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MARCOS AGUILA, JEFFREY BORTZ

Andre Gunder Frank: The Limits to the Latin American Lumpenbourgeoisie

The work of Andre Gunder Frank appears like the vast and magnificent output of Francisco Goya, especially his “black painting”. Shooting from the hip, engaging his capricious view of society, Goya sketched the Spanish people, the upper nobility and the Church of the early 19th century. Refraining from any delicacies, he was a partisan with a sharp social. His view was so cutting that today we can view his paintings and drawings as a repertoire of the vices, defects, intrigues, superstitions, fanaticisms, and hopes of his time. We can also see them, to a certain degree, as a critique of the human condition. A century and a half later, Frank painted a similar picture, though from the perspectives of the social sciences. Like Goya, his output was vast, but for this essay we have chosen just a single element, part of a much larger work which, taken as a whole, creates a series of reflections on Andre Gunder Frank’s world just as Goya’s work pictured his. We will focus on the idea of the Latin American lumpenbourgeoisie.

Today it is not quite so common to employ the term bourgeoisie in most English-speaking countries, but the concepts of lumpenbourgeoisie and lumpendevlopment play a critical role in Frank’s ideas about Latin American development. He used them to tie together backwardness and underdevelopment with development and modernization, as he saw them as part of the same and simultaneous world process. In the advanced countries, development did not occur by stages in isolated, autarchic regions, as some authors maintained, instead the world market developed by creating poles of development and underdevelopment, bourgeoisie and lumpenbourgeoisie. By linking the low and the high, lumpen and development, lumpen and

bourgeoisie, Frank authored a critique that was both ethical and historical. It denied the possibility that the national bourgeoisies of the various Latin American countries might lead processes of political independence, or any form of development with greater equity for the popular classes. His critique employed a caricature of the weak national bourgeoisies, who lacked a viable road to economic growth and autonomous development. The disdain he felt was not a simple or dogmatic one, nor did it lack basis. He scoured the historical records of the political behaviour of the Latin American dominant classes, in particular, the importance of their ties to the land and their permanent dependence on state favours. He also searched through the different forms of foreign intervention and domination in the region, from the Spanish and Portuguese Viceroyalties through the period of English hegemony until the relatively recent control of the region by the United States and its great multinational corporations. In what follows, we will look at Frank's argument with its political and economic suggestions, concluding with a reflection on the possibility that Frank remains relevant for understanding current political changes in the regions.

Towards the end of 1969, while he prepared the small book that serves as central reference for these notes, *Lumpenburguesía: lumpendesarrollo* (1971), Frank announced with a certain disgust that the concepts of dependency and development of underdevelopment, on which he had worked tirelessly for years, had become common currency among the sociological establishment. Frank, an incorrigible rebel, found the appropriate terminology to separate himself from what he considered linguistic reformism. As he noted in his autobiography, "[F]rom the production of Dependence to its Consumption Dependence 'theory' prospered, despite early and continued rejection, resistance and attacks. This 'alternative' approach found little favor with the orthodox right, some of the structuralist reformist left, the Soviet aligned Communists, Trotskyists, and soon also the Maoists. Nonetheless, dependence was 'consumed' in Latin America and elsewhere." (Frank 1996: 10).

The concept of lumpenbourgeoisie will not have the same fate as dependence or the development of underdevelopment because it captures the spirit of the phenomenon, just as Goya sketched more than one noble or courtesan with the ears of a burro or the face of a pig to underline aspects of character. Andre Gunder Frank's fundamental critique of the transfor-

mative capacity of the national bourgeoisies is part of his characterization of Latin American dependency. As he notes, "If dependency was only external, one could argue that the national bourgeoisie has objective conditions in order to lead a nationalist or autonomous exit from underdevelopment. But such an exit does not exist [...] precisely because dependency is integral and make the bourgeoisie itself dependent." (Frank 1971: 14). Frank's statement about the degradation of the Latin American national bourgeoisie leads also to his charge of historical responsibility for their submission to foreign economic power. By treating underdevelopment as a consequence of both external and internal forces, he does not take the internal forces as mechanical with regard to the foreign, but rather takes into account the role of Latin American dominant classes as partners in their own submission. He accuses them of disdaining the struggle for hegemony within their own countries. One might say that he denationalizes them. "It is thus that, the national and class structure of underdevelopment in place during the free trade of the colonial period in Latin America, became more profound with the commerce and the imperialist capital of the 19th century. *They became a satellite bourgeoisie acting through the corrupted state of an anti-country.*" (Frank 1971: 79, emphasis added)

Of course, Andre Gunder Frank was not the only one to have similar thoughts about the virtually non-existent revolutionary capacity of the bourgeoisie in the backward countries. Lenin had already developed the theory, carried into practice, of the "weakest link." It was the underpinning of the Bolshevik assault on power in the Soviet Union, and to a certain degree, the inspiration for similar revolutionary movements in the rest of the Third World. To a certain degree, the Chinese and Cuban revolutions came about because of the intrinsic weaknesses of their national bourgeoisies, and as in Russia, the victorious revolutionaries liquidated the "satellite" bourgeoisie.

In 1971, the same year that *Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpendevelopment* appeared, Eduardo Galeano published another work that had a notable impact on resistance movements on the continent. An ambitious academic work, *Las venas abiertas de America Latina* (Open Veins of Latin America, 1971/1987) demonstrated the strong influence of the *dependentista* school, one of whose central figures was Andre Gunder Frank. Written with a literary quality highly unusual for the works on the sociology of development, *Las venas abiertas* underwent fifty reprintings by 1987. It is filled with references

to the structural limitations of the Latin American dominant classes. Writing at the end of the period of import substitution industrialization, supposedly the high point of local development efforts, Galeano characterized the process like this: “The Latin American bourgeoisie is a trading bourgeoisie without any creative capacity. Tied by the umbilical cord of the control over the land, they bow to the altars of the goddess technology.” (Galeano 1971: 405). Galeano pointed out another characteristic of Latin American capitalism, growing technological backwardness, and as a consequence, an increasing productivity lag. Unable to compete with more productive foreign enterprises, he noted local ruling groups survived by participating in mixed business enterprises within the modern sector, that is, businesses with state investment. Profitable and protected by the coffers of the government, such businesses provided them a safe haven, but did not allow them to develop their own leadership in the productive sphere. Galeano, following Frank, argued that local ruling groups since independence, “associated itself with foreign investment [...] the industrial growth in Latin America that has characterized our century has come from the outside [...] the Latin American bourgeoisie was born from the insides of the agro export system [...]” (Galeano 1971: 344-345). Thus local ruling groups sometimes reinvested their fortunes in industry for external reasons rather than because of any industrial vocation. By and large they did not develop local technologies nor did they initiate new projects. Railroads, the 19th century symbol of economic progress, were designed and built by the English and Americans, almost never by nationals. Oil, industrial mining, even the textile industry were developed by foreign capital.

During the 20th century, the crisis of foreign commerce during the great depression brought industrial advances to the region. But the national bourgeoisies did not achieve these advances without help. They did it behind elevated tariffs and with state subsidies. “The state occupies the place of a social class whose appearance history demands, without much success.” (Galeano 1971: 346). Even so, the protectionism that characterized Latin America’s industrial response to the depression, then continued through the post war economic boom, could not avoid imperialist competition. Paradoxically, it made the imperialists and their foreign capital participants in the feast. Foreign investment passed through the tariff barriers like a modern Trojan horse and continued to expand its presence in the protected markets,

usually from a technological horizon deliberately mediocre. Galeano, citing Frank, offers the example of the *General Motors* plant in Toluca, Mexico. He quotes Leo Fenser, an American union delegate, who visited the plant in July 1969, and considered it “worse than archaic”: “Worse, because it was deliberately archaic, with carefully planned obsolescence [...]. The Mexican plants are deliberately equipped with low productivity machinery” (Frank quoted in Galeano 1971: 410).

Obsolete equipment in the advanced countries is not necessarily obsolete in the backwards countries, where they are often the best machines employed in the protected market. The effect is to postpone their obsolescence, thus prolonging the value of the initial investment in equipment. Thus the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s was good for local ruling groups, but even better for the multinationals that came to dominate in this period.

Today of course, with the emphasis on globalization and regional organizations like the North American Free Trade Agreement signed by Mexico, Canada, and the United States in 1994, the nature of commerce, trade, and foreign investment has changed, although some analysts contend that NAFTA contains a certain regional protectionism as its goal. Whether that is the case or not, today Mexico is inundated with second-hand clothes for popular markets that enter the country in railroad wagons filled with boxes of used items. Many of the items of clothing are sizes that mostly don't fit Mexicans, thus the streets are filled with the poor wearing shirts and other items truly exaggerated for their bodies, much like a modernized Goya painting. Meanwhile, the Mexican textile industry has migrated to China. Once again, local ruling groups lack a plan for autonomous or equitable development.

Andre Gunder Frank carried out pioneering work in order to refute the idea, then dominant among orthodox economists and governments, that the lack of economic and social development in Latin America was due to a relative scarcity of capital. It is not that capital is abundant in the region but rather that the flows of capital into the region were less than the flows outwards in payment for profits and other concepts. “I was the first person” – wrote Frank in his autobiography – “to publish an accounting of Latin American external payments and receipts which distinguished between services and goods. With this new accounting I clearly demonstrated that the

Latin American current account deficit was due to a large deficit on service account, especially from financial service payments” (Frank 1996: 9). The early drop-by-drop decapitalization that Frank described became a torrent in the 1980s with the massive foreign debt crisis. The crisis led to the fall of various governments. While the dominant orthodoxy blamed oil prices, non-mainstream economists had learned enough from Frank, Galeano, and others to find the culprit elsewhere (Bortz et al. 1987). The mechanisms for surplus extraction from Latin America via the financial system towards the end of the 20th century began to redefine the lumpenbourgeoisie.

The crisis that originated in the imperialist countries in the 1970s and exploded in Latin America in the debt crisis of the 1980s, led to the current process of globalization. With a dominant ideology that the state is bad and the private is good, local groups have followed foreign pressures to privatize state-owned enterprises. The result has allowed a tiny minority of the lumpenbourgeoisie to acquire great volumes of state wealth at ridiculous prices. The paradigmatic case is that of Carlos Slim of Mexico, who from his base in the formerly state-owned *Teléfonos de México* with its virtual monopoly over the country’s telephone service, has extended his economic power to Colombia, Brazil, and even the United States. He is now one of the ten wealthiest men on earth, so that the category lumpen hardly applies to him at all. On the other hand, the majority of national capitals, both small and medium, became more fragmented and weaker than ever. As a group, the lumpenbourgeoisie became polarized and lost its capacity to negotiate. Meanwhile, the great transnational corporations continued their advance in the Latin American economies, with many European firms joining the race, particularly Spanish companies. The always weak Latin American banking systems slowly ceded to the advance of Spanish and other foreign financial enterprises.

The intrinsic weakness of the national bourgeoisie in Latin America contrasts with the relative strength of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, most notably with the historical trajectory of the United States. The ruling class in the United States quickly extended its hegemony over the entire region. In distinct phases from the Monroe Doctrine, a proclamation of intent rather than actual capacity, through the Cold War and up until the current War Against Terror, the U.S. never abandoned its dream of controlling Latin America. In 1912, President Taft affirmed, “[T]he day is not far in which

three flags carrying the stars and stripes show the three equidistant sites the extension of our territory, one in the North Pole, the other in the Panama Canal, and the third in the South Pole. The entire hemisphere will be ours, in fact, just as by virtue of our racial superiority, it is already ours morally” (quoted in Galeano 1971: 172).

From the beginning, American elites used their state to further their goals of growth, development, and domination. After the independence of the thirteen colonies, and even more after the victory of the northern industrialists during the civil war, the state applied a policy of protectionism, following the example of Great Britain. Ulysses S. Grant, victorious general carried to the presidency, pointed out, “[W]ell gentlemen, the knowledge I have of my country makes me believe that within two hundred years, when America has obtained all that it can from protectionism, it will then also adopt free trade.” (quoted in Frank 1971: 68). Within the time frame set by Grant, the United States now demands free trade from others. Before then, however, in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, the United States considerably widened its frontiers and strengthened state institutions favorable to private enterprise. Meanwhile, Latin America experienced the development of underdevelopment. Liberal governments in the region, under pressure from Great Britain in the 19th century and the United States in the 20th, dogmatically approved free trade policies that essentially undermined their capacity to industrialize. There were some modest exceptions of course. Some individuals and groups pursued an interest in strengthening the nation. To a certain degree, the larger Latin American states created businesses and businessmen, rather than businesses and businessmen creating the state. Nonetheless, most these efforts were in vain. A business history of Latin America, still incomplete, would shed great light on the essential correctness of Frank’s characterization. In recent years, business historians have focused on two important aspects of this problem, the lack of a banking system and the lack of protection for private property rights (Haber/Razo/Maurer 2004). While they can be seen as causes of Latin American backwardness, they can also be seen as symptoms of a lumpenbourgeoisie.

Meanwhile, other historians traced the development of local ruling groups, Daniel Cosío Villegas, Alan Knight and Friedrich Katz in Mexico, Tulio Halperin Donghi (1972) in Argentina, Richard Graham (1990) in Brazil, and numerous others. Frank and Galeano never denied that La-

tin America had ruling classes. But even in the most radical case, Mexico during the *Reforma* in the mid 19th century, what did they achieve? Today few historians would question the profound nationalism of Porfirio Díaz, but his highly successful economic policies strengthened foreign elites more than locals and resulted in a massive social revolution. Nationalism played an important role in that revolution but the victors, some of whom tried to lessen the burdens of underdevelopment on the lower classes, eventually succumbed to the ills of lumpendevelopment, increasingly depending on foreigners to develop the national economy for their own benefit and to the detriment of Mexico. In Argentina and Brazil, as in most of the rest of the Continent, dominant elites could never consolidate their hegemony without the brutal rule of the army, with whom they collaborated in the bitter years of military rule and mass torture of civilians. Collaboration with the Americans was fundamental during the years of military repression that swept the continent as the armies in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay attempted to crush popular movements, often singling out dependentista intellectuals for particularly brutal treatment. In Central America, American puppets like Somoza and the Guatemalan military after Arbenz tried similar policies, but the Sandinista revolution, partly inspired by dependentista writings, shook the region to the core and brought direct and indirect U.S. military response.

Through all of this, Frank never claimed to be a professional historian. His work is basically interpretative rather than the discovery of new data because, as he stated, being a historian “is a task that is not mine” (Frank 1971: 18). However he had a strong intuition even when he lacked the data. He was a powerful interpreter who repudiated reformism with a strength that was as much visceral as intellectual. When he evaluated the process of Latin America’s industrialization oriented towards the internal market during the postwar period, he considered it nothing but “an efficient instrument for growing dependence and underdevelopment [...] by the same bourgeoisie represented first by Getulio Vargas and later by Castelo Branco and Costa e Silva; by Justo and Peron [...] but also by a Cárdenas that appointed as his successor Ávila Camach” (Frank 1971: 98).

As often happens with historical synthesis, there is perhaps too much simplification in these characterizations. It was probably Frank’s way of swimming against the current of the reformism. He wrote, “some of the

principal political problems of the present result from the survival of that deformed offspring and of the efforts by certain people to revive it by producing another like it" (Frank 1971: 98). Other contemporary Latin American dependentistas like Theotonio Dos Santos (1978), a Frank student, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, authors of the influential essay, *Dependencia y desarrollo en América Latina* (1969), maintained a more optimistic vision of the Latin American bourgeoisies. Against this, Frank argued that the birth of a nationalist bourgeoisie was impossible during the rise of neo-imperialism, "and to dream to start it in the future is utopian; that is to say, utopian for the bourgeoisie but politically suicidal for the people" (ibid.). Frank further added that such political suicide was possible not only for Latin America but also for Asia, Africa, and particularly Indonesia. He had a wide vision, as subsequent works would demonstrate.

What would Andre Gunder Frank think, just months after his death, that an Indian leader would become President of Bolivia? Is Evo Morales actually a representative of his country's bourgeoisie? Has the bourgeoisie chosen one of its opposites as its representative? At the beginning of the 21st century, Morales represents a new wave of democratization sweeping Latin America on the ashes of the social and economic destruction of globalization. There is a kind of civic indignation because of a barbarism worthy of the scenes that Goya painted after the French invasion of Spain between 1808 and 1814. It is a supranational movement with deep national and even local roots.

Today, two thirds of the Latin American population is governed by regimes that characterize themselves as leftist. There is a declared opposition to the social and economic results of the pro-capitalist regimes that made the 1980s the "lost decade", with zero growth, followed by very slow growth and a decline in living standards in the 1990s. The two very difficult decades, the 1980s and 1990s, had a serious impact on the electorate in Latin America, who looked to the left to stop the sharp fall in living standards.

Perhaps not unrelated to globalization, the conservative American sociologist Samuel Huntington has attempted to measure cycles of political democratization in the world since the 19th century. He notes a democratic increase in the period between the 1974 revolution in Portugal until the close of his study in 1990. By then, of 130 countries in which he divided the political map, 59 or 45 per cent fell in the democratic list, against only 24

per cent in 1973 (Huntington 1991: 24-26). Latin America of course suffered its share of anti-democracy, beginning with Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973, after which the general became the most notorious symbol of military dictatorship in the region. Frank was one of the thousands of intellectuals who suffered from the repression of that time, wandering in a long exile in Europe, the United States, and Canada (Frank 1996). In the 1980s, the ideological inclination of the civilian governments that emerged from those dark days was decidedly pro-market and pro-American. Their policies, however, contributed to the pauperization of the middle and lower classes, which eventually led to the present movement of popular governments displacing conservative ones. In almost every case, a popular resistance movement preceded the electoral shift. This is what happened in Chile with the *NO movement* against Pinochet, in Brazil with the *Partido del Trabajo* leading general strikes, in Argentina with its urban rebellion against a corrupt party system, in Uruguay which followed the Argentine example, and in Venezuela with a movement whose beginning was the struggle to end the corruption of Christian Democracy. It is what is happening today in Bolivia, after a difficult popular struggle against the privatization of water and gas. Thus the left swing of the Latin American electorate did not take place in a vacuum but developed after mass struggles against dictatorships, then against conservative civilian government.

The question for the electoral left was whether it could really make a substantial impact. On the one hand, in Argentina Néstor Kirchner repudiated the foreign debt and successfully negotiated new terms with foreign lenders, leading to an initial recovery of the Argentine economy. In Chile, the electorate has placed the first socialist in the presidency since Allende, and the first woman ever. On the other hand, in Brazil, the ex-union leader, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, moves on the razor's edge within an institutional structure still dominated by conservatives, although the president favors redistributive policies that would expand the domestic market and help the poor.

Within the rise of the left, the most widely discussed and most fragile process has been that led by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. He originally led a military coup, for which he was sent to prison. Released, he became president after an unquestionable electoral victory. His triumph opened the door to increasing popular organization. Meanwhile, Chavez exercises an autho-

ritarian personal rule based on radical rhetorics financed by high prices for Venezuela's oil. Whatever the consequences internally, the political ascent of Chavez has helped Cuba recover its influence in the region.

Do these partial victories signify that the left is truly ascendant in Latin America? What is the relationship of this left to local ruling groups? Is there a new geopolitics led by the growing weight of China in the world market and its insatiable demand for raw materials, which might benefit Latin America? Can a regional market in Latin America serve as a counterweight to the traditional domination by the United States? Will the electoral left be strengthened in the near future by upcoming elections in Mexico, the Andean countries, and Central America?

Frank always argued that the lumpenbourgeoisie could never lead a process of equitable development. It is interesting that the greatest success today in the world market has been China, where the Communist Party has led a process of massive industrialization. To what degree Chinese economic growth will benefit the mass of the Chinese people, however, remains an open question. What is not in question is that the Party carried out its economic development policies only after liquidating the old lumpenbourgeoisie. This never happened in Latin America, except in Cuba after 1959, and somewhat in Mexico during and after the revolution. In the rest of Latin America, as the electoral left grows stronger, there is the reminder of what happened in the past when elections swung in that direction. The Americans quickly overthrew the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954 and worked with the military to overthrow Allende in Chile in 1973. There was also the long secret war in Central America following the Sandinista victory in 1979. Can anyone be certain such military interventions would not happen again in Latin America? Does Iraq make anybody believe that the United States will not use the military to defend its geopolitical interests?

The nature of the lumpenbourgeoisie, today polarized between a few magnates who have benefited from globalization and the majority of smaller capitals displaced by brutal international competition, has further weakened the state. Meanwhile, it seems to have opened the door to other classes and groups such as marginal urban workers, poor *campesinos*, rebel ethnic minorities, and women, many of whom are participating in a movement of relative regional autonomy, perhaps little conscious of itself yet. This resistance

to neoliberal globalization has the indispensable support of the new leftists in government, at least for the moment.

The question is whether any of this represents a true transformation of the lumpenbourgeoisie and its lumpendevlopment. In his autobiography, Frank remembers a long letter of twelve pages written in July of 1964 to friends in the United States in which he explained his ties to the political struggle for development in Latin America. He hoped for an outcome that would eventually “de-link from the system externally and transit to self-reliant socialism internally (or some undefined international socialist cooperation) in order to make in- or non-dependent economic development possible. I hardly considered [...] how such post revolutionary economic and social development would then be promoted and organized, not to mention guaranteed” (Frank 1996: 9). It is hard to imagine the current process, brutal globalization on the one hand, governments of the left who refuse to break with the system on the other, changing the nature of either Latin America’s ruling groups or its lack of development. The most telling sign is that almost nobody in the leftist governments talks of socialism, and even the most radical, Chavez, bases his politics on the market price of oil. In the short run, it would appear that Andre Gunder Frank is as relevant as ever.

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Abstracts

Der Artikel setzt sich mit einem Buch Franks auseinander, das 1969 publiziert wurde und den Titel: *Lumpenburoguesta: lumpendessarrollo (Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpenentwicklung)* trägt. Frank stellt in diesem Buch die transformative Kraft der nationalen Bourgeoisie in Lateinamerika in Frage. Er argumentiert, dass der Mangel an revolutionärer Energie der Bourgeoisie Teil der Bedingungen von Unterentwicklung ist. Unterentwicklung ist folglich nicht nur ein externer Faktor; indem die nationale Bourgeoisie an ihrer eigenen Unterwerfung mitwirkt und so zur "satellite bourgeoisie" wird ist Unterentwicklung auch ein endogener Prozess. Im zweiten Teil des Papers diskutieren die Autoren jüngere politische Entwicklungen in Lateinamerika. Diese ist auf der einen Seite von einer Polarisierung der Lumpenbourgeoisie in eine kleine Gruppe erfolgreicher Unternehmer, die von der Globalisierung profitieren, und dem Großteil kleinerer Kapitalgruppen, die durch die internationale Konkurrenz verdrängt werden, gekennzeichnet. Auf der anderen Seite hat die politische Linke in den letzten Jahren in zahlreichen Ländern Lateinamerikas Wahlerfolge erringen können. Die Autoren bezweifeln allerdings, dass diese Regierungen eine soziale Dynamik entfachen können,

die zu einer wirklichen Transformation der Lumpenbourgeoisie und der Lumpenentwicklung führen könnte.

This article takes issue with a small book published by Frank in 1969, *Lumpenburguesía: lumpendesarrollo*. In this book, Frank firmly questions the transformative capacity of the national bourgeoisies in Latin America. The lack of any revolutionary capacity of the bourgeoisie in backward countries is, according to Frank, part of the condition of dependency. As a consequence, underdevelopment has to be perceived not only as an external force. Rather, the dominant classes in Latin America are partners in their own submission, becoming thus a “satellite bourgeoisie”. In the second part of the paper the authors discuss the recent political development in Latin America, characterized, on the one hand, by a polarization of the “lumpenbourgeoisie” into a small group of magnates who have benefited from globalization and the majority of smaller capitals displaced by brutal international competition and, on the other hand, by electoral victories of the political left in many Latin American countries. The authors question, however, that these governments of the left can engender a social dynamic leading to a true transformation of the lumpenbourgeoisie and its lumpen-development in Latin America.

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