J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **31**, 589–616 Printed in the United Kingdom

Workers, Citizens and the Argentine Nation: Party Politics and the Working Class in Rosario, 1912–3*

MATTHEW B. KARUSH

Abstract. The electoral democracy created by the Sáenz Peña Law of 1912 opened up dramatic new possibilities for working-class political identity. In the important port city of Rosario, the Radical politician Ricardo Caballero crafted a political discourse that combined an explicit defence of working-class interests with a nostalgic depiction of the country's rural past. By linking class consciousness with images drawn from the popular culture of the 'gauchesque,' *Caballerismo* constructed a distinctively working-class version of Argentine nationalism and citizenship.

In 1912, Argentina's President Roque Sáenz Peña signed into law a package of electoral reform measures that would rapidly transform the nation's political system. Although universal male suffrage had long been the legal standard in Argentina, the so-called Sáenz Peña Law introduced several important innovations: compulsory voting, the secret ballot, a system of minority representation, as well as the use of new and improved voter lists. Together, these reforms led to an immediate and dramatic expansion of the electorate; over three times as many voters participated in the national elections of 1912 as had voted just two years before.[1] Recently, historians have begun to reconsider the nature of this transformation by analyzing politics in the periods before and after the Sáenz Peña Law.[2] This article contributes to this project through an

Matthew B. Karush is Assistant Professor of History, George Mason University

* The research on which this article is based was made possible by a grant from the Social Science Research Council. I would like to thank Alison Landsberg, Oscar Videla, Marta Bonaudo, and the anonymous reviewers of the JLAS for their suggestions.

[1] D. Canton, *Elecciones y partidos políticos en la Argentina. Historia, interpretación y balance: 1910–1966* (Buenos Aires, 1973), p. 45.

[2] Hilda Sábato has uncovered significant, non-electoral forms of political participation in the period before 1912. H. Sábato, 'Citizenship, Political Participation and the Formation of the Public Sphere in Buenos Aires 1850s–1880s', *Past and Present*, vol. 136 (1992), pp. 139–63. For a partially dissenting view, see P. Alonso, 'Politics and Elections in Buenos Aires, 1890–1898: The Performance of the Radical Party', *Journal of Latin American Studies* vol. 25, no. 3 (1993), pp. 465–487. Analyses of political practices in the post-1912 period have tended to emphasise the persistence of clientelist techniques even after the application of electoral reform. See G. Vidal, 'Los partidos políticos y el fenómeno clientelístico luego de la aplicación de la ley Sáenz Peña: la

examination of political rhetoric, voting behaviour and labour mobilisation in the large port city of Rosario during the immediate aftermath of the 1912 reforms. This analysis, draws attention to a significant and as yet unexamined development: by forcing politicians to seek the votes of newly enfranchised workers, the reformed electoral system enabled the construction of new working-class political identities.

The question of how workers experienced party politics during the democratic period of 1912–30 has attracted significant attention from scholars, in part because it seems to offer explanations for Argentina's long-term failure to consolidate a stable democracy. Within the social science literature on the topic, the dominant interpretation argues that workers were never successfully 'incorporated' into electoral politics, that for the most part they did not look to political parties to represent their interests before the state. According to this view, working-class formation and labour organisation represented an obstacle to incorporation; instead of joining parties, workers turned to a combative union movement led by anarchists and syndicalists who rejected all participation in electoral politics. The alleged 'failure' of incorporation is usually attributed, at least in part, to the immigrant origins of Argentina's working class. Deprived of the political rights of citizenship, foreign-born workers were legally excluded from the democratic electoral system established by the Sáenz Peña Law. In this sense, their decision to join unions instead of parties was really no decision at all.[3]

However, since large-scale immigration had begun over three decades earlier, there was already, by 1912, a sizable generation of native-born workers in Argentina. Automatically granted citizenship and, with it, the right to vote, these sons of immigrants represented a significant working-class electorate. Having long acknowledged the existence of working-class voters, historians have sought to establish correlations between voting behaviour and social class. Studies of election results in the city of Buenos Aires have argued that while the Socialist Party attracted

---

Unión Cívica Radical de la Provincia de Córdoba, 1912–1930', in F. Devoto *et al.* (eds.), *La construcción de las democracias rioplatenses: proyectos institucionales y prácticas políticas, 1900–1930* (Buenos Aires, 1994), pp. 195–209.

[3] J. McGuire, 'Political Parties and Democracy in Argentina', in S. Mainwaring et al. (eds.), *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford, 1995), 200–8. R. and D. Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 129–49. See also J. Adelman, 'The Political Economy of Labour in Argentina, 1870–1930', in *Essays in Argentine Labour History* (Basingstoke, 1992), pp. 23–28. On workers' decisions to shun parties and join anarchist unions, see R. Falcón, 'Izquierdas, régimen político, cuestión étnica y cuestión social en Argentina 1890–1912', *Anuario*, Escuela de Historia, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, vol. 12 (1987), pp. 378–87.

widespread support from skilled and semi-skilled workers, the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR or Radical party) received most of its votes from the middle class, particularly public employees.[4] In his classic work on politics in the democratic period, David Rock offers a more nuanced interpretation. He argues that the Radical Administration of Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916–22) intervened in support of the labour unions during several major strikes precisely because it hoped to attract working-class votes. But even though Rock acknowledges the efforts of the Radicals to appeal to workers, he concludes that the bulk of the party's electoral support came from middle-class government employees, who were particularly susceptible to the party's elaborate patronage network.[5] If, as Rock suggests, the UCR, the majority party throughout the period, primarily represented middle-class interests, and if the Socialist Party ultimately proved incapable of expanding on its electoral base, then it can be concluded that workers played little role in electoral politics after the Sáenz Peña Law.

In recent years, historians have challenged this interpretation. They have argued against any strict correlation between social class and party affiliation. Moreover, they have recognised that the Radicals were successful in attracting working-class votes, particularly as the democratic period wore on. Finally, they have begun to examine the content of political appeals in order to ask deeper questions about the nature of political representation during the period. Far from stressing the failure of working-class incorporation, these historians argue that the new appeals aimed at voters after the 1912 electoral reform eroded working-class militancy and helped integrate workers into the political system. In other words, the Sáenz Peña Law made new forms of political representation available to workers and, in so doing, reduced the appeal of the anti-electoral, anarchist union movement.[6] The decline in working-class

[4] R. Walter, 'Elections in the City of Buenos Aires during the First Yrigoyen Administration: Social Class and Political Preferences', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 58, no. 4 (1978), pp. 595–624.

[5] D. Rock, *Politics in Argentina, 1890–1930: The Rise and Fall of Radicalism* (London, 1975). Also instrumental in establishing the connection between the UCR and the 'middle sectors' was E. Gallo and S. Sigal, 'La formación de los partidos políticos contemporáneos: La U.C.R. (1890–1916),' in Di Tella *et al.* (eds.), *Argentina, sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires, 1965).

[6] A. Viguera, 'Participación electoral y prácticas políticas de los sectores populares en Buenos Aires, 1912–22', *Entrepasados* vol. I, no. 1 (1991), pp. 5–33. J. Suriano, 'Ideas y prácticas "políticas" del anarquismo argentino', *Entrepasados*, vol. V, no. 8 (1995), pp. 21–50. For an insightful study of the changing forms of citizenship in Santa Fe province following the Sáenz Peña Law, see M. Bonaudo, 'Entre la movilización y los partidos. Continuidades y rupturas en la crítica coyuntura santafesina de 1912', in J. Melón Pirro et al. (eds.), *Los caminos de la democracia. Alternativas y prácticas políticas, 1900–1943* (Buenos Aires, 1996), pp. 77–100.

militancy would culminate during the interwar period, when the perception of significant social mobility, the emergence of new residential patterns, the development of new forms of mass culture, and the impact of nationalist state education would all combine to reinforce an increasingly moderate tendency within the native-born working-class. These historians, then, count the extension of voting rights to working-class sons of immigrants as one of several factors that encouraged a growing willingness to work within the political system.[7]

Following the lead of recent scholarship, this article will examine political appeals during the first campaign after the implementation of electoral reforms in Rosario. However, in contrast to the new scholarship, this reading of such rhetoric suggests that workers were not always faced with a clear-cut choice between working-class identity and incorporation into the political system. In Rosario, a powerful faction of the mainstream Radical party appealed directly to working-class voters, evidently with some success. By constructing a political discourse that combined a defence of labour with nostalgia for the masculine heroics of the *gauchos* of Argentina's rural past, Ricardo Caballero and his followers depicted workers as the true repositories of Argentine national identity. In so doing, these politicians sought to appeal *both* to the desire of Rosario's sons of immigrants to assimilate into Argentine society *and* to their persistent feelings of working-class solidarity. Employing images that resonated with the immensely popular culture of the 'gauchesque', the Caballeristas crafted a political discourse that defined citizenship and national identity in class terms. This strategy achieved immediate results, helping the Radical party to attract working-class voters and to win provincial elections. More important, the evidence from Rosario demonstrates that the 1912 electoral reform inaugurated a complex process of representation that made new political identities available to workers. In the pursuit of votes, politicians did not simply present workers with a choice between working within the system and rejecting it; on the contrary, they fashioned political identities that articulated the

[7] For this interpretation of the interwar period, see L. Romero, 'Los sectores populares en las ciudades latinoamericanas del siglo XIX: La cuestión de la identidad', *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 27, no. 106 (July–Sept 1987), pp. 214–9. L. Gutiérrez and L. Romero, 'Los sectores populares y el movimiento obrero en Argentina: Un estado de la cuestión', *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana 'Dr. Emilio Ravignani'*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1991), pp. 109–22. See also D. James, 'Uncertain Legitimacy: The Social and Political Restraints Underlying the Emergence of Democracy in Argentina, 1890–1930', in G. Andrews et al. (eds.), *The Social Construction of Democracy, 1870–1990* (New York, 1995), pp. 62–5. For a critique of the notion that a willingness to negotiate with the state made syndicalist labour leaders less radical, see J. Adelman, 'State and Labour in Argentina: The Portworkers of Buenos Aires, 1910–1921', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 25, no. I (1993), pp. 73–102.

solidarities of Argentine workers – class, ethnic, national, and gender – in new ways.[8]

An alternative history: Ricardo Caballero's defence of workers

The introduction of electoral democracy posed a novel challenge for Argentine politicians; as a result of the effective expansion of suffrage, the electorate was now composed of thousands of new voters, many of whom were workers. Nowhere was this challenge greater than in the dynamic port city of Rosario. During the late nineteenth century Rosario had experienced a spectacular process of growth and urbanisation, thanks to a precipitous boom in cereal production in Santa Fe Province. Between 1875 and 1895, Argentina went from importing wheat to being the world's third largest exporter of the grain. And by the end of this period, 50 per cent of the Argentine land dedicated to wheat production was located in Santa Fe.[9] Rosario, situated on the easily navigable Paraná River, served as the principal port for transporting the grain produced on these lands. The city quickly became home to railroad companies, banks, import-export houses, retail and wholesale businesses, and small industrial operations seeking to take advantage of the opportunities created by the agricultural boom. In these circumstances, Rosario grew at a terrific pace: in the four decades preceding the Sáenz Peña Law, the city's population mushroomed from 23,000 to nearly 200,000.[10] And with this growth came the emergence of an urban working class.

As in Buenos Aires, Rosario's economic development attracted massive immigration: foreign-born residents accounted for 47 per cent of the city's population in 1910.[11] And as in the Argentine capital, anarchist organisers thrived in this milieu, expanding union memberships by struggling for workplace improvements. Rosario's anarchist labour federation repeatedly demonstrated its ability to mobilise the city's workers, leading significant general strikes in 1904 and 1907.[12] In its

[8] This view of politics in general, and electoral politics in particular, as a crucial site for the creation of collective identities and the articulation of affiliations such as class, follows Pierre Bourdieu. See P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and the Genesis of Classes', and 'Political Representation: Elements for a Theory of the Political Field', in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 229–51, 171–202.

[9] E. Gallo, *La pampa gringa: La colonización agrícola en Santa Fe (1870–1895)* (Buenos Aires, 1984), pp. 211–2.

[10] The city's population was 22,439 in 1869 and 192,278 in 1910. Gallo, *pampa gringa*, 288. *Tercer censo municipal del Rosario de Santa Fe* (Rosario, 1910), p. 29.

[11] *Tercer censo*, p. 29. Out of the total population of 192,278, the census listed 97,895 as Argentine, while 85,883 were foreign. For an additional 8,500, the census-takers gathered no information on nationality.

[12] M. Monserrat, 'Orígenes y consolidación del anarquismo en Rosario 1888–1910', unpubl. manuscript, CONICET, 1989.

report for 1912 the Santa Fe government's statistics department listed 53 trade unions in Rosario, as well as 15 separate labour organisations included in the more militant category of 'resistance societies'. That same year, a moment of relative calm in labour relations, the department reported 14 strikes in the city, most of them motivated by demands for higher wages and a shorter work day.[13] By 1912, then, Rosario was home to a large, well-organised and occasionally quite militant labour movement.

During the year that preceded the 1912 gubernatorial election, Rosario's workers became the object of unprecedented attention from politicians. Although the provisions of the Sáenz Peña Law were not yet binding in provincial contests, the 1912 election was to be the first in which military conscription lists would replace the sharply restrictive voter rolls of the past. Under the supervision of a federally appointed 'intervention' government, these lists made something approximating universal male suffrage a reality for the first time in Argentine history. In Rosario, the 1912 election produced a city-wide turnout over three times the size of the one generated by the previous year's contest.[14] And many of these new voters were workers. Since the 1910 municipal census registered only 3,227 adult male property owners of Argentine nationality, many of the more than 13,000 men who voted in 1912 had to have come from lower down on the socio-economic ladder.[15] Even though foreign-born workers remained disenfranchised, Argentines of 'native' stock as well as the sons of immigrants, represented an ample new electorate within the working class.[16]

Four parties competed for the support of Rosarino voters in the 1912 election. Remnants of Santa Fe's old conservative parties forged a new alliance called La Coalición. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Buenos Aires-based Socialist Party decided to participate, even though it lacked a significant following in Rosario. These parties confronted two newcomers to electoral politics: the Liga del Sur and the Unión Cívica Radical. The Liga del Sur was a regional association based in Rosario and its immediate environs. Founded in the aftermath of a 1909 tax protest,

[13] Santa Fe, *Anuario de la Dirección General de Estadística de la Provincia de Santa Fé. Correspondiente al año 1912* (Rosario, 1913), pp. 435–7.

[14] 4,824 men voted in the department of Rosario in the provincial election of 1911. One year later, the turnout in the department was 15,828. Within the municipality of Rosario, 13,229 voted in 1912. See *El Municipio* (3/7/11) and *La Capital* (4/1/12), p. 6.

[15] *Tercer censo*, p. CIV.

[16] The provincial statistics department identified 39,613 adult, male workers ('*obreros*') in the Department of Rosario in 1912, although it did not break this number down according to nationality. Given that the turnout in the election of that year was only 15,828, workers must have comprised a significant sector within the electorate. Santa Fe, *Anuario*, p. 433.

the Liga represented local landowners, businessmen and merchants who sought to wrest political power and tax revenues away from the city of Santa Fe, the provincial capital.[17] The UCR, founded in 1891 by disaffected elites, was a national movement that attacked the oligarchic regime for its alleged corruption and immorality. Committed to 'the Cause' of popular democracy, the Radicals attempted to overthrow the government by force in 1893, and again in 1905. With the electoral reform law being debated in Congress, and with the intervention government in Santa Fe committed to ensuring a fair contest, Radical leaders decided to end the party's traditional policy of abstention and to compete in the Santa Fe election.

From the beginning of the campaign, both the Liga del Sur and the Radical party actively sought to recruit Rosario's newly enfranchised workers. For example, in July 1911, nine months before the election, the Liga established a political committee in the working-class neighborhood of Refinería, while the Radical party opened one among workers in the city's Matadero section, named for its proximity to the slaughterhouses.[18] And this type of organising activity did spark interest among some of Rosario's workers. One sympathetic source claimed that more than 300 people showed up when the Liga's Refinería committee held elections for delegates to the party's convention in March.[19] Likewise, the Radical Leandro N. Alem Club, with its headquarters near the northern working-class district, managed to recruit over 400 men to march in the party's demonstration of 31 July 1911.[20] But the two parties were not equally successful in these efforts; one wing of the local Radical party, under the leadership of Ricardo Caballero, proved particularly adept at attracting working-class voters.[21]

Caballero had developed a reputation as an outspoken advocate for workers long before the campaign of 1911–2. Born and educated in the

[17] M. Bonaudo, 'Los actores frente a la política: de la movilización social a la participación ciudadana (Santa Fe, 1890–1909)', unpubl. manuscript, n.d., pp. 37–49. A. Liebscher, 'Commercial Expansion and Political Change: Santa Fe Province, 1897–1916', unpubl. PhD diss., Indiana University, 1975, ch. 3.

[18] *Monos y Monadas* (7/2/11).

[19] *La Capital* (3/13/12), p. 6.

[20] *La Capital* (7/31/11), p. 6. Agustina Prieto refers to residents of Refinería participating in the Club Leandro N. Alem. See A. Prieto, 'Ciudad y barrio obrero. Un analisis comparado de la vida cotidiana de los trabajadores de Rosario', unpubl. manuscript, CONICET, n.d., 12.

[21] The Caballeristas' success among workers cannot be attributed to their own class backgrounds, since they were not a particularly plebeian group. Caballero's most loyal political allies included such men as Francisco Capmany, a wealthy real estate dealer and member of both the Bolsa de Comercio and the Jockey Club, and Julio Bello, a civil engineer and the director of Rosario's business school (Escuela Nacional de Comercio). Moreover, Caballero himself was an established physician, a medical school professor and a long-time member of the Jockey Club.

neighbouring province of Córdoba, he had participated in anarchist intellectual groups as a medical student. Around the time of his relocation to Rosario in the early years of this century, Caballero converted to Radicalism, but he retained his allegiance to the labour movement. In 1904, he appeared as the invited guest of the shop employees union at a rally demanding the passage of a Sunday rest law.[22] Later that same year he published an angry diatribe in response to the murder of a young worker by a member of the Rosario police's 'security squadron.'[23] Building on these activities, Caballero tried to secure working-class participation in the Radical uprising of 1905.[24] Although the revolt failed miserably, it helped cement his position within the local Radical leadership. Over the next seven years, he helped lead efforts to reorganise the party in Rosario, recruiting members and opening committees in preparation for another insurrectionary movement.[25] Towards that end, Caballero and his followers gradually developed a novel political discourse. To be sure, he employed many of the standard images of Radical rhetoric, trumpeting the 'Cause' of democracy and stressing the need to wrest political power from the corrupt and morally bankrupt 'Regime'. But Caballero pushed this rhetoric in new directions. Based on a specific reading of Argentine history, his attacks on the government explicitly linked the struggle for democracy with the struggle to improve the lot of workers.

In October 1906, Caballero gave the opening address at the inauguration of the Radical Party's Central Committee in Rosario.[26] He used the occasion to present his interpretation of Argentine history, and to espouse a vision of a democracy that would benefit the working masses. Caballero argued that Argentina's true, democratic spirit thrived in the period before 1880. He praised the violent *caudillos* of the early nineteenth century for their heroism, describing Rosas and Facundo as 'Shakespearean characters' who were willing to fight for an ideal. In his description of the long civil wars in which the Unitarians of Buenos Aires sought to crush the Federalist strongmen of the countryside, Caballero located not only heroism, but also masculinity on the side of the rural

[22] *La Capital* (1/7/04), p. 6. Appearing with Caballero at this event was the famous reformer Juan Bialet Massé.

[23] R. Caballero, 'Sangre Proletaria', in R. Ortelli, (ed.), *Discursos parlamentarios y discursos políticos del Doctor Ricardo Caballero* (Buenos Aires, 1929), pp. 391–92.

[24] For the Radicals' efforts to attract Rosarino workers during the 1905 revolt, see R. Falcón, 'Elites urbanas, rol del Estado y cuestión obrera (Rosario, 1900–12)', *Estudios Sociales* vol. 3 (1992), p. 92. For Caballero's role, see R. Caballero, *Hipólito Yrigoyen y la revolución radical de 1905* (Buenos Aires, 1975), pp. 1–83.

[25] Caballero, *Hipólito Yrigoyen*, pp. 84–90.

[26] The text of the speech is found in: Caballero, *Discursos*, pp. 400–7. The occasion is described in Caballero, *Hipólito Yrigoyen*, pp. 89–90.

caudillos. Regional leaders like Facundo represented 'those virile countrysides, so often bloodied by the implacable Unitarian tyranny of the cities'. This early period in Argentine history constituted the 'ideal period of our democracy' because men struggled valiantly, and were willing to die for 'the love of liberty'.

According to Caballero's nostalgic vision, all of these 'native virtues' – bravery, manliness, love of liberty, willingness to sacrifice for an ideal – began to disappear in 1880, destroyed, paradoxically, by economic growth. This so-called progress brought material prosperity for the oligarchy, even as it uprooted the poor *criollo* masses and depressed their standard of living. In Caballero's view, these changes threatened the national character: 'the passion that pushed men towards the struggles for truth and for justice, was transformed into a vile desire for profit … and the ideal fatherland of liberty and right … fell to the level of a contemptible factory'. Caballero's condemnation of the current era reflected, in part, his distaste for what he saw as the destructive impact of modern technology on what had been an idyllic, rural world. With economic growth, he argued, 'factories stained the high blue skies with their black clouds of smoke … material prosperity stretched telegraphs and railroads like a double web to imprison the unbroken spirit of the vast plain.' These images constructed a clear opposition between a noble, heroic, rural past and a morally debased, urban present. And while Caballero lauded the masculinity of the old, rural *caudillos*, he claimed that this virtue too was endangered by the new order. He described contemporary Argentine youth as 'that troop of indeterminate sex which drags its vanity through the avenues and the places of pleasure, where they are impelled by a surge of unhealthy lust'. After arguing that a 'political utilitarianism' aimed at the pursuit of wealth had 'corrupted the national soul,' he concluded that 'virility has died or is dying in this country.'

For Caballero, this historical interpretation – the view that the economic growth of recent decades had imperiled Argentina's virile national character – justified a political programme geared towards the defence of workers.[27] He concluded his 1906 speech by attacking the government's violent repression of the labour movement and its suspension of workers' civil rights. The oligarchy, he argued, had sold out the nation's poor people in its quest for personal gain. Likewise, weak-

[27] Nostalgic visions of the rural past were quite common in the Argentine literature of the early decades of the twentieth century, with perhaps the most famous example being Ricardo Güiraldes' 1926 novel, *Don Segundo Sombra*. Caballero's political use of this *criollista* nostalgia is far less well known. On the literary utopias, see B. Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires, 1988), pp. 31–43; C. Leland, *The Last Happy Men: The Generation of 1922, Fiction, and the Argentine Reality* (Syracuse, 1986), pp. 119–47.

willed newspapers – what he termed the 'female press' – had stood idly by as the country's rulers attacked workers and rolled back the democratic promises of the 1853 Constitution. To right these wrongs, Caballero promised to pursue a particular brand of democracy:

> Here, in this city of Rosario … the police have declared workers outside the law. Under the pretext of searching for presumed delinquents, they have closed union headquarters, they have searched homes at all hours of the night, masses have been imprisoned, and what is more despicable, workers declared innocent have been held for 18 hours and beat up in police stations … . [W]e who participated in the revolution of February [1905], we who will lead another great revolution, we did so and will do so again with the aim of uprooting this sentiment, which is opposed to the republic, to democracy, to the respect that those who work and suffer ought to inspire, a sentiment which the oligarchies have spread throughout the country. More than a political mission, Radicalism pursues a social apostolate.[28]

Caballero's analysis of Argentina's national decline led him to defend democracy not only as a political measure, but also as a social reform. In fact, his description of the pre-1880 period as the embodiment of the Argentine democratic ideal suggested that he defined democracy less in terms of free and fair elections than in terms of general notions of liberty and respect for the working man. Caballero sought to dethrone the 'mercantilist' oligarchy in order to create a nation in which workers would again enjoy the 'human dignity' they had known when Argentina was a rural world ruled by manly *caudillos*.

The explicitly gendered elements of Caballero's rhetoric, his frequent usage of terms like 'virility', reinforced the class content of the discourse. By appealing to workers' masculinity – a trait they had in common – Caballero encouraged workers of different ethnic backgrounds and different work experiences to see themselves as a unified group in opposition to their effeminate oppressors. By implying that today's workers were the true descendants of yesterday's manly *caudillos*, Caballero intentionally appealed to workers' class consciousness. By arguing that the rise of an exploitative oligarchy represented the decline of virility, he located masculinity firmly on one side of the class divide. According to this vision, Argentina's workers were real men; its selfish elite and oppressive government leaders were not.

Alongside this gendered rhetoric, Caballero employed ethnic terminology as well, increasingly emphasising the plight of *criollo* workers. At first, though, Caballero was careful to avoid appearing excessively xenophobic; in his early speeches he complemented his nativist rhetoric with explicit declarations of support for immigrant workers. For example,

[28] Caballero, *Discursos*, p. 407.

in 1906, he evoked the suffering of the *criollos*, while at the same time attacking the residence law, a xenophobic deportation measure passed in 1902.[29] In a 1907 speech in his hometown of Ballesteros, Córdoba, Caballero attacked the government for selling the nation out to 'foreign merchants' and, in particular, for expropriating land on behalf of the British-owned Central Argentine Railroad Company, which now exploited the local *criollos*. Still, even in this speech, Caballero was careful to defend the 'disinherited races' who came to Argentina looking for work.[30] Over time, however, Caballero's emphasis on the worthiness and dignity of *criollo* workers came to assume a rhetorical prominence in his speeches. After all, if Argentina had achieved its true national character in the period before massive immigration, it was logical to defend the pre-immigration, 'native' population that had been so debased by the crass, profit-chasing policies of the oligarchy. While it had long been present in Caballero's rhetoric, this *criollista* impulse would dominate his speeches during the campaign of 1911 and 1912.

Glorifying the gaucho*: The political potential of* criollista *nationalism*

By the time the Radical party decided to participate in the 1912 election, Caballero was the acknowledged leader of the Santa Fe UCR's southern section, representing the area around Rosario.[31] Following an internal power struggle that resulted in the designation of Manuel Menchaca, a relative unknown, as a compromise candidate for governor, Caballero was added to the ticket in order to assuage the Rosario Radicals.[32] But even before becoming the party's candidate for vice governor, Caballero was an extremely visible campaigner for the Radical cause. Under his leadership, the Rosario Radicals made the project of attracting working-class voters the centrepiece of their campaign strategy. The party established new committees to recruit workers in the city's railroad companies, the port, the utilities, the slaughterhouses, and elsewhere.[33] As the election loomed, Caballero refined his rhetoric into a potent instrument for appealing to these working-class voters.

As Caballero confronted the task of building electoral support for the party, the nativist, even anti-foreign elements in his rhetoric grew more pronounced. In one campaign speech, he attacked the Socialists for

[29] Caballero, *Discursos*, p. 405.
[30] Caballero, *Discursos*, pp. 409–16.
[31] *La Capital* (2/16/12), p. 6.
[32] *La Capital* (3/9/12), p. 6; (3/10/12), p. 6.
[33] M. Bonaudo, 'Entre la movilización y los partidos. Continuidades y rupturas en la crítica coyuntura santafesina de 1912', in J. Melón Pirro *et al.* (eds.) *Los caminos de la democracia: Alternativas y prácticas políticas, 1900–1943*, (Buenos Aires, 1996), pp. 90–1. See also Caballero, *Hipólito Yrigoyen*, pp. 137–53.

allegedly cutting a deal with the Liga del Sur.[34] The Liga, he argued, was a 'bourgeois association *par excellence*', whose members had publicly applauded when the Rosario police massacred innocent workers in one of Rosario's central plazas. During the campaign, then, Caballero continued to denounce anti-worker violence sanctioned by the wealthy. But in other passages of the speech, he complemented this classist discourse with an argument based on ethnic categories. In these passages, Caballero attacked the Liga del Sur as an organisation of foreigners who turned their backs on the '*criollo* element'.[35] Caballero's repeated claims to represent the truly Argentine *criollos*, as opposed to the foreigners who belonged to the Liga del Sur, led Rosario's pro-Liga newspaper, *La Capital*, to refer sarcastically to him and his followers as the 'genuinely national' faction of the local UCR.[36]

Caballero's defence of the *criollos*, though, was in no way a departure from his concerns for the working class. On the contrary, in the 1912 speech, as in his later writings, he deployed nationalist, anti-immigrant language to make a specifically classist argument. Caballero did not attack the members of the Liga del Sur merely for their foreign origins; more important was the fact that they belonged to the 'Rosarino plutocracy', the fact that they were 'rich men, especially foreigners'. Most of the *Liguistas*, he claimed, were immigrant parvenus who participated in politics merely to further their own selfish interests. By contrast, he sought to defend 'the *criollo* people, humble and dispossessed'.[37] Years later, he would describe the 1912 election as a battle in which 'the dispossessed but proud *criollos* opposed the foreign-ising (*extranjerizante*) plutocracy with self-sacrifice, intelligence and courage.'[38] Caballero's support for the *criollos* was hardly unprecedented, coming as it did at a time when immigration was provoking widespread concern. In his famous report on the state of Argentina's working class in 1904, Juan Bialet Massé had argued against the notion that *criollo* workers were somehow less capable than their immigrant counterparts. Although he did not oppose immigration, Bialet Massé called for special legislation to protect Argentina's native sons.[39] Caballero's innovation was to use this type of rhetoric for political ends; he sought to recruit voters to the Radical party by applauding *criollo* workers and attacking their foreign exploiters.

[34] Caballero, *Discursos*, pp. 426–36. The Socialists denied that they had made any such alliance. See *La Vanguardia* (1/25/12), p. 3.
[35] Caballero, *Discursos*, pp. 432–3.
[36] *La Capital* (3/2/12), p. 6.
[37] Caballero, *Discursos*, pp. 432–3.
[38] Caballero, *Hipólito Yrigoyen*, p. 140.
[39] J. Bialet Massé, *El estado de las clases obreras argentinas a comienzos del siglo* (Córdoba, 1968 [1904]), ch. 1.

Caballero's pro-working class nativism was, in some ways, particularly well suited to Rosario, where foreigners predominated among the wealthy sectors. As a recently developed city, Rosario lacked a patrician elite whose roots in Argentina predated the immigration boom of the late nineteenth century. Unlike the traditional elite in Buenos Aires and elsewhere, the majority of Rosario's upper-class residents – its wealthy merchants and property owners – were either immigrants or the children of immigrants.[40] Of the 18,493 owners of real estate in Rosario in 1910, 10,839 – or 59 per cent – were foreign, and Italian last names figured prominently in the memberships of the city's elite social clubs.[41] Equally significant, Rosario's infrastructure – the tramways, the port, the water, sewage, gas, and electricity systems – was entirely owned and operated by foreign companies,[42] as was another of the city's major employers, the Central Argentine Railroad Company. As a result, many Rosarinos worked directly for foreign bosses. In this context, it is not surprising that rhetorical attacks on wealthy foreigners might be an effective means of attracting working-class votes. Moreover, Caballero's depiction of the Liga del Sur as a party of and for foreign elites was not without foundation. The Liga enjoyed significant support from elite merchants and foreign shop owners, and the party's 1912 platform even included a plank in favour of giving the right to vote to property-owning foreigners.[43]

Still, Caballero's rhetoric poses an analytical problem. While it is true that immigrants accounted for a sizable portion of Rosario's elites, they were equally numerous, if not more so, among the working population. The northern working-class neighbourhoods, for example, contained the highest percentage of foreigners of any census district in the city.[44] If so many workers were foreign themselves, then how could Caballero hope to appeal to them with nationalist, anti-immigrant rhetoric? In a recent article, the historians Ricardo Falcón and Alejandra Monserrat argue that

[40] M. Johns, 'The Making of an Urban Elite: The Case of Rosario, Argentina, 1880–1920', *Journal of Urban History* vol. 20, no. 2 (Feb. 1994), p. 167. For the contrasting case of Buenos Aires, see M. Johns, 'The Antinomies of Ruling Class Culture: The Buenos Aires Elite, 1880–1910', *Journal of Historical Sociology* vol. 6, no. 1 (1993), pp. 74–101. See also J. Sábato, *La clase dominante en la Argentina moderna: Formación y características* (Buenos Aires, 1991).

[41] For the figures on real estate owners, see *Tercer censo*, p. CIV. For the Jockey Club membership lists, see Jockey Club Rosario, *Memoria 1913* (Rosario, 1913), pp. 25–32.

[42] M. Johns, 'The Urbanisation of a Secondary City: The Case of Rosario, Argentina, 1870–1920', *Journal of Latin American Studies* vol. 23 (1991), p. 511.

[43] *La Capital* (3/5/12), p. 6.

[44] A. Prieto, 'Condiciones de vida en el barrio Refinería de Rosario: La vivienda de los trabajadores (1890–1914)', *Anuario*, Escuela de Historia, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, vol. 14 (1989–90), p. 169.

Caballero aimed his electoral propaganda specifically at the *criollo* segment of the local working class.[45] It is, of course, logical that a politician seeking election might be willing to alienate immigrants, since they did not have the right to vote. But according to this argument, Caballero also wrote off the sons of immigrants; he used nativist rhetoric and a glorification of the pre-immigration, rural past in order to appeal only to those workers who did not trace their origins to the immigration boom. Falcón and Monserrat argue that *criollo* workers resented the immigrants who competed with them for jobs, and that this resentment made them receptive to Caballero's brand of nationalism. They argue that the support of *criollo* workers was crucial for the Radicals' victory in the 31 March election, and that this support helps explain the pro-worker actions of the Radical government in succeeding years.

Falcón and Monserrat have opened up a fruitful line of inquiry, but their straightforward reading of Caballero's rhetoric does not resolve the problem. In a city built almost entirely on immigration, it seems unlikely that a clever politician would restrict his appeal to the 'truly' native. The municipal census of 1910 ascribed Argentine citizenship to 97,895 people – or 53 per cent of those for whom data on nationality was available. However, of this total, only 40,774 – or 42 per cent – had two Argentine parents.[46] In other words, nearly 60 per cent of the Argentine citizens living in Rosario were the children of foreigners, a percentage that would be significantly higher if we could include immigrants' grandchildren. The 'truly' *criollo* – those who were not the descendants of immigrants – were not only a minority within the population as a whole; they were also a minority among the city's Argentine citizens. Given this context, the paradox of *Caballerismo* remains: why would a political faction seeking to maximise its electoral appeal deliberately alienate the vast majority of voters? The apparent success of Caballero's rhetoric only deepens the paradox.

Since Caballero's nativism typically took the form of an attack on the 'foreign plutocracy', it must be read not as an attempt to capitalise on tensions between native and immigrant workers, but rather as an effort to mobilise the hostility that workers of all ethnic backgrounds felt towards their employers and social superiors. What made this approach possible was that in the multi-ethnic world of Rosario, Argentine national identity was contested terrain. Since most Rosarinos had some immigrant blood,

[45] R. Falcón and A. Monserrat, 'Estado provincial, partidos políticos y sectores populares (El caso de Rosario: Las elecciones de 1912 y los conflictos sociales)', *Cuadernos del Ciesal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1993), pp. 21–36, esp. pp. 28–30. Aníbal Viguera also supports the contention that *criollista* language within Radical political rhetoric excluded foreigners: Viguera, 'Participación electoral', p. 17.

[46] *Tercer censo*, p. 72.

it was not at all clear who the *criollos* – the 'authentic' Argentines – were. While the term *criollo* was intended to invoke the authority of biological or racial difference, it also connoted certain character traits, a slippage that allowed observers such as Bialet Massé to describe some workers of foreign backgrounds as 'more *criollo* than the *criollo*'.[47] Likewise, Caballero himself occasionally attributed *criollo* virtues, such as courage, manliness and patriotism, to certain 'old foreigners'.[48] The term *criollo*, in other words, was available to people of different ethnicities. Caballero's political rhetoric inflected '*lo criollo*' with working-class resonances and, in so doing, provided workers of all ethnicities with a version of Argentine national identity that they could inhabit.

By defending *criollo* workers and attacking foreign plutocrats, Caballero was able to weave class and national identities together into a powerful political appeal. He used the term *criollo* in order to link his working-class audience to Argentina's glorious rural past, and to suggest that the true bearers of national identity were the hard-working, downtrodden masses, rather than the wealthy foreigners who exploited and oppressed their workers. By describing class conflict as a struggle between native workers and foreign elites, Caballero told workers that they were the authentic Argentines. The appeal of this rhetoric was not limited to a small minority of xenophobic natives. On the contrary, by drawing on the language and images of a rich, popular culture, *Caballerista* rhetoric spoke to the frustrations of the working class as a whole. Caballero's paeans to the dignified manliness of Argentina's rural past reverberated with the enormously popular cult of the *gaucho*, a cult embraced as enthusiastically by immigrants and their children as by the 'true' *criollos*.

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw the emergence in Argentine cities of a popular literature that celebrated the free-wheeling, rebellious lifestyle of the *gauchos*. These migratory cowboys were a significant presence on the pampas before the expansion of large cattle estates led to their disappearance as a recognisable social group after about 1870.[49] For modernising liberals like Domingo Sarmiento, the *gauchos* were the embodiment of backwardness and barbarism. But positive, even romantic depictions of the *gauchos* existed as well. Beginning with the work of Bartolomé Hidalgo in 1820, a genre of 'gauchesque' poetry employed the rustic dialect of the countryside to narrate epic tales of *gaucho*

[47] Bialet Massé, *las clases obreras*, p. 51. On the widespread diffusion of racial language and ideas in early twentieth-century Argentina, see E. Zimmermann, 'Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890–1916', *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 72, no. 1 (1992), pp. 23–46.

[48] See, for example: Caballero, *Hipólito Yrigoyen*, pp. 93.

[49] See R. Slatta, *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* (Lincoln, 1983).

heroics. This tradition had its most famous culmination with the publication in 1872 of José Hernández's *El gaucho Martín Fierro*. Intended in part as a political attack on the liberal regimes of Sarmiento and Bartolomé Mitre, *Martín Fierro* presented the *gauchos* as the victims of government oppression. The poem celebrated the hero's manly resistance to this oppression, his willingness to desert the army that drafted him by force and to fight against enormous odds.[50]

In the works of Hidalgo and Hernández, the *gaucho* began to emerge as an icon of Argentine identity. But it was Eduardo Gutiérrez's *Juan Moreira* which became the model for the so-called *criollista* literature that was so popular among the urban poor at the turn-of-the-century. Gutiérrez's work, published in 1879, shared many of the themes of *Martín Fierro*: both tell the story of a *gaucho* who is persecuted by the law, turns to a life of crime and heroically battles the police. Moreover, both works emphasise the protagonist's courage, his masculine dignity, his status as hard worker, and his love of liberty. Nevertheless, as Adolfo Prieto has argued, *Moreira*, set in a rural world filled with such signs of modernisation as railroads and brothels, was better suited to the urban, working-class readers of the late nineteenth century. Gutiérrez's work was far more explicitly violent than that of Hernández; Moreira fought many more battles and did so with far less provocation than did Fierro. By glorifying these violent exploits, Gutiérrez, like the many authors who imitated him, created what Prieto calls 'supermen invented to fulfill the fantasies of the urban reader'.[51] Sold as inexpensive pamphlets and narrated in traditional verse, *criollista* stories modelled on *Juan Moreira* achieved immense popularity at the turn-of-the-century.

The popular fascination with the *gauchos* was at least as strong in Rosario as it was in other Argentine cities. In fact, while the popularity of *criollista* literature seemed to decline in Buenos Aires after about 1910, the Rosario publishing house Longo y Argento began selling its own gauchesque pamphlets in 1913, making the city the national centre of such publication activity.[52] Long before that, so-called *criollo* circuses had

[50] On gauchesque literature, see J. Ludmer, *El género gauchesco. Un tratado sobre la patria* (Buenos Aires, 1988); N. Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 67–80, 261–78. Both Ludmer and Shumway focus on this literature's depiction of the so-called 'patriot *gaucho*,' its use of the *gaucho* as a symbol for the Argentine national spirit.

[51] A. Prieto, *El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna* (Buenos Aires, 1988), p. 97. Prieto's work is a groundbreaking analysis of the role of *criollista* literature in the construction of Argentine nationality.

[52] Prieto, *discurso criollista*, p. 80, n. 54. The Communist Party activist Francisco Monaco worked at Longo and Argento as a youth. In his memoirs, he recalls that the firm was famous in the city and throughout the province for its 'gauchesque pamphlets.' See L. Monaco, *Volver a vivir* (Buenos Aires, n.d.), 22.

established themselves as among the most popular sources of plebeian entertainment in the city. These circuses featured equestrian exhibitions, gauchesque theatre productions and performances by *payadores*, guitarists who narrated *gaucho* tales in song. According to one account, the famous *criollo* actor José Podestá first performed his dramatisation of Gutiérrez's *Juan Moreira* to enthusiastic crowds in Rosario.[53] This type of theatre flourished in the city, but mass participation in *criollismo* was most evident during the annual carnival celebration, when members of local *criollo* clubs would don *gaucho* costumes and parade through the streets.[54] As late as 1925, these clubs continued to play a prominent role in Rosario's carnivals.[55] Prieto has shown that the members of *criollista* organisations in Buenos Aires were by no means exclusively native, and the same can be said for Rosario's *criollo* clubs. A cursory examination of the last names of club members demonstrates that these organisations recruited many people of foreign descent. To cite two examples, the organisation Pampa Soul ('Alma Pampa') listed Leonardo Spinelli as its vice president, while a *gaucho* club called the Rosarino Brothers was led by the Carlomagno family.[56] The prevalence of Italian last names such as these belie the notion that the cult of the *gaucho* was popular only among 'true' *criollos*; immigrants and their children participated enthusiastically in the glorification of the heroes of Argentina's rural past.

Prieto has argued that the *criollista* phenomenon provided both native Argentines and foreigners with a much needed sense of national identity in a disordered, cosmopolitan world. Reeling from the effects of economic modernisation and immigration, natives looked to the rural world depicted in stories such as *Juan Moreira* in order to find an unchanging, traditional Argentina to anchor their feelings of national belonging. At the same time, immigrants and their children participated in the cult of the *gaucho* in order to fulfill a desire to assimilate. For both groups, reading *gaucho* tales or dressing up as Juan Moreira represented a conscious act of identification with the nation.[57] In fact, the authors of *criollista* pamphlets often presented the *gaucho* hero as a representative of the national character or, in the words of one typical story, 'the truest prototype of our old

[53] E. García Velloso, 'José Podestá y Juan Moreira,' *Revista de Historia de Rosario*, vol. IX, no. 21–2 (1971), pp. 43–58. On Rosario's *criollo* circuses, see O. Ensinck, 'El teatro en Rosario', in *Historia de las instituciones de la provincia de Santa Fe*, v. V (Santa Fe, 1973), pp. 341–2. For a description of some of Rosario's *payadores*, see H. Zinni, *El Rosario de Satanás*, v. 1 (Rosario, 1992), pp. 84–93.

[54] For one description, see *La Capital* (2/20/12), pp. 6–7.

[55] See *El Censor* (2/21/25).

[56] Prieto, *discurso criollista*, 131. On Pampa Soul and the Rosarino Brothers, see *La Capital* (2/4/18), p. 5 and (2/6/18), p. 6, respectively. Italian last names were even common among the most celebtrated *payadores*, such as Rosario's Francisco N. Bianco.

[57] Prieto, *discurso criollista*, pp. 98–9, 151–2.

countryman (*paisano*)'.[58] The cult of the *gaucho* allowed natives, immigrants and second-generation Argentines to identify with this national prototype.

Immigrants did figure as characters in the *criollista* narratives, although usually as the objects of parody. In fact, the character of Cocoliche – an Italian immigrant who seeks to imitate the *criollo* way of life – became a stock figure in such works. Cocoliche's broken Spanish and ridiculous behavior made him a popular source of comic relief in *gaucho* dramas.[59] However, in the *criollista* literature produced in Rosario, Italians began to figure in less satirical ways. By including an 'assimilated Italian (*italiano acriollado*)' as a main character, Angel Amante's *Los Hermanos Barrientos* suggested that even immigrants could become good *criollos*. Don Angel, the Italian in Amante's story, had embraced the *gaucho* lifestyle and was an expert at breaking horses and using the traditional knife, or *facón*. The local *gauchos*, in turn, accepted the honest, hard-working Angel, noting with surprise that 'this *gringo* (foreigner) is a good *criollo*'![60] However, when Angel's wife falls in love with the story's hero, Julio Barrientos, a duel is inevitable. Julio protests that he is not to blame, but Angel feels compelled to defend his honour; he attacks Julio, who, now forced to fight, wounds him but spares his life. Later, when Julio is arrested by the anti-*gaucho* authorities, the judge calls Angel to testify, thinking that the Italian must surely hold a grudge. Instead, Angel has come to his senses, realising that what had angered him was only 'women's talk' and that Julio had behaved as a 'gentleman'. When the Italian refuses to testify against him, Julio graciously responds: 'I did not know that you were a man, don Angel. There will come a time when I … will repay your favour'.[61] This story stages a successful process of immigrant assimilation. Not only does don Angel possess the skills of a *gaucho*, but his behaviour – his hot-headed defence of his personal honour – is completely in keeping with allegedly *criollo* character traits. It is, after all, this type of behaviour that gets *gauchos* like Juan Moreira in trouble with the law in the first place. Moreover, in the end, Angel's manliness enables a reconciliation with the 'true' *criollo*, Julio. In the heavily gendered language of the genre, Angel is welcomed into the national community when he proves himself to be a man. Popular enough to be published in four printings, *Los Hermanos Barrientos* suggested that a masculine, *criollista* culture could actually serve as a common terrain on which natives, immigrants and the sons of immigrants might be united.

[58] R. Aguirre, *El tigre del desierto*, 3rd ed. (Rosario, n.d.), p. 20. Aguirre prefaced his poem by declaring his commitment to 'the national stock.'
[59] Prieto, *discurso criollista*, pp. 66, 155–6.
[60] A. Amante, *Los Hermanos Barrientos*, 4th ed. (Rosario, n.d.), p. 11.
[61] Amante, *Los Hermanos*, pp. 21–2.

Aware of this potential, Ricardo Caballero embraced the popular culture of the gauchesque as a means of advancing his own political aspirations. Caballero explicitly linked his pro-labour appeals to the unifying identity and historical vision elaborated in *criollista* stories. Although these stories were clearly apocryphal, the *gaucho* heroes whose exploits they depicted were often historical figures. Juan Moreira, Facundo Quiroga, Hormiga Negra, and El Chacho had actually lived, even if the *criollista* protagonists who took their names were, for the most part, authorial inventions. Moreover, the authors of *gaucho* stories typically situated themselves as historians who were recounting the past of a 'proud and generous race which progress is extinguishing'.[62] Caballero's rhetoric combined the alternative national history suggested in these works with a critique of capitalist exploitation. His notion that recent economic growth had destroyed a once-great nation evoked the *criollista* literature's depiction of the manly heroes of the past. Caballero narrated this history in a 1912 campaign speech:

> At times the old, dying nationality sought to protest, but soon the powerful, new fatherland was able to silence it with gunfire, and it resigned itself without giving in, convinced that those vanquished by its heroic lance were the victors of the present, representatives of a tyranny a thousand times more hateful than that which they had fought: the old *caudillos*, noble (*caballerescos*) and brutal, who salvaged their independence, had been replaced by the factory managers, by the railroad administrators, by the port operators, by the large foreign companies, to whom treacherous governments had handed over the national sovereignty in one-sided contracts.
>
> Young Radicals: Radicalism must repair all those injustices. You are, I repeat, its standard-bearers: understand the immensity of your task. Bring to it all the nobility and altruism of the old nationality, which must not die because it was too great, too poetic, too generous.[63]

Here, Caballero presented Argentine history as a battle between an old nation of violent *caudillos* and a new one of sell-out governments and exploitative foreign companies. Faced with this opposition, the Radical leader clearly came down on the side of the past. The message to Rosario's enfranchised workers, both *criollos* and the sons of immigrants, was that by redeeming the national spirit represented by the old *gaucho* heroes, Caballero would redeem the exploited working class. Just as don Angel and Julio Barrientos had united in manly opposition to an oppressive government, Caballero sought to mobilise male workers of all ethnic backgrounds by appealing to their common identification with a noble, *criollo* past.

Caballero's historical narrative reassembled already existing discursive elements in order to construct a class-based political identity for Rosario's

[62] Aguirre, *El tigre*, p. 6.

[63] Caballero, *Discursos*, pp. 435–6.

workers.[64] After a decade of anarchist organising efforts, many of the city's workers already viewed themselves as members of a distinct social class. Even if they did not belong to unions, they had certainly been exposed to the pervasive discourse of class interest.[65] At the same time, workers of all ethnic backgrounds tended to be enthusiastic about the *gaucho* heroes of the past. Even if they had not read *criollista* stories or joined the clubs, they had undoubtedly seen the carnival parades or attended the *criollo* circus. By inter-articulating these two discourses, Caballero devised an apt strategy for appealing to Rosario's workers, who might readily imagine themselves carrying on the *gauchos*' noble and heroic struggle against the oppressive forces of modernity – the latter represented in Caballero's rhetoric by the all-too-familiar figures of 'factory managers … port operators … large foreign companies', and the like. This *criollista* nationalism took centre stage in the Radicals' campaign. Just like carnival parades, large Radical marches and rallies in Rosario nearly always featured 'gauchos on horseback'.[66] And even hostile observers described these demonstrations as mass events, attracting on one occasion more than 5,000 people.[67] As the 1912 campaign wore on, Caballerismo did seem to be attracting Rosario's working-class voters to the Radical cause.

Caballero's political opponents certainly recognised the potential power of his appeal. To counteract its effect, the Liga del Sur went so far as to recruit the support of a local *payador* who defended the party's *criollo* credentials in a song composed in gauchesque verse. The song emphasised the common interests of immigrants and natives – '[A]s a Liguista and a *criollo* I am not fooling myself … Argentines and foreigners I want proudly to bind together'. – but shied away from any Caballero-style denunciation of the wealthy.[68] This attempt to strip *criollismo* of its class content reflected the widespread belief that the cult of the *gaucho* posed a dangerous threat to the social order. As early as 1893, Rosario's municipal government banned the production of *criollo* plays without previous

[64] Many social scientists have recently argued for the importance of narrative in the process of identity-formation. See, for exmple: M. Somers, 'The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach', *Theory and Society* vol. 23 (1994), pp. 605–49; G. Steinmetz, 'Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives in Working-Class Formation: Narrative Theory in the Social Sciences', *Social Science History* vol. 16, no. 3 (Fall 1992), pp. 489–516.

[65] M. Karush, 'Workers or Citizens: The Construction of Political Identities in Democratic Argentina (Rosario, 1912–1930)', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997, pp. 24–36.

[66] *La Capital* (2/1/14), p. 6. See also *La Vanguardia* (3/21/12), p. 1.

[67] *La Capital* (7/31/11), p. 6.

[68] *La Capital* (3/29/12), 6. Cited in: Carlos Malamud, 'Los partidos políticos en la Argentina (1890–1914): Programas y plataformas políticas. El caso de la Liga del Sur', unpubl. manuscript, n.d.

authorisation from the mayor. According to the decree, these dramas encouraged viewers to commit acts of violence and undermined 'the moral authority that [the police] must exercise over the masses'.[69] Later, even as Caballero and his followers sought to capitalise politically on *criollista* culture, most elites continued to take a negative view of the popular cult of the *gaucho*.[70] In a typical article, *La Capital* celebrated the death of Hormiga Negra, a *gaucho* whose life had been idealised in *criollista* texts. According to the article, this alleged hero was really a coward and a liar. The reporter concluded optimistically:

> It is consoling to think that as civilisation spreads across our territory and our customs, it is reducing all that which yesterday attracted the admiration of thousands of souls to things without environment and without object, and is awakening the spirit of the new generations to the noble and beneficial things that constitute our happiness and well-being.[71]

Borrowing arguments developed by Sarmiento and other Argentine liberals of the nineteenth century, this journalist depicted the *gaucho* as a barbaric remnant of a backwards past. Similarly, Rosarino politicians called on teachers to emphasise the historical contributions of Argentina's statesmen, political thinkers and scientists over the violent acts of the country's *caudillos*. Alcides Greca, a Radical who would become a dedicated opponent of Caballerismo, lamented that '[o]ur people know of el Chacho, Pancho Ramírez and Facundo Quiroga – genuine representatives of barbarism – but they do not know Ameghino … the most eminent biologist of recent times.'[72] And this hostility to the cult of the *gaucho* was shared by the majority of Rosarino politicians.

In this context, Caballero's appeals to *criollista* culture – his espousal of a view of Argentine history that placed *gauchos* and, by extension, workers at the centre of national identity – represented a dangerous threat. Decades of massive immigration and violent class conflict had made the question of national unity a pressing one for Argentine intellectuals.

[69] Editor's note in García Velloso, 'José Podestá', pp. 44–5.

[70] In the 1910s and 1920s, certain conservative intellectuals in Argentina – most notably, Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Rojas – pointed to *Martín Fierro* as the embodiment of national identity. But even for these thinkers, *moreirismo* – the popular literature and cultural practices celebrating *gauchos* like Juan Moreira – was to be resisted as the symbol of crime, immorality and revolutionary unrest. See P. Funes, 'Nación, patria, argentinidad. La reflexión intelectual sobre la nación en la década de 1920', in W. Ansadi (ed.), *Representaciones inconclusas. Las clases, los actores y los discursos de la memoria, 1912–1946* (Buenos Aires, 1995), p. 133; D. Viñas, *Literatura argentina y política. De Lugones a Walsh* (Buenos Aires, 1996), pp. 63–4; Likewise, Adolfo Prieto analyzes the efforts of Rafael Obligado and other poets to transform the *gauchos* of texts like *Juan Moreira* into characters worthy of civilized high culture: Prieto, *discurso criollista*, pp. 113–34.

[71] *La Capital* (1/3/18), p. 6.

[72] Alcides Greca, 'El nuevo patriotismo', in *Laureles del pantano* (Buenos Aires, 1915), p. 71.

Unsurprisingly, the Santa Fe election of 1912, which marked the emergence of an active citizenry, foregrounded this issue. Throughout the campaign, politicians appealed to a notion of the national interest – invoking, for example, 'the collective soul' and the 'common good'[73] – in an attempt to bridge the gaps between social classes. Voting responsibly and resisting the temptation to sell one's vote to the highest bidder, they argued, were patriotic duties for all Argentines. In contrast, Caballero's rhetoric, inflected with the language of *criollismo*, undermined the unifying effect of nationalism by reinforcing class identities. Attacking the Liga del Sur as a party of wealthy foreigners, the Radical leader appealed to a vision of the nation that reinforced rather than obliterated class distinctions and, in so doing, introduced a potentially divisive mode of politics into the campaign.

The working class and the consumption of Caballerismo

On 31 March 1912, thousands of Rosarino workers exercised their political rights for the first time, responding enthusiastically to Caballero's *criollista* nationalism. The Radical ticket of Menchaca-Caballero won the contest, managing a narrow plurality in Santa Fe province as a whole, but a more impressive victory in Rosario, where Caballero had been the party's most visible campaigner. There, the Radicals received 46.5 per cent of the vote, compared to 35.5 per cent for the Liga del Sur, 17.5 per cent for the conservative La Coalición party, and a few dozen votes for the Socialists.[74] Although concrete data on the social composition of the electorate is unavailable, it is likely that a significant proportion of those who voted for the Radicals were working-class. In 1912, class-based residential segregation had not yet developed to a significant extent in Rosario. Although a truly working-class neighbourhood had begun to emerge in the northern part of the city, this growing community still represented an exceptional case.[75] As one might expect, then, Radical votes were not concentrated in any particular section of the city; instead the party obtained a majority in nine of the city's ten electoral districts. As Falcón and Monserrat have argued, this result is consistent with – even if it does not prove – the hypothesis that working-class votes were crucial to the party's victory in Rosario.

[73] See *La Capital* (2/6/12), p. 6; (2/8/14), p. 6.

[74] *La Capital* (4/1/12), p. 6. Falcón and Monserrat also argue that the Radicals received significant working-class support. Falcón and Monserrat, 'Estado provincial', pp. 25–27.

[75] J. Hardoy, 'La vivienda obrera en una ciudad en expansión. Rosario entre 1858 y 1910,' in J. Hardoy et al. (eds.), *Cultura urbana latinoamericana* (Buenos Aires, 1985), pp. 63–93.

The outcome of subsequent elections provides further evidence of Caballero's appeal among Rosario's workers. Over the next few years, Caballero remained a central figure on the Rosarino political scene, repeatedly confirming his ability to attract working-class votes even after the local Radical party split in two. The Radical faction associated with Caballero won a solid majority in Rosario in each of the next three provincial elections: those of 1914, 1916 and 1918. Although the Radicals won a majority in all ten electoral districts in 1914, their domination began to slip after the party schism of 1915. In 1916 and 1918, two separate Radical factions competed against the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), a new national party formed out of the old Liga del Sur. Caballero's faction, the so-called Dissident Radicals, won both elections, but only by a slim margin over the PDP. The break-up of the Radical party cost Caballero his majority in the second and third electoral districts, both located downtown and both home to many of Rosario's wealthy families. Nevertheless, Caballero continued to thrive in the ninth and tenth electoral districts, located in the northern part of the city, an area increasingly dominated by working-class neighborhoods. In 1918, for example, Caballero's Dissidents won a plurality of 45 per cent in the Department of Rosario as a whole but carried 49 per cent of the vote in the ninth and tenth districts, despite the stronger performance of the Socialists in those areas.[76] These results suggest that *Caballerismo* had indeed become a powerful political force within the city's working class; by securing the votes of workers, Caballero was able to continue winning elections even after his party fell apart.

Caballero's opponents were certainly convinced of his ability to attract working-class votes. In fact, in the years following the 1912 election they often dedicated their stump speeches to denouncing Caballero's *criollista* rhetoric. Speaking in the working-class neighbourhood of Talleres during the 1916 campaign, the Progressive Democrat José Guillermo Bertotto attacked politicians who pandered to workers. Bertotto argued that elected officials must be intellectuals; those who said otherwise were condescending to the electorate, using 'the weak argument that the most illiterate are the closest to the people'. In an explicit attack on Caballero's party, Bertotto scoffed at candidates who donned the characteristic attire of the *gaucho* in order to appeal to impressionable voters:

> ... the Dissidents intend to elevate those who are most capable of wearing a *chiripá* or of commanding (*acaudillar*) ignorant masses. The [Progressive] Democratic

[76] For the results of the 1914, 1916 and 1918 elections, see *La Capital* (3/2/14), p. 6; (2/7/16), p. 6; (3/23/18), p. 5; (2/4/18), p. 4. On the schism within the Santa Fe Radical party, see Karush, 'Workers or Citizens', pp. 165–70.

candidates and the entire party have a more elevated concept of their function as citizens who respond to ideas and ideals.[77]

Bertotto depicted Caballero's use of *criollista* culture as demagoguery aimed at swaying uneducated voters, a recurring trope in the political discourse of the period. He promised his working-class audience that despite its high-brow, intellectual style, the PDP would actually deliver more concrete, pro-labour reforms than the Dissident Radicals. In any case, Bertotto's decision to spend the bulk of the speech attacking Caballero's political techniques indicates that he believed those techniques to be dangerously effective in recruiting working-class voters.

The Socialists shared Bertotto's conviction that many of Rosario's workers had been swayed by Caballerismo. In its analysis of the 1912 election, the party's newspaper, *La Vanguardia*, expressed its disappointment in the fact that 'our working class' had voted for 'bourgeois candidates'. For the Socialists, this outcome demonstrated 'the ignorance and lack of culture that unfortunately dominate the proletarian masses'.[78] In other words, by allowing themselves to be duped by Caballero's rhetoric and false promises, by supporting a fundamentally bourgeois party, Rosario's workers had revealed their lack of true class consciousness. But the Socialists appear to have been wrong. Just one year after the election, Rosario's unions launched a massive series of strikes, suggesting that class consciousness was hardly on the wane in the city. In fact, a brief examination of the labour mobilisation of 1913 suggests that for many workers, voting for Caballero and participating in direct action in defence of their class interests were compatible, even complementary practices.

The 1913 labour unrest began in January of that year with a strike by the city's sanitation workers. In their efforts to secure a pay raise from the city council – then dominated by the Liga del Sur – the workers received the enthusiastic backing and encouragement of Rosario's Mayor Daniel Infante, a close political ally of Caballero. The tramway workers soon walked off the job with their own demands, and within weeks the labour federation called a general strike. By the beginning of May, 30,000 to 40,000 workers were on strike.[79] In the provincial senate, Liguista Enrique Thedy argued that this wave of labour unrest was a direct result of the Mayor's political manoeuvres during the preceding months. By telling municipal workers that they were underpaid, the *Caballerista* Mayor 'had left in the working masses a ferment of anarchy which resulted in the movement that recently unfolded in Rosario'.[80] Moreover,

[77] *La Capital* (1/29/16), p. 6.
[78] *La Vanguardia* (4/5/12), p. 2.
[79] These estimates are drawn from: Santa Fe. Cámara de Senadores, *Diario de Sesiones* [SFCS](1913), p. 150; *La Rebelión* (6/8/13), p. 1.
[80] SFCS (1913), p. 172.

Mayor Infante's support for the striking sanitation workers was not the only effort by *Caballerista* politicians to take advantage of the labour unrest. After Infante had resigned in the face of a growing political firestorm, a so-called 'popular independent committee' emerged, composed, at least in part, of *Caballerista* activists seeking to encourage labour protest against the Liguista councilmen.[81] In late April, Caballero himself asked Governor Menchaca for permission to lead a large demonstration of strikers on a march to the municipal government building, where they would demand the resignation of the city council.[82] In the end, all of these efforts failed. Under pressure from members of his own party who were alarmed by the strikes, Menchaca turned against Caballero and called in the national troops to put an end to the conflict. By April 30, a large military force had occupied Rosario; within days, the strikes were effectively over.[83]

The labour mobilisation of 1913 was the product of a long trajectory of working-class formation in Rosario, a process that began well before Caballero started appealing for workers' votes. The sanitation workers, for example, had struck for higher wages as early as 1911, before they had any reason to expect support from a sympathetic mayor.[84] Still, many workers did respond to the *Caballeristas*' efforts to politicise the strikes. While the sanitation workers' union originally framed its demands in strictly economic, non-partisan terms, by mid-April the strike committee was issuing manifestos directly attacking the *Liguista* majority on the city council.[85] Likewise, during the early days of the tramway strike, *La Vanguardia* reported that a 'mass of workers' stood outside the city council, jeering at the councilmen as they entered and left the building.[86] On several occasions during the conflict, *Liguista* councilmen were even targeted for violent attack. Although a few of these assaults may have been conducted by political operators, at least some of the anti-*Liguista* violence was carried out by striking workers. When Councilman Hipólito Zubía had his store vandalised by strikers, he wrote a letter to the railroad workers federation claiming that he was not actually a member of the Liga del Sur, and denying rumours that he had supported low wages for workers.[87] Zubía clearly believed that workers, and not political agitators,

[81] *La Vanguardia* (4/13/13), p. 2. Testifying before the provincial Senate, Minister of Government Herrera argued that only some of the committee's members were Radicals and provided a list of the committee's members in order to substantiate this point. Even this list, though, cited two known Radicals, including then *Caballerista* Alejandro Nogués. See SFCS (1913), pp. 149–150.

[82] *La Capital* (4/28/13), p. 6.

[83] *La Capital* (5/1/13), p. 7; *La Capital* (5/3/13), p. 6.

[84] *La Capital* (1/29/13), p. 7.

[85] *La Capital* (4/3/13), p. 6; *La Vanguardia* (4/13/13), p. 2.

[86] *La Vanguardia* (4/23/13), p. 1.

[87] *La Capital* (4/27/13), p. 8.

had attacked his store because they perceived him to be an anti-labour Liguista politician. Taken together, these incidents reveal significant anti-Liga feeling among the strikers, suggesting that under the influence of Caballero, many workers came to see the conflict in political terms.

Even though the strikes of 1913 had begun as workplace disputes, workers often seemed more responsive to *Caballerista* politicians than to their supposed leaders within the labour movement. At several points during the conflict, rank-and-file workers acted without the approval of Rosario's anarchist union federation. As late as April, the leaders of the federation expressed only lukewarm support for the striking sanitation workers, while denouncing the efforts of 'certain politicians of this city' to capitalise on the conflict.[88] Similarly, on May 1, the federation criticised the tramway workers for accepting the representation of Socialist Congressmen Juan B. Justo and Mario Bravo.[89] This preoccupation with the actions of politicians, both *Caballeristas* and Socialists, suggests that the labour leaders sensed they were losing out in the struggle for workers' loyalty. For their part, the Socialists were also frustrated with their inability to gain the confidence of Rosario's workers. They accused the anarchist federation of being a front for the UCR, and blamed the failure of the strikes on the influence of Caballerismo: '*Criollo* Radicalism, led in Rosario by the ex-anarchist and current Vice Governor, Mr. [sic] Ricardo Caballero, wants to take advantage of the labour movement by directing it against the Liga del Sur.'[90] The Socialists went on to lament that workers had been unable to resist Caballero's appeal. Thirteen years later, a local anarchist newspaper would echo these sentiments, looking back on this period as the moment when Caballero and other leaders of 'rabble-rousing (*populachero*) Radicalism' succeeded in corrupting the labour movement to serve their own ends.[91]

In all likelihood, many of the workers who proved receptive to the mobilising efforts of *Caballerista* politicians during the 1913 strike wave also helped them achieve their repeated electoral majorities during the 1912–8 period. By constructing a discursive space for the expression of working-class interests within mainstream party politics, Caballero had succeeded in building a large following. His *criollista* nationalism tapped into the desire of working-class sons of immigrants to participate in the cult of the *gaucho*, thereby inter-articulating Argentine national identity with working-class consciousness. Although the paucity of available sources precludes an accurate assessment of exactly how workers understood this discourse, their participation in Radical rallies, their choices in the voting booth and their actions on the picket line suggest

[88] Quoted in *La Capital* (4/14/13), p. 7.
[89] *La Capital* (5/2/13), 6.
[90] *La Vanguardia*, 5/2–3/13, 1.
[91] *Orientación* (8/26), p. 31.

that they did engage with it. And as the events of 1913 demonstrate, workers' participation in party politics did not automatically dilute or suppress the process of class formation. On the contrary, the case of *Caballerismo* demonstrates that electoral democracy enabled the construction of novel, class-based political identities.

Of course, workers did not simply inhabit an identity created for them by Caballero. First of all, it is important to remember that Caballero constructed his rhetoric out of already existing discursive elements, including the popular *criollismo* of the gauchesque and the working-class solidarity of the labour movement. Moreover, workers only embraced *Caballerismo* inasmuch as it promised to advance their perceived interests; they did not remain blindly loyal. By 1919, in fact, rising class conflict would induce *Caballerista* politicians to moderate their rhetoric, leading in turn to a resurgence of anarchism within Rosario's working class.[92] Nevertheless, in the early years of competitive party politics, *Caballerismo* enabled working-class political participation. Workers could enthusiastically support *Caballerista* candidates without turning their backs on their class affiliations. They could march in Radical campaign demonstrations and union picket lines, without experiencing any sense of contradiction.

Conclusion

As recent scholarship has begun to demonstrate, historians of Argentina need to examine the construction of collective identities within the sphere of party politics.[93] In Rosario, the introduction of electoral reforms did not present workers with a straightforward choice between assimilation into the nation and loyalty to class, or between political incorporation and labour militancy. On the contrary, the competitive and relatively open political system created by the Sáenz Peña Law forced Argentine politicians to develop new techniques for appealing to the recently enfranchised majority. Caballero pursued this goal by drawing on elements of popular culture in order to craft a political identity that resonated with the attitudes and outlook of Rosario's workers. Moreover, available evidence suggests that workers responded enthusiastically to Caballero's appeal. Both the election results of 1912–8 and the labour mobilisation of 1913 demonstrate that many workers were receptive to a political discourse that combined a defence of working-class interests with a nationalist celebration of rural Argentine identity. On the basis of this

[92] On Caballero's decline during the 1918–22 period, see Karush, *Workers or Citizens*, pp. 204–32. On his activities as Rosario's police chief during the labour unrest of 1928, see R. Korzeniewicz, 'The Labor Politics of Radicalism: The Santa Fe Crisis of 1928', *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 73, no. 1 (1993), pp. 1–32.

[93] The most rigorous attempt to trace this process is Viguera, 'Participación electoral'.

analysis, democratic party politics emerges not as a co-optive mechanism that necessarily diluted working-class consciousness, but rather as an arena in which workers enjoyed new options for collective representation and identification.

Caballerismo left its mark on politics in Rosario and on the political identity of the city's workers. By linking the discourse of working-class consciousness with the discourse of *criollismo*, Caballero and his allies constructed a working-class version of Argentine nationalism and Argentine citizenship. This political articulation, in turn, provoked responses from other politicians as well as from the organised labour movement. In order to appreciate the impact of electoral democracy on workers, historians need to attend to these local contestations over the meaning of terms like citizen, nation, *criollo*, and worker. These struggles and their outcomes transformed the landscape of Argentine political culture. And it was upon this terrain that Juan Perón would build his working-class base of support during the period after 1943. The superficial similarities between *Caballerismo* and *peronismo* – the emphasis on social citizenship and on the privileged position of workers within the nation, the use of *criollista* rhetoric – are more than mere coincidence. Both in discourse and practice, Perón built his movement out of existing raw materials, mobilising and re-articulating political identities created during the period of electoral democracy.[94] The subsequent trajectory of Argentine history, then, makes it all the more pressing for historians to examine the process of identity construction within democratic party politics.

[94] Ernesto Laclau's classic essay on populism suggests the need for just this sort of analysis. Ernesto Laclau, 'Towards a Theory of Populism', in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London, 1977), pp. 143–98.