Chapter One
An Evaded Reality

To reflect on the process of formation and evolution of a movement that we can generally term socialist in Latin America necessarily implies a return to its sources, an effort to investigate the historical vicissitudes of perceptions of the ‘Latin-American phenomenon’ through the prism of a body of theoretical and political work that bore decisive influence on the development of the revolutionary social movements of the modern era. Here lies, however, one of our greatest difficulties, because while we can analyse with relative ease the Third International’s conceptions of the economic, political and social reality of our continent, there remains an open question as to why it discovered this reality only belatedly.¹ And the further we go back in history, our difficulties increase as we are confronted with the need to trace the problem in Marx himself.

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¹. It was only starting with the Sixth Enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist International (17 February–15 March 1926) and only thanks to very special conditions that it began to consider in a more particular manner the socio-economic situation and need for a specific strategy in the Latin-American region. This change of perspectives erupted into the open in the debates of the Comintern’s Sixth Congress (17 July–1 September 1928). Given both the number of parties represented and the particular attention granted to the problems of the Latin-American revolutionary and communist movement, this congress was considered the moment of the Comintern’s ‘discovery’ of Latin America. In this same period, the South-American Secretariat of the Comintern drew up the first outlines of general theses on the particularities of the region. The near-totality of the Latin-American delegation’s interventions dedicated to this theme, as well as those of some leading members, are collected in Internacional Comunista 1978, pp. 132–9, 175–86, 299–321, 351–85.
Today it is thus extremely complicated to imagine to what extent there existed in the Second International, or among some of its most important theorists, any critical perception of the problems of ‘classification’ that were posed – not to say, are posed – by Latin-American societies; in other words, to uncover a more or less defined concern to discern the foundations of the autonomy of our continent relative to the world as a whole. Nonetheless, a careful historical reconstruction demonstrates that the relations between this international body and the socialist parties and internationalist groups in Latin America existed from the very moment that it was created.

From the late nineteenth century, the Partido Socialista Argentino maintained very close links with the Second International and participated not only in its congresses, but also in the life of the International Socialist Bureau. One of the movement’s main theoretical organs, the German journal Die Neue Zeit, published commentaries on the social and political reality of the continent with relative frequency, drawn up not only by its own staff but also by local correspondents like Pablo Zierold in Mexico and Germán Ave Lallemant in Argentina. The same was true of Critica sociale, the Milanese journal directed by Filippo Turati. This being the case, we would go as far as to say that the quite generalised belief as to the late entry of the Latin-American socialist parties into the life of the Second International is by no means a certainty. Moreover, in the case of the socialist organisations of Brazil and Argentina, we can speak of their surprisingly early involvement.

Where, then, do we have to look for the reasons for this oversight, the causes of an undervaluing or underestimation that can hardly be put down to ignorance? Where can we find the motives for the exclusion in theory of a reality that, even if partially, really did enter into consideration in practice? As we shall try to demonstrate, posing the problem of the international socialist movement’s

2. From its foundation, the Partido Socialista Argentino maintained a systematic and ongoing relationship with the Second International. It participated with its own delegations or had brother parties’ delegations represent it at all or almost all of the international congresses and occupied a permanent post in the sessions of the International Socialist Bureau from 1901 until the eve of the First World-War.

3. Although we have been able to obtain a complete file of the texts by the correspondents and editors of Die Neue Zeit on Latin-American themes, unfortunately the same cannot be said for the other two European organs that most frequently referred to our continent’s political and social life from the perspective of the socialist movement: Critica sociale, the Milanese publication close to the leadership-group of the Italian Socialist Party, and Les Temps nouveaux, published in Paris from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. The very fact of the interest with which these publications followed Latin-American events is a demonstration of what we are arguing, namely, the early links between the socialist movement in our countries and the European revolutionary and socialist movements. In our opinion, the ideological and organisational connections were much closer than is generally believed; and this is not only true for the particular case of Argentina.