performing its function of maintaining public order over large parts of the country. There was, however, an important qualification to this weakness of the central state: throughout the nineteenth century, challenges were directed against the governments rather than against the state. That is, in Uruguay, there were no regional forces able to bring into question the central power of the state. Both Blancos and colorados were national, not regional, parties (even if, as a

periods in its nineteenth century history by supplying the armies of the allied nations, while agricultural production in the countryside was in deep crisis, which shows that the capital's economy had a relatively high degree of autonomy from its rural hinterland.

[25] For a more in-depth discussion on the *patriciado* as relatively autonomous state managers see Real de Azua, *El Patriciado Uruguayo* and Barrán and Nahum, *Batlle, Los Estancieros y el Imperio Británico*, vol. 1, section 3.

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result of the *Guerra Grande*, the Blancos asserted themselves as the main force in the countryside and the Colorados in the capital city). Both parties had their rural *caudillos* and their urban *dotores* (as the members of the literate urban elite were called by their rural counterparts), often in conflict with each other. In spite of the paramount military importance of the rural *caudillos*, power was held mostly by the urban elite. After the *Guerra Grande*, only one *caudillo*, the Colorado Venancio Flores, reached the presidency. Even this was more a result of the support of the Brazilian army than of his own forces. No counterpart to Rosas or Urquiza can be found in Uruguayan history.

In brief, during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the relative weaknesses and strengths of the urban and rural upper classes in Uruguay resulted in a delicate balance of forces. The early importance of Montevideo, in terms of its strategic military and economic situation as well as its population, gave the capital city a political and economic importance of its own, in spite of the overwhelmingly agricultural nature of the country's economy. The state, mainly managed by the urban-based *patriciado*, was a centralised power structure with a weak presence in the countryside. Yet there were no regional forces outside the state threatening its unity or centrality. For their part, the rural *caudillos* were neither subordinated to the state's authority, nor were they feudal junkers. Their power, particularly their military power, was established outside of the state institutions, which they were not able to conquer or control by themselves. Rather, they related to the state through the loose structures of the traditional parties. Both these parties, with their different geographical balances and contrasting rural/urban bases of support, were national as opposed to regional, or sectorial, parties. They were both loose alliances of rural and urban notables without any clear political differences among themselves.[26]

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century this state of affairs had begun to change. The more modern members of the landed upper class increasingly regarded the continuous unrest in the countryside as a liability. In 1876 the Minister of War, Col. Lorenzo Latorre, deposed President Varela and embarked on a decade of military rule. This date marked the start of a long-term process of strengthening the state's authority over the whole national territory, to be completed by Batlle himself. This process also coincided with the modernisation of the agricultural sector. The policy of land enclosure – *el alambramiento de los campos* – showed the close relationship between the two elements.

[26] For the relations between *caudillos* and *dotores*, see J. E. Pivel Devoto, *Historia de los Partidos Políticos en el Uruguay* (Montevideo, 1942).

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In the decade between 1872 and 1882, the surface area of land fenced grew from 29,700 *cuadras* to 1,178,480.[27] These land enclosures served a dual purpose: they allowed for better techniques of cattle handling, and were a way of demarcating property rights. They also had far reaching social consequences, producing the first wave of technological unemployment in Uruguayan history. While precise figures are difficult to establish, it has been estimated that up to 10 per cent of the entire rural population was expelled from the land during that period.[28] Aside from land fencing, property rights in the countryside were also asserted by the enforcement of new legislation: the Rural Code (1875), the Code of Criminal Procedures (1878), and the creation of the Cattle Identification Marks Office (1877). Protection of property over land and cattle, however, would not have been possible without an increase in the coercive powers of the state. For that purpose, the rural police was reorganised and made into an effective law enforcement force in the countryside. It dealt ruthlessly with the large sections of the rural population living at the margins of agricultural society. Uruguay's leading historian of the period, Eduardo Acevedo, has drawn attention to the large number of detainees killed by the rural police under the allegation that they had attempted to escape.[29]

In this way, the old and new rural poor became the victims of agricultural modernisation in late nineteenth century Uruguay. Evicted from lands they had hitherto occupied without proper legal rights, and no longer needed as a surplus labour force in the newly fenced *estancias*, they migrated to the growing shanty towns, to Montevideo or to the more prosperous Argentine countryside. Those who remained were pursued by the police and drafted into the army or into forced labour. One leading member of the representative body of the cattle ranchers, the *Asociación Rural*, pointed out that what really mattered for the advancement of the nation was the security of its rural population.

What is remarkable is that, in spite of the well recorded fears of some influential intellectuals and politicians of the period, the suffering of the rural poor during that time produced very little social and political unrest.[30] Again, it is worth stressing the limited character of the process

[27] J. P. Barrán and B. Nahum, *Historia Rural del Uruguay Moderno*, vol. 1, p. 537.

[28] Barrán and Nahum, *Historia Rural*, p. 560.

[29] Eduardo Acevedo, *Anales Históricos*, vol. 4, p. 16 quoted in Barrán and Nahum, *Historia Rural*, vol. 1, p. 492.

[30] In this sense there is very little historical support for the claim by Riet that it was in this period, for the first time since Artigas, that an open class conflict emerged in the Uruguayan countryside. Even if the hardship caused to large numbers of the rural population by the land enclosures was certainly a potential source of conflict, it

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of agricultural modernisation in Uruguay in the late nineteenth century. The victims were not the peasants of a pre-capitalist agrarian economy, but the rural poor, a group of people without strong links to the land or amongst themselves. As such, they lacked the degree of solidarity and cohesiveness displayed by peasant communities elsewhere. Amongst them were protagonists of the last two great civil wars, but this factor never jeopardised the issue of property relations in the rural areas.

If the process of agricultural modernisation did not have to deal with a pre-capitalist peasantry, it also did not involve a confrontation between a traditional rural oligarchy with a rising, commercially-minded agrarian bourgeoisie. Both traditional and modernising landowners supported the policy of land enclosures, although for a different mixture of reasons: the modernisers mainly because it allowed better breeding techniques, the traditionalists because it clarified the boundaries of their property.

Whatever the differences in technologies and social relations separating the 'progressive' littoral and the 'traditional' North and East, there were no fundamental conflicts of interest between the two sectors of the landed upper class. Both produced the same commodities for the external and internal markets: meat, hides, tallows and, more recently, wool. Generally, both the modernising and the more traditional cattle ranchers were equally affected by prices and policies. Large estates dominated both the littoral and the North East. Any possible threat to their land rights would find the landed upper class united in their defence. What differentiated the two landowning sectors, however, were their political attitudes. For obvious reasons, the civil wars were very unpopular with the modernising landowners of the littoral, many of whom were foreigners, entrepreneurs who feared the destruction of their valuable livestock. However, the ranches of the region near the Brazilian border, which were still very much structured around traditional *caudillo* links rather than modern labour relations and a profit-maximising rationality, provided the social basis for the 1897 and 1904 uprisings. It has been estimated that between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of the members of the revolutionary forces came from the Northern and Eastern departments, near the Brazilian border. As Barrán and Nahum have shown, it is no coincidence that these regions had the largest concentration of rural poor. It was the rural poor that formed the backbone of the revolutionary army. By joining, they at least secured food, dignity and a sense of identity, and they avoided being drafted into the national army.[31]

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nevertheless never materialised, least of all along class lines. See N. Galain, G. Riet, F. Vernazza and M. Weinberger, 'Los Conflictos de Clases en el Proceso de Modernización de la Sociedad Uruguaya (1855–1895)', *Cuadernos de Ciencias Sociales* 2, pp. 117–52.

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In brief, the process of limited agricultural modernisation that took place in Uruguay over the final quarter of the nineteenth century resulted in both the introduction of changes in rural society and in the consolidation of some of its more backward characteristics. It phased out some pre-capitalist features of an already capitalist economy, particularly the surplus labour force living in the *estancias*. With the consolidation of social order in the countryside, a period of economic growth in the agricultural sector was possible. It did not, however, produce a more integrated or diversified rural society. By evicting many small and medium-sized cattle ranchers from the land and asserting the property rights of the big landowners, a pattern of social relations was fixed which was to remain largely unchanged in the history of rural Uruguay: a social structure marked by extremes of wealth and poverty which continuously expelled people to Montevideo or abroad. As for the scattered labour force of the cattle ranches, the peons, they were left, if anything, more isolated than before. At best subject to a paternalistic relationship with the landowners, they lacked the social conditions that might have made them a threat to the *status quo*.

However, the undeniable political and economic power of the landowners was constrained by a number of social and political limitations. The process of agricultural modernisation in Uruguay was much less expansive than in Argentina. Technological and social changes in Argentina's countryside began earlier and were comparatively more far reaching. For instance, land enclosure, with all its economic and social consequences, took place in Uruguay mainly over a ten year period (1872–82). In Argentina, even though the enclosure movement peaked at about the same time as in Uruguay, it was spread over a longer period. Land fencing became a common practice in Buenos Aires province as early as the 1850s.[32] Its disruptive consequences, therefore, were less strongly felt in Argentina than in Uruguay.

It is important to note that, in Uruguay, the land was basically occupied when the enclosure process began. In Argentina, however, as a result of the Campaign of the Desert (1879–80), the last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a greater expansion of the land frontier. The availability of agricultural and in Buenos Aires province nearly doubled when vast Patagonian territories south of the Río Negro were effectively incorporated into the Argentine territory. It is true that the expanding

[31] J. P. Barrán and B. Nahum, *Historia Social de las Revoluciones de 1897 y 1904* (Montevideo, 1993) ch. 4.

[32] C. Díaz Alejandro, *Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic* (New Haven and London, 1970), p. 159.

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agricultural frontier in Argentina did not result in the setting up of a land of free farmers as was the case in the colonisation of the west in the USA. On the contrary, land occupation in Argentina's new frontier lands followed the same pattern of ownership as the earlier occupation of Buenos Aires province: mainly privately-owned large estates. As Carlos Díaz Alejandro put it, the United States Homestead Act was known and admired in Argentina, but only pale imitations were enacted.[33] Land availability, however, not only contributed to increased agricultural output but also absorbed significant amounts of labour power, which was provided to a large extent by European immigration. In this way, the immigrants did not only remain in the urban areas, as in Uruguay, but also populated the countryside.

Another significant difference between the processes of agricultural modernisation in the two countries was the respective rate of expansion of crop production. Between 1888 and 1895, land under cultivation in Argentina doubled from 2.5 million hectares to almost 5 million. This expansion continued into the first two decades of the twentieth century, when a new wave of agricultural expansion occurred in lands which had already been either totally or partially given over to cattle raising.[34] By the early twentieth century, Argentina was among the world's leading cereal and meat exporters, and was the largest exporter of maize and linseed. Despite competition with land for cattle, the expansion of wheat production after 1900 was faster in Argentina than in Canada, and Argentina was among the three largest wheat exporters in the world. In comparison, the expansion of Uruguay's agriculture was much more limited. In 1911 land under cultivation reached a peak for the period at just above 5 per cent of all agricultural land, and Uruguay's cereal exports never surpassed 10 per cent of the country's total exports.[35]

In brief, the economy in both Uruguay and Argentina was dominated by the large landowners. In Argentina, however, the agricultural sector was more efficient and dynamic. It was therefore more able to profit from the favourable international trade conditions of the early twentieth century. The differences in the process of agricultural development meant that the Argentine landed upper classes and its allies were, by the turn of the century, a wealthier, more cohesive and potentially more hegemonic force than their Uruguayan counterparts.

The political influence of a social force, however, does not depend only

[33] Díaz Alejandro, *Essays*, p. 39.

[34] R. Cortés Conde, 'The Growth of the Argentine Economy', p. 332.

[35] D. Rock, 'Argentina in 1914', p. 394 and J. P. Barrán and B. Nahum, *Historia Rural de Uruguay Moderno*, vol. 7 (Montevideo, 1978), p. 10.

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on its relative wealth. Political factors ultimately determine the ability to become a leading force. In 1876 in Uruguay and in 1880 in Argentina, two military men (Col. Lorenzo Latorre and General Julio A. Roca) came to power. But they did so *via* different means: Latorre by way of what was effectively Uruguay's first military coup; and Roca through the restricted electoral procedures of oligarchical liberalism. Both presidents had the backing of the conservative classes in their respective countries. Both sought to strengthen the state's authority and their administrations were the starting points of a process of economic growth that only ended in the international crisis of the 1890s.[36]

There were, however, important differences between the two regimes. Helped by his military victory and a favourable economic outlook, Roca was able to dominate and shape Argentina's politics in a much more decisive way than Latorre and his successors in Uruguay. Through the cooptation of the provincial elites in a network of alliances, Roca was able to build up a highly effective political machine commanded from the top. The Governors' League, *La Liga de los Gobernadores*, was an elaborate system of clientelistic politics based on the Executive's control over the so-called provincial situations (*las situaciones provinciales*).[37] Roca's political machine, in turn, was put at the service of the economic project of the 'generation of the eighties', which combined economic liberalism with a staunch political conservatism under the economic hegemony of the landed upper classes of Buenos Aires province. As Natalio Botana put it, the extraordinary increase in wealth in the 1880s consolidated the economic power of a social group whose members were regarded as 'naturally' fit for government. Economic power and political power became one and the same; this coincidence justified the coinage of a specific term, *la oligarquía pampeana*.[38]

Latorre, for his part, ruled without seeking the active support of political parties and without attempting to set up his own political machine. His successor, General Máximo Santos, although also a military man, became progressively identified with the traditional Colorado party machine. The termination of the militarist period was the result of a bipartisan agreement, the *conciliación de noviembre*. The first civilian president following military rule, Julio Herrera y Obes (an urban, liberal, Colorado) adopted increasingly sectarian attitudes, and his successor, Idiarte Borda, also a Colorado, followed the same path. The Blancos,

[36] For a comparative history of this period, see T. Halperín Donghi, *História Contemporánea de América Latina* (Madrid, 1980).

[37] D. Rock, *Argentina 1516–1987*, p. 155.

[38] N. Botana, *El Orden Conservador. La Política Argentina entre 1880 y 1916* (Buenos Aires, 1985), p. 71.

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feeling themselves unjustly excluded from power responded with the 1897 and, later, with the 1904 armed upheavals.[39]

By the turn of the century both the Argentine and the Uruguayan political systems faced serious challenges, albeit of a very different nature. From the 1890s, the conservative political order in Argentina faced the challenge of the Unión Cívica Radical, founded by Leandro Alem at the beginning of the 1890s. The Radicals preached '*abstención y revolución*', and attempted uprisings in 1893 and 1895. Alfredo Palacios was elected the first socialist deputy in Latin America in 1905. In Uruguay meanwhile, although the Blancos' armed uprisings of 1897 and 1904 deeply shook the political system, no new political forces emerged over the same period with the exception of the small socialist and catholic parties. So, while the country's traditional political forces were bitterly divided and engaged in armed confrontations, they nevertheless would show a much greater ability to incorporate new social sectors into the traditional political system.

In brief, the oligarchical liberal order in Argentina was, by the late nineteenth century, economically more successful and, although facing new challenges, it was politically more stable than in Uruguay, where the Blancos and Colorados were still engaged in armed struggles for the control of the state. Moreover, the landed upper class of Buenos Aires province, the so-called *oligarquía pampeana*, had a degree of political and economic centrality which was not matched by their Uruguayan counterparts.[40]

Early modernisation

How did the incorporation of new social sectors take place in Uruguay? It would be misleading to portray the early Batllista period as one in which the state pushed forward a number of reforms amidst the total passivity of the popular sectors. The conditions for the emergence of a movement like Batllismo were given perhaps earlier in Uruguay than in any other Latin American nation. It was mainly an urban movement. At the beginning of the century, Montevideo was the fifth largest capital in Latin

[39] Juan C. Pivel Devoto, *Historia de los Partidos Políticos*, chs. IV and VII.

[40] Carlos Waisman points out that the peculiarities of Argentina's political evolution were related to two distinctive traits: unlike other lands of recent settlement, it had a landed upper class that controlled the state apparatus, and unlike the modal Latin American setting the population included a high proportion of immigrants. In the specific conditions of Argentina – Waisman argues – the second trait was conducive to democracy, while the first one was not. C. H. Waisman, 'Argentina: Autarchic Industrialization and Illegitimacy', in Diamond, Linz and Lipset (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries. Latin America*, p. 66.

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America, a notable feature given Uruguay's small population. The capital housed 28.7 per cent of the total population, against an average figure of between 3 per cent to 5 per cent for other Latin American capitals in the same period.[41] With a very different economic structure, Uruguay had by that time a rate of urbanisation similar to countries like Austria and Japan, and higher than in Russia, Hungary, Italy and Spain.[42] In Latin America, only Argentina bears any comparison with Uruguay in terms of its rate of urbanisation. However, in Uruguay, urbanisation was even more concentrated in the one city, Montevideo.[43]

In this comparatively large urban society there were no large industries. There were, nevertheless, a considerable number of small, semi-artisan domestic manufacturers, together with some fairly large public enterprises like the railways. It was in these sectors that the first working class organisations emerged under the influence of European immigrants. The first recorded trade unions were set up in 1870, and the first known industrial action took place in the early 1880s.[44] In 1905, the first trade union confederation, the anarchist-led *Federación Obrera Regional Uruguaya* (FORU) was founded. The eight-hour day had by then been defined as a common goal for all workers.

The years 1905–06 were peak years for trade union activity. Militancy subsequently declined until 1911, when the first general strike in Uruguayan history took place.[45] After 1913 there was again a sharp decline in activity, due in part to the economic crisis of the immediate pre-war period. It was not until 1917 that further strikes took place, led particularly by the meat packing and tram-way workers. The dockworkers

[41] By the turn of the century nearly 30% of the Uruguayan population lived in a city of over 10,000 inhabitants. Corresponding figures for Argentina over the same period are 16.8 per cent, followed by Cuba (15.0 per cent) and Chile (14.1 per cent). N. Sánchez Albornoz, *The Population of Latin America. A History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1974), pp. 179–80 and table 5.13.

[42] J. P. Barrán and B. Nahum, *Batlle*, *Los Estancieros y el Imperio Británico*, vol. 1, pp. 110–11.

[43] While by the turn of the century Montevideo housed 28.7 per cent of the country's population, the figure for Buenos Aires was just 16.8 per cent. Sánchez Albornoz, *The Population of Latin America*, Table 5.13, pp. 178–79.

[44] For a history of Uruguay's trade union movement, see Héctor Rodriguez, *Nuestros Sindicatos (1865–1965)*, (Montevideo, 1965).

[45] For the anarchist workers' mobilisation that led to the general strike see A. Rosenthal, 'The Arrival of the Electric Streetcar and the Conflict over Progress in Early Twentieth-Century Montevideo', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 27, 1995, pp. 319–41. I believe, however, that Rosenthal's presentation of the elite's vision of progress and its attitude toward the workers is highly simplistic. Contrast it with Ruth and David Collier's analysis of Batlle's views and attitudes toward the labour movement. R. Berins Collier and D. Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena* (Princeton 1991), pp. 278–84.

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were involved in another major industrial conflict in 1918. In the 1920s, the trade union movement entered a difficult period as a result of its internal factionalism, and an unfavourable economic outlook. Partial statistics for the period show that by 1921 some of the main industries had fired between 20 per cent and 50 per cent of their workforce. By 1927 the two rival trade union organisations, the anarchist FORU and the *Unión Sindical Uruguaya* (USU) comprised between them no more than 7,000 members out of a total of 65,717 manual workers in the capital. This was no higher than the figure registered for FORU alone 15 years earlier.[46]

The highs and lows of the trade union movement in the first quarter of the twentieth century were not just related to economic factors or to internal factionalism. It should be noted that the two major peaks of union activity (1905–06 and 1911–13) coincided with Batlle's two presidential terms. During both periods the government followed Batlle's policy of so-called 'equidistance' between workers and employers.[47] The authorities even took a sympathetic attitude towards striking workers. This was symbolised when President Batlle addressed a workers' demonstration from his balcony during the 1911 general strike. Such an unprecedented gesture, together with the government's sponsorship of the eight hour day and other social legislation, firmly established Batlle's appeal to important sectors of the urban working class.

This pro-worker attitude on the part of the government was much less apparent during the two administrations headed by Batlle's successors to the presidency (and his own nominees): Claudio Williman (1907–11) and Feliciano Viera (1915–19). As Collier and Collier point out, following the early incorporation of the working class, Uruguay experienced a long impasse between the Batlle forces and their conservative opponents, which lasted from the second half of the 1910s to the late 1920s.[48] Even if some new social legislation acts were passed during Williman and Viera's periods of office, striking workers were usually dealt with severely by the police. In 1908, with police assistance, the British-owned Railways Company broke the most important trade union of the period, the railwaymen. Repression was also used by Viera against striking meat-packing workers in 1917, and against the dockers in 1918.[49]

[46] According to the 1926 National labour Office census, in Montevideo there were 65,717 manual workers (*obreros*), 27,179 white collars (*empleados*) and 26,549 domestic servants. W. Turianski, *El Movimiento Obrero Uruguayo* (Montevideo, 1973), p. 32 and H. Rodríguez, *Nuestros Sindicatos*, p. 21.

[47] For an analysis of the ideas of Batllismo toward the working class, see Finch, *A Political Economy*, chapter one and Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, pp. 278–84.

[48] Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, p. 438.

[49] For an overview of government-unions relations during this period see Héctor Rodríguez, *Nuestros Sindicatos*, chs. 3, 4 and 5 and M. Vanger, *The Model Country*, ch. 2.

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This brief summary of the relation between the state and the unions in the early Batllista period illustrates a number of issues: (*a*) that there was already a certain pressure from below for some of the demands that were eventually granted by Batllismo; this was particulary true of the politically most important, the eight hour day, although as the ups and downs in union activity indicate, the worker's strength was still limited and conditioned by the attitude of the government; and (*b*) that the contradictory attitudes of different governments of the same party towards the working class highlight the intrinsic ambivalence not just of the Colorado party, but of Batlle's own faction within the party. This state of affairs had an important political consequence: the fact that a sympathetic attitude towards the workers depended so much on Batlle's own person reinforced Batlle's image as the grantor of popular democratic demands.

In spite of all his legislation and activities favourable to the workers, Batlle never sought to establish an organic link with the working class. Few labour union or federation leaders actively supported Batlle, either by suggesting to their members that they vote for him or by supporting his programmes through channels such as the declarations of the various labour leaders.[50] With the exception of the tiny socialist party, founded in 1910, no workers' representatives sat in Parliament during that period. Under anarchist leadership and with a considerable number of foreign-born people in their ranks, the workers, as a rule, did not participate in elections. As we already know, Batlle did not accede to the presidency by popular vote but because of his superior skills at manoeuvring within the closed ranks of incumbent Colorado legislators. Even though Batlle's journal *El Día* had, in earlier times, defended the workers' right to strike, as the 1903 indirect presidential election approached, the newspaper muted any controversial opinion on social affairs. Batlle himself did not take office committed to an explicit social and political programme, but simply as his party's most able standard-bearer.[51]

When popular elections were held, as elsewhere in Latin America, voter turnout was very low. Widespread electoral fraud and a lack of confidence in the electoral system contributed to the general apathy. Those who bothered to vote were largely public employees – whose jobs depended on their electoral participation – and the police – who were not supposed to vote, but did anyway. In the first parliamentary election after Batlle took office – in January 1905 – only 45,00 people out of a population of over one million turned out to vote, i.e. less than 5 per cent of the population.

[50] Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, p. 279.
[51] M. Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordoñez*, ch. 4.

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The first meaningful popular elections – under secret ballot – were those for the Constituent Assembly in 1916. Even then, the 145,000 voters were still only just over 10 per cent of the total population.[52] The 1917 Constitution signalled the institutionalisation of Uruguayan politics. It was not, however, until the 1920s that political participation through a fair electoral process became firmly established. It was also only in the 1920s that Batllismo – through its Convention – established some sort of institutional channel for internal debate on policy matters.[53]

Much of Batlle's social and economic programme of reform was carried out between 1911 and 1920. However, in 1906, two years after the end of the last civil war, and with the question of political institutionalisation still unresolved. Batlle was already advocating the eight hour day. On that occasion he declared in an interview:

> I have worked to prepare a plan of social reform, all designed to look after and liberate the working class. But you must realise that up to now we have had a Senate composed of good patriots, but who were conservatives. The new Senate, on the other hand, will be entirely liberal and will not put obstacles in the way of reforms. The workers already know that they will find protection in the government. I believe – in fact – that in countries like ours, where the problem of liberty is already solved, it is necessary to begin to resolve social problems.[54]

Aside from the eight hour day, (1915) legislation included the first pension fund for civil servants, the divorce law (1907), the introduction of old age pensions (1919), compensation for redundancy (1914), the extension of secondary education to the departmental capital cities, and the abolition of registration fees in secondary and university education (1916). There were also what can be called the moral aspects of the Batllista project, such as the abolition of the death penalty, the protection of illegitimate children and, of course, his anti-religious campaign. To all this should be added the early intervention of the state in the economy and the setting up of the first state-owned enterprises: the Capital City Electricity Company (1905–12), the Bank of the Republic (1911) and the State Mortgages Bank (1912).

In its most radical period in office Batlle questioned some significant elements of the established social and political order. The law which awarded the state a monopoly over most insurance covers (1911) led to a clash with important British interests. Even if the eight hour day was already granted to some sections of the working class, and notwithstanding the fact that when the law was eventually passed it was

[52] B. Nahum, *Historia Uruguaya*, vol. 6, p. 79.
[53] For Batllismo in the 1920s see G. Lindahl, *Batlle, Fundador de la Democracia Uruguaya*.
[54] Newspaper *El Día*, 24 December 1906. Cited in M. Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordoñez*, pp. 255–56.

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already less a radical initiative than when first proposed nine years earlier, the proposal was still opposed by all the employers' organisations. The divorce law and the anti-religious campaign led to bitter clashes with the Catholic Church and its influential social backers. And even if in practice Batllismo showed itself powerless to promote any significant social change in the countryside, its political discourse and some of its projects were alarming enough to prompt the establishment in 1915 of the *Federación Rural*. This was representative body of the *estancieros* with a more politically explicit role and a more militant oppositional attitude towards the Government than the urban-based, more traditional *Asociación Rural*.[55]

The radical reformist drive of Batllismo was clearly signalled by the campaign that preceded the 1916 election for the Constituent Assembly. Both those who were in favour and those who opposed Batlle's controversial proposal for the plural executive – *El Colegiado* – made clear that what was at stake beyond the project for constitutional reform were all the social and economic issues raised during Batlle's second term in office. While the Batllistas linked the vote for the reform with the eight hour day, the Colorado opposition newspaper *La Mañana* was even more explicit. Drawing up a balance of the election result, an editorial from the newspaper stressed that in this election it was not just constitutional and political issues that were at stake but all social and economic laws.[56]

Even Batllismo endorsed this interpretation of the defeat it suffered in the election with President Viera (Batlle's chosen successor), when the latter called in his famous speech for pause in the programme of reforms, which came to be known as '*el alto de Viera*'.[57] What is more, Batlle himself supported Viera's retreat from radical challenge to the *status quo*. This challenge – the challenge of Batllismo – took place before the full completion of the process of political institutionalisation. This challenge was carried on despite the absence of proper channels for political participation at electoral or party level, and without any organic relation with the working class or the trade union movement.

[55] For the opposition of the *Federación Rural* to Batllismo as stated through the speeches of the organisation's influential president, see J. Irureta Goyena, *Discursos de José Irureta Goyena: Homenaje a su memoria* (Montevideo, 1948).

[56] *La Mañana*, 1 July 1917, quoted in B. Nahum, *Historia Uruguaya*, vol. 6, p. 90.

[57] This is a translation of President Viera's famous speech: 'The advanced social and economic legislation passed during the last legislative periods have caused concern among many of our supporters which had voted against us on the 30th. Right gentlemen, let us not go any further in matters of social and economic legislation. Let us bring together capital and labour. We have moved too fast, let us make a pause in our journey. Let us not sponsor new laws of this type and stop those who are currently under the consideration of parliament. Any new legislation should be sanctioned only with the agreement of all interested parties.' Quoted in B. Nahum, *Historia Uruguaya* p. 89.

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The political strategy of Batllismo led to the opening up of the closed world of liberal oligarchical politics. This was not achieved simply by way of a break with the past. It was rather an attempt to detach the political system from its narrow oligarchical basis and rearticulate it with a broader democratic project. In this process, while the moment of political institutionalisation was later and more precarious than its Argentine counterpart, the absorption of the demands of the urban popular sectors was earlier and, to a considerable extent, its social aspects preceded the enlargement of suffrage.[58]

Conclusions

This article has suggested that the successful democratic incorporation of the Uruguayan political system was related to certain structural features of the country's economy and society; to the timing of the consolidation of state power in relation to the democratic incorporation; to the degree of relative autonomy of the political elite from economically dominant classes; and to the way subordinate class interests were addressed by the state. In no way, however, can the emergence of a liberal democratic order in Uruguay be attributed to economic determinism or historical inevitability. As Diamond *et al.* point out, the period at which a new democratic regime was founded and began to function provided particularly wide scope for political leadership to shape the character of politics and political institutions. This proved to be the case in Uruguay.[59] In this sense, the political strategy set up by the founder of Batllismo of addressing working class demands simultaneously or even prior to the implementation of full male electoral democracy proved highly successful in the setting up of democratic institutions. Batlle had to deal simultaneously with two separate questions that in Argentina were solved

[58] It is true that in Argentina labour laws on issues like days of rest and regulations governing the labour of women and children were passed before 1916. However, as Ezequiel Gallo points out, progress in the sphere of labour legislation was hesitant and slow. Even the reform achievements of the Radicals, much more sympathetic to the working class, are, perhaps rather unfairly, characterised as 'insignificant' by David Rock. E. Gallo, 'Argentina: Society and Politics', p. 368; D. Rock, 'Argentina From the First World War to the Revolution of 1930', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. V (Cambridge 1986), pp. 435–37 and Rueschemeyer *et al.*, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, p. 182.

[59] Diamond, Linz and Lipset (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries. Latin America*, p. 15. This is also Ruth and David Collier's main point. They argue that the emergence of different forms of control and mobilisation of the labour movement during the initial incorporation periods in Latin America, along with their varied legacies, produced contrasting reactions and counter reactions, generating different modes of conflict and accommodation that laid the foundation for contrasting political legacies. See Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, pp. 27–39, 271–313 and 438–56.

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at different historical moments: the question of political institutionalisation, and the demands for democratic participation from the emerging middle class and popular urban sectors. By the time that these demands were incorporated into Uruguay's process of political institutionalisation, it was no longer possible to integrate them into the existing elitist oligarchical political order. The demands for political participation raised for so long by the Blancos, were, at this historical moment, completed with the social and economic demands of new social sectors represented by Batllismo. When the process of political institutionalisation was eventually consolidated in the period from the Government's victory in the 1904 civil war to the Constitution of 1917, the political order which emerged was necessarily very different to the one that would have emerged twenty years earlier.

The demands of the Blancos, for which they took up arms in 1897, 1903 and 1904, did not go beyond the limits of the pre-existing liberal order: co-participation, opposition to electoral fraud and to the abuses and corruption of the state. The nature of these demands was in many ways similar to those of the Radical opposition in Argentina. Blancos and Radicals, however, were very different political forces. The Blancos, with strong support in rural areas and among sectors of the urban upper classes, were a traditional conservative force not particularly sympathetic to the urban popular classes.[60] The fact that the Blanco *caudillo* Aparicio Saravia was inclined to support Mac Eachen, the ultra-conservative Colorado rival to Batlle's first presidential candidacy, illustrates the political context in which the Blancos' demands should be understood.

The fact that in Uruguay the process of enlargement of the political system was conducted from the state and from a party historically identified with the prevailing social and political order did not result in its being at the service of a conservative project. It is clear that Batlle was not just an enlightened conservative politician. During his period in office he brought into question some of the basic tenets of the *status quo*. Batlle's social legislation was not enacted as a complement to anti-socialist laws, as in Bismark's Germany, but in a context of government encouragement to union activities, as exemplified by the episode from the 1911 General Strike.

[60] The fact that the Radicals represented mainly emerging middle class and, to a lesser extent, working class urban sectors, gave them a popular appeal which was closer to that of Batllismo than to the Blancos, even if their appeal was not explicitly reflected in an elaborate social programme. On the other hand, while the Colorados under Batlle had a wider agenda of social and economic democratisation than the Radicals, the Colorados' control of the state apparatus and their resource to unfair electoral methods were more akin to those of the conservative Argentine political forces.

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There was, however, another dimension to the same question. The fact that the 'Batllista period' was simultaneously a process of political institutionalisation and of democratisation of the political system, meant that both institutions and agents were shaped by the process. As it developed, Batllismo did not break with the past: it used and adapted it to its own political project. Batlle did not seek the destruction of the old oligarchical political and social forces. He bargained, neutralised and subordinated them, both within the parties and society at large. In this context, the economically dominant classes, while still strong enough to defend their corporate interests, never gained political centrality.

That the democratic institutions in Uruguay were so strongly connected with the state had far reaching historical implications beyond this foundational period. On the one hand, the early expansion of the state to the economic and social terrain meant that from its inception the neo-classical division between economics and politics, and the juridical distinction between the public and the private, became blurred. On the other hand, the fact that popular demands were conceded from the state at an early stage meant that the relationship between the popular sectors and the state was not constituted as a purely external one. The state did not appear as 'an instrument of the dominant classes', but as a centre for institutional alliances and compromises. It is a measure of this formula's success that it ensured more than half a century of democratic stability before the breakdown of the early 1970s.

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