

“*La teoría i la realidad*”: The Democratic Society of Artisans of Bogotá, 1847–1854

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IN late 1851, the artisan Cruz Ballesteros bitterly criticized members of the Colombian Liberal party in a scathing leaflet entitled *La teoría i la realidad*. Ballesteros complained that the Democratic Society of Artisans had been manipulated by Liberals to secure that party's rise to power. The society had temporarily set aside its objective of working for the common interests of Bogotá's skilled laborers in order to pursue Liberal political victories, for which Liberals had pledged to reward the society by advancing its causes. Ballesteros, a carpenter, alleged that rather than fostering artisan industry and democratic government, Liberals had exploited the artisans' organizational strength, ignored their pleas for tariff protection, and denied them legitimate political participation.¹ In his outburst, Ballesteros echoed the sentiments of Ambrosio López, who earlier in the year had charged that artisans had lost control of the society to the “red serpents” of the Liberal party, leaving craftsmen no choice but to leave the organization to struggle for their own interests.²

These sentiments are at odds with some later scholarly interpretations on the Democratic Society and seem, on the surface, to support conclusions reached by Conservatives in the 1850s. Writers such as Venancio Ortiz had then argued that “red liberals” had misled loyal artisans with

1. Cruz Ballesteros, *La teoría i la realidad* (Bogotá, 1851). The Society of Artisans was founded in Oct. 1847 and went by its original name until 1849. It then became the Democratic Society of Artisans. For the sake of continuity, I will favor the use of Democratic Society throughout the essay.

2. Ambrosio López, *El desengaño o confidencias de Ambrosio López, primer director de la Sociedad de Artesanos de Bogotá, denominada hoy “Sociedad Democrática,” escrito para conocimiento de sus consocios* (Bogotá, 1851). Emeterio Heredia rebutted López's accusations in *Contestación al cuaderno titulado “El desengaño o confidencias de Ambrosio López ect.” por El presidente que fue de la Sociedad de Artesanos el 7 de marzo de 1849* (Bogotá, 1851). López defended his stance in *El triunfo sobre la serpiente roja, cuyo asunto es del dominio de la nación* (Bogotá, 1851).

messages of “popular sovereignty” and “communism” in order to acquire their political support.³ By contrast, in the last generation, authors such as Gustavo Vargas Martínez have looked to the “progressive” relationship between artisans and certain younger members of the Liberal party to sustain the argument that the 1854 coup by José María Melo, in which artisans of the Democratic Society had a central role, represented the initial armed attempt of the Colombian pueblo to win control of the government, and to do so under the auspices of a revolutionary ideology. Vargas used the writings of José María Samper, Francisco Javier Zaldúa, and others to document the “socialist” thinking of the society. This, for Vargas and others, made it the most important popular mobilization in nineteenth-century Colombia.⁴ Other scholars have seen the group as trade unionist or focused on its political relationship to the reform process.⁵ In 1851, Ballesteros and López, both representative of artisanal attitudes, directed their criticisms at the very people that Vargas Martínez and others have used to illustrate the ideological orientations of the society. To be sure, they also rejected most relations with the Conservative party of the day in favor of a course of action more in keeping with their particular interests. Clearly, as Ballesteros observed, the theory and reality of the Democratic

3. Venancio Ortiz, *Historia de la revolución del 17 de abril de 1854* (Bogotá, 1972), 24. See, also, José Manuel Restrepo, *Historia de la Nueva Granada*, 2 vols. (Bogotá, 1952–53), II, 76–77. Germán R. Mejía Pavony has skillfully analyzed the nineteenth-century secondary sources on the society, revealing the early association of socialist ideology and the Democratic Society. Mejía Pavony, “Las Sociedades Democráticas (1848–1854): Problemas historiográficos,” *Universitas Humanística*, 11:17 (Mar. 1982), 145–176. Mejía Pavony argues that most observers of the period attributed the origins of the Democratic Societies either to Liberal intrigues or to some vague artisan movement; all thought that by 1849 the Democratic Society was a tool of the Liberal party (p. 173).

4. Gustavo Vargas Martínez, *Colombia 1854: Melo, los artesanos y el socialismo (La dictadura democrático-artesanal de 1854, expresión del socialismo utópico en Colombia)* (Bogotá, 1972). Vargas Martínez suggests that artisans of the organization represented a “social class in formation” (the proletariat), which undertook the 1854 revolution with clear social objectives drawn from the utopian socialists of the Republican Society (pp. 27, 140, 141).

5. Miguel Urrutia suggests that the Democratic Society should properly be seen as an early trade union that became embroiled in partisan politics. Urrutia, *The Development of the Colombian Labor Movement* (New Haven, 1969), 3–44. Urrutia categorizes the society as “the first attempt at working class organization in the history of Colombia,” which failed due to the weakness of the artisan class (p. 43). Both Urrutia and Vargas agree with Orlando Fals Borda that the greatest significance of the movement was the 17 de abril coup that for the first time brought a nonelite social sector to power. Fals Borda, *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, Jacqueline D. Skiles, trans. (New York, 1969), 81–89. Other writers have examined the society in juxtaposition to the midcentury reform era. Germán Colmenares, in *Partidos políticos y clases sociales en Colombia* (Bogotá, 1984) and Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, in “Las Sociedades Democráticas de Artesanos y la coyuntura política y social colombiana de 1848,” in *La personalidad histórica de Colombia y otros ensayos* (Bogotá, 1977), 203–222, both explore the topic in this light.

Society were different. The historiographical disagreements surrounding the organization suggest the need for reexamination.

The general outline of the society's history is well documented, but opinions differ on the organization's relationship with the Liberal party, especially its younger and more doctrinaire members (*Gólgotas* as they were known). This issue broaches the broader topic of the emergence of, and distinction between, the parties in early nineteenth-century Colombia. The unsuccessful effort of Francisco de Paula Santander in 1836 to promote José María Obando as his presidential successor fractured what had been the broad coalition of his political supporters into two groups, *progresistas* (pro-Santander) and moderates who supported the winner, José Ignacio de Márquez, and became known as *ministeriales*. The *Guerra de los Supremos* three years later crystallized that division, and the emerging alignment between *ministeriales* and the former partisans of Bolívar, into what would eventually become, in the late 1840s, the Liberal and Conservative parties. Frank Safford has convincingly argued that individual members did not gravitate into one or the other of the two parties on the basis of purely socioeconomic factors (such as occupation or class), but that a more important factor was proximity and access to the main sources of administrative, ecclesiastical, or educational power in the late colonial and early national periods, with Liberals tending to be those whose origins were somewhat marginal, geographically or otherwise.⁶ Few points of ideological conflict divided the parties, aside from perhaps the proper role of the church in state and society. They were largely in agreement with the multiple proposals championed by the younger members of the Liberal party (and others) that defined the Liberal Reform era (1845–54).

The Democratic Society operated in these years of reform, when Colombia cast off most of its colonial heritage in favor of liberalized economic policies, decentralized government, a lessened social and political role of the church, and a host of other innovations. The generally critical reaction of the artisans of the society to the reforms is quite important—especially as many craftsmen participated in the 1854 Melo coup against the Constitution of 1853 that had incorporated the most important of the reforms.

Historians who have studied the society have focused much of their attention on the 1854 coup, although several questions concerning the latter still have not been satisfactorily answered. How did the artisans of

6. Frank Safford, "Bases of Political Alignment in Early Republican Spanish America," in *New Approaches to Latin American History*, Richard Graham and Peter H. Smith, eds. (Austin, 1974), 71–111.

the society figure in its origin and process? What was the relationship between Draconians (generally older, more moderate Liberals) and the coup? What happened to artisans after the coup, in terms of both individual participants and their collective political expression? Several other important aspects of the society's history, by contrast, are seldom even discussed. Were there antecedents to the society, or did it emerge solely in reaction to the 1847 legislation that lowered tariffs on imported products? Who became members of the society? Did its membership remain constant from 1847 until 1854, or were there turning points in those years indicating reformation or redirection of the group? This essay will suggest some answers to these questions and raise several issues that deserve further investigation. Clearly, the significance of the Democratic Society and its members to nineteenth-century Colombia needs to be reinterpreted.

*The Democratic Society:
Origins and Political Trajectory*

An almost total lack of socioeconomic data on members of the society and self-serving exaggerations of its size severely weaken any attempt to concretely describe the numbers and social composition of the organization. Most accounts describe the original members of the society as artisans, yet the trades of only a limited number of leaders are available; occupations for most of the general membership are simply unknown. Estimates of the numbers of individuals associated with the group vary from 12–15 at its inception, to some 300 during the peak of the 1848 presidential campaign, to about 1,000 in early 1850, and, finally, to some 800 in mid-1853 and early 1854.⁷ These latter figures, especially the 1850 number, are inflated both by nonartisan members and for partisan reasons. A reliable indication of active artisan members is gained from the numbers of signers of the society's petitions to the congress: 219 men in 1846 and 229 in 1851.⁸ A fairly stable membership of some 200–250 artisans is probably an accurate guess for the entire period; several hundred more were occasionally involved in the organization's activities, and large numbers of nonartisan Liberals were members of the society at various times. (This point will be addressed later.)

7. Agustín Rodríguez, *Al director i miembros de la Sociedad Democrática* (Bogotá, 1849), 1–3; Sociedad de Artesanos, *Reglamento para su régimen interior i económico* (Bogotá, 1847), 16; *El Aviso*, Oct. 8, 1848 (all newspaper citations are from Bogotá); *El Sur-Americano*, Jan. 19, 1850; Blas López et al., *Protesta de los artesanos Blas López, Miguel León, Anselmo Flórez y otros* (Bogotá, 1853).

8. Archivo del Congreso (hereafter AC), Senado, Proyectos de leyes negados, 1846, V, 118–126; and AC, Cámara, Informes de comisiones, 1851, VI, 464–473r. Probably a similar number supported petitions in 1850, 1853, and 1854, but only the names of leading officials were recorded.

The organization of the Society of Artisans in reaction to proposed tariff reductions in 1846 was not the first instance in which Bogotá's craftsmen sought to protect their economic interests by political activity. Ten years earlier, 15 master craftsmen had requested that the congress implement legislation to protect the nation's industries. The men protested that the city's *gremios* were unable to further lower prices to match the costs of imported goods that had been allowed to enter the country.⁹ These artisans argued that their value to the country as producers warranted official protection and that the country in general could be raised from economic doldrums by protective legislation. Artisans reasoned that the government had an obligation to protect its citizenry, an argument that sustained all craftsmen's petitions in the reform era. A commission appointed to study the request agreed that it was the state's obligation to protect the industry of the populace, a conclusion generally consistent with governmental policies in the early national period.¹⁰

Artisans' opinions about national economic policies were not heard again at the level of national politics until the administration of Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera (1845–49), himself a somewhat maverick Conservative, and the initiation of the Liberal Reform era. Rumors of proposed reductions in duties—a central tenet of liberal economic policy—circulated through Bogotá in mid-1846 and spurred 219 “artisans and mechanics” to protest the plan in a petition to the congress. The men observed that many of their class were already suffering economic ruin because of foreign competition, a condition quite likely worsened by the credit crisis of 1842–43, and that further imported goods in the marketplace would spell their ruin.¹¹ The 1846 petition argued that the social value of the artisan class, based on its industrial productivity, positive social influence, and patriotic sacrifices in conflicts such as the *Guerra de los Supremos*, fully justified the degree of protection afforded by higher tariff rates. The petitioners pleaded that both their families and the general population would suffer from increased competition, and that the country was simply too

9. *Gremios* in this context is a reference to trades. Official guilds, which had never been firmly established in Bogotá, were abolished by national law in 1824. David Bushnell, *The Santander Regime in Gran Colombia* (Newark, 1954), 130; Humberto Triana y Antorveza, “La libertad laboral y la supresión de los gremios neogranadinos,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*, 8:7 (1965), 1015–1024; Francisco Robledo, “Instrucción de gremios en gral. Pa todos oficios aprobada pr. el Exmo. Sor. Virrey del Rno. Siguense a ella quantos papeles y providens se han creado en el asunto,” *Revista del Archivo Nacional*, 1:10–11 (Oct.–Nov. 1936), 13–34.

10. AC, Cámara, Informes de comisiones, 1836, VIII, 156–159r.

11. AC, Senado, Proyectos de leyes negados, 1846, V, 118–126; Agustín Rodríguez et al., *HH. Senadores* (Bogotá, 1846). Artisans from Medellín presented a similar petition to the congress the following year. AC, Cámara, Informes de comisiones, 1847, X, 229–241r.

poor to compete on an equal footing with European producers.¹² Congress nevertheless passed a bill in June 1847 that lowered tariffs by about 30 percent on most imported goods. Many of the same men who had backed the petition, including its apparent organizer, Agustín Rodríguez, then founded the Society of Artisans to undertake political action to repeal the tariff law.¹³

How important is the 1846 petition as a benchmark of artisan political activity during the reform era? For most men, affixing their names to the document was probably one of the few formal statements of their social and economic interests.¹⁴ Of the clearly identifiable names on the petition, roughly two-thirds do not show up again on major documents of the period. For others, signing the petition was only one of a series of recognizable political expressions. One out of every six names on the 1846 petition was associated with efforts in the 1830s by groups associated with the emerging Conservative and Liberal parties to mobilize “popular” sectors in support of items on their political agenda. Of the 32 men with prior activity, two out of three are found on a 1839 petition to the congress which, among other points, requested that the Jesuits be allowed to return to Colombia, that “impious” (Benthamite) books not be used for educational purposes, and that ecclesiastical reforms be approved by the church before their enactment into law. These issues were dear to the *ministeriales*, who formed the foundation for the Conservative party.¹⁵ The remaining one-third of the 1846 signers had been members of the Sociedad Democrática Republicana de Agricultores i Labradores Progresistas (SDRAL), a group organized by Lorenzo María Lleras in 1838. The Democratic Republican Society had attempted to instill in its members the ideological orientations of men associated with Francisco de Paula Santander and to support *progresista* electoral ambitions.¹⁶ In the same

12. AC, Senado, Proyectos de leyes negados, 1846, V, 118–126. For the expression of artisan protectionist ideology in Peru in the same period, see Paul Gootenberg, “The Social Origins of Protectionism and Free Trade in Nineteenth-Century Lima,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 14:2 (Nov. 1982), 329–358.

13. The stated objectives of the society included as well educational programs in reading and writing, self-help, and examination of political issues. Hugo Latorre Cabal, *Mi novela: Apuntes autobiográficos de Alfonso López* (Bogotá, 1961), 26; Rodríguez, *Al director*, 1–2.

14. Names from the 1846 and 1851 petitions, along with names of individuals accused of complicity in the Melo coup were correlated to obtain a notion of artisan political activity in the reform era. All persons associated with the society or its affairs were tracked through the era. When a question of the validity of a match on a given petition arose, such as two names that were the same, my tendency was to assume that different persons had signed. But if the same name appeared on any two documents, a link was assumed.

15. AC, Senado, Peticiones, 1839, XI, 79–86r; Bonifacio Quijano et al., *HH. Senadores i Representantes* (Bogotá, 1839).

16. *El Labrador i Artesano*, Oct. 7, 1838, Jan. 20, 1839, and *passim*.

period, some men, such as Rodríguez and Antonio Vásquez, both later officers in the Society of Artisans, had supported the 1836 petition of master craftsmen to the Chamber of Representatives.

Founders of the Society of Artisans thus drew on a varied political experience in their efforts to represent the interests of Bogotá's craftsmen. In keeping with their belief that government should take a positive role in providing for the welfare of its citizens, some had earlier sought to protect their crafts from foreign competition. Others had been active in political bodies mobilized by men associated with the emerging Conservative and Liberal parties in support of partisan objectives. The artisan support of the proclerical petition of 1839 suggests that many craftsmen held that the church should be a central component of Colombian society, a belief that would be tested in the years of reform. Moreover, one message of the SDRAL in particular was that all citizens had the right to represent their interests in the body politic. While such notions of republican political theory were no doubt weakly developed at this time, its principles would as well be tested in the reform era. Still, artisans coming from a "Liberal" background were less represented in the 1846 petition and in the original membership of the society than those with "Conservative" experiences. It is inaccurate to apply a partisan label to the initial organization; it seemingly was bound more by class than by partisan ties.

The initial society may have had artisan interests at heart, yet its meetings barely met the 20-person quorum until May 1848, when the organization began to discuss that year's presidential campaign, a move that had momentous consequences for the society's direction. Debates on potential candidates drew as many as 300 persons. They were often addressed by younger Liberals such as Ezequiel Rojas, José de Obaldía, or Francisco Javier Zaldúa, men generally in favor of General José Hilario López, who, it was said, would repeal the tariff law and bring craftsmen into his administration.¹⁷ The participation of these men in the society's affairs transformed the organization into a Liberal political club, a re-direction with both immediate and long-term consequences. Although the society voted to work for López's election, it was by no means a unanimous decision. Many, including Agustín Rodríguez, preferred the *ministerial* Joaquín Gori, who, like López, had indicated his support for higher tariffs and more democratic government.¹⁸ Backers of both López and Gori circulated pamphlets and made considerable efforts to convince craftsmen of the merits of their candidates. One such leaflet warned artisans that Liber-

17. López, *El desengaño*, 1–5; Latorre Cabal, *Mi novela*, 72; *El Aviso*, June 18, 1848; Rodríguez, *Al director*, 1–7.

18. *La América*, June 4, 1848; *El Aviso*, June 18, 1848.

als were exploiting the society for their partisan objectives and concluded: "Time will disillusion you." Liberals, of course, denied the charge.¹⁹

In the election, Bogotanos favored Gori with 31 electoral votes, López with 12, and moderate *ministerial* Rufino Cuervo with 8.²⁰ These results, coupled with the various pro-Gori announcements, suggest that artisans and others were not completely swayed by the society's electioneering. The artisan alliance with the future Gólgotas was far from secure at this early date, although the potential value of the organization as a tool of partisan politics was clearly understood.

A majority of electors nationwide were not pledged to a single candidate, which forced the congress to select the president. The congressional meeting of March 7, 1849 took place amid fears of partisan violence and open intimidation of congressmen by spectators in the gallery, which Conservatives attributed to the Society of Artisans. After three confused and tumultuous ballots, a fourth tally awarded López the election. The precise impact of the society on the congress's choice is hotly debated, but it possibly helped sway one or two votes toward López, which would have sealed his victory.

Sometime in 1849, the society's name was changed to the "Democratic Society of Artisans," or, simply, the Democratic Society. This accurately reflected the broadening of its membership to include nonartisan Liberals and its new function as a mobilizing agent for the policies of the López administration. Throughout the country, similar societies were founded, the first in Cali in July. Most simply served as a town's organization of Liberal government employees, lawyers, and other party members, although some, most significantly that of Cali, had a "popular" character paralleling that of the Bogotá society.²¹

The societies also had a military character. *Jefes políticos* throughout the country were told in September 1849 to organize National Guards in support of the administration.²² These militia groups would work closely with the Democratic Societies and later helped put down the 1851 Con-

19. *A los artesanos de Bogotá* (Bogotá, 1848?); *La América*, June 18, 25, 1848; *El Nacional*, June 11, 1848.

20. Mariano Ospina Rodríguez received one electoral vote. *El Día*, July 1, 19, 1848; David Bushnell, "Elecciones presidenciales colombianas, 1825–1856," in *Compendio de estadísticas históricas de Colombia*, Miguel Urrutia and Mario Arrubla, eds. (Bogotá, 1970), 258–259.

21. *El Sur-Americano*, Jan. 19, 1850; J. León Helguera, "Antecedentes sociales de la revolución de 1851 en el sur de Colombia (1848–1851)," *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, 5 (1970), 53–63; *Reseña histórica de los principales acontecimientos políticos de la ciudad de Cali, desde el año de 1848 hasta el de 1855 inclusive* (Bogotá, 1856), 29–32, 36–39.

22. *El Porvenir*, Sept. 15, 1849.

servative rebellion. In late 1851, during the revolt, numerous societies noted their need for weapons and financial aid to defend Liberal "principles."²³ The tempo of the societies' foundings adds credence to the view that the national network of societies acted to mobilize political support for the López administration and to defend it by force of arms, an objective hardly intended by the founders of the society in 1847. Between 1849 and 1853, *La Gaceta Oficial* carried the notices of the founding of 112 Democratic Societies; of these 16 (14 percent) were established in 1849; 21 (19 percent) in 1850; 66 (59 percent) in 1851; and 9 (8 percent) in 1852.

Conservatives did not passively watch the development of the network of Democratic Societies. In December 1849, they organized the Sociedad Popular de Mutua Instrucción i Fraternidad Cristiana, first in Bogotá, and then in other cities. The Popular Society was more openly partisan than the Democratic Society, but it too included many artisans among its membership. The Popular Society sought first to revitalize support of the Conservative party throughout the nation. This goal would be reached by means of Popular affiliates teaching the ideological and moral beliefs of the party's organizers.²⁴

In both Bogotá and the Cauca Valley conflicts promptly erupted between the two partisan groups. The Liberal governor of Cundinamarca immediately began a repressive campaign against the Popular Society, calling several of its officers into his office and threatening them with jail or exile if they "disturbed" the peace.²⁵ Confrontations between "Popular" and "Democratic" craftsmen were frequent, including a major clash on January 15, 1850. The fear that confrontations would take a violent turn, in combination with an outbreak of smallpox in the city, led to a prohibition of public meetings in February.²⁶ Government harassment of the Popular Society did not cease, however. The artist Simón José Cárdenas, its president, was momentarily detained and later accused of slander, a charge that led to his incarceration in May and his eventual flight from the country.²⁷ In the Cauca Valley, violence between the Democratic and

23. In late 1851, during the Conservative revolt, numerous Democratic Societies noted their need for weapons and aid so that "Liberals can have full freedom against the enemies of our principles." Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter AHN), República, Guerra y Marina, tomo 800, ff. 3, 9–11; tomo 819, ff. 355–359; tomo 791, ff. 288–292.

24. *El Amigo de los Artesanos*, Dec. 21, 29, 1849; *El Día*, Dec. 26, 1849; *Reglamento orgánico de la Sociedad Popular de Instrucción Mutua i Fraternidad Cristiana* (Bogotá, 1849).

25. *El Día*, Mar. 23, 1850.

26. Gustavo Arboleda, *Historia contemporánea de Colombia (Desde la disolución de la antigua república de ese nombre hasta la época presente)*, 6 vols. (Bogotá, 1918–35), III, 97; *El Neo-Granadino*, Jan. 25, 1850.

27. *El Día*, Feb. 12, 16, 1850; *La Civilización*, May 24, 27, 1850.

the Popular Societies was widespread and helped raise the level of tension that contributed to the civil war of 1851.²⁸

The utility of the Democratic Society as an agent of the Liberal reformers was demonstrated in early 1850, even as the distance between artisan and Gólgota interests was becoming apparent. In May of that year, an outpouring of calls for the expulsion of the Jesuits, in which the society's national network took part, helped convince a reluctant President López to order the company to leave the country.²⁹ The society's role in the episode raises questions that cannot be answered with assurance. Did its leaders side with ardent Gólgotas such as José María Samper, in opposition to the Jesuits and contrary to the sentiments of many rank-and-file members, in the hope of being rewarded on issues of more immediate artisanal interest? If so, they were soon disappointed.

In the very same month, the society petitioned the congress for higher tariff rates in much the same language as the appeal of 1846, although it was now clear that artisans feared not only foreign products, but also foreign ideas about economic policy. The notion that the worship of such ideas might help Colombia materially was called the "vanity of theoreticians and the greed of speculators."³⁰ An 1851 petition flatly rejected economic liberalism as inappropriate for Colombia. The artisans stressed that their petition was based on social reality, not economic theory. They noted that theories dealt with nations as single abstract entities, not as amalgamations of various classes and peoples. What therefore might cause "advancement" for the nation, craftsmen reasoned, did not necessarily benefit its separate parts.³¹ In both years, the congress refused to respond favorably to the Democratic Society's petitions, a decision in keeping with its general laissez-faire orientation.³²

The formal separation of Gólgotas from the Democratic Society apparently took place in the middle of 1850, as Gólgotas tried to impose the vice-presidential candidacy of Florentino González, a man whose sponsorship of the 1847 tariff reductions made him anathema to most artisans. In September 1850, leading Gólgotas founded the Escuela Republicana as a forum to more faithfully represent their interests.³³

28. José Escorcía, *Sociedad y economía en el Valle del Cauca. Desarrollo político, social y económico, 1800–1854* (Bogotá, 1983), 86–92; Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 56–67; Helguera, "Antecedentes sociales," 53–63.

29. *El 7 de Marzo*, Jan. 20, 1850; *El Cañón*, Jan. 17, 1850; *El Día*, May 1, 1850; *La Gaceta Oficial*, July 4, 11, 1850.

30. AC, Cámara, Proyectos de leyes negados, 1850, X, 28–44r.

31. AC, Cámara, Informes de comisiones, 1851, VI, 464–473r.

32. AC, Cámara, Proyectos de leyes negados, 1850, X, 28–44r. See the congressional debate in *Diario de Debates*, June 5, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26, 1850.

33. *El Estandarte del Pueblo*, July 7, 14, 1850; *El Neo-Granadino*, July 12, 1850; Fals Borda, *Subversion and Social Change*, 83–85.

At the same time, there was an increased clamor for craftsmen to assess their association with the López administration.³⁴ This undoubtedly contributed to Ambrosio López's condemnation of the society as a tool of Liberal *políticos* in May 1851, an action that resulted in his expulsion from the organization. Perhaps in recognition of the partisan stance of the Democratic Society, in May there was an unsuccessful attempt to unite "Popular" and "Democratic" artisans in an independent organization.³⁵ When the May 1851 petition to the congress to raise tariffs was rejected, the disillusionment of most artisans of the society was nearly complete.³⁶ The civil war between Conservatives and Liberals in mid-1851 finished the process. Democratic militiamen were called into military service in Antioquia, but, according to Ballesteros at least, were treated with disdain and ingratitude both in the field and on their return to Bogotá.³⁷

The relationship between craftsmen and *Gólgotas* had never been tranquil. Tension and conflicting interests between the two groups repeatedly were evidenced from the society's decision to support José Hilario López through the unsuccessful tariff petitions. At the root of the tension lay the simple fact that artisans and *Gólgotas* had quite distinct political objectives. Craftsmen founded the society to seek protection for their trades against foreign goods in Bogotá's market. Reformers sought to reorient the Colombian economy more directly into the mainstream of the global economy, which spelled more competition for native artisanal producers. The surprise is not that the groups parted ways, but that it took so long—or that the groups had cooperated at all. From its founding, protection of the craftsmen's socioeconomic position served as the guiding principle of the Democratic Society, but political action in pursuit of that goal had intertwined its fortunes with reformist Liberals, leading to the sense of the group's political exploitation and, perhaps, heightening its members' political consciousness as well. The result was the burst of outcries in 1850 and 1851 against partisan manipulation and in favor of legitimate representation of the organization's true interests.³⁸ Yet the protests of 1851 were not limited to the realm of economics and politics. They also included critical observations on liberal reforms that were seen as undermining tra-

34. *El Día*, Sept. 7, 1850; *La Civilización*, May 1, 1850; *El Filotémico*, Jan. 26, 1851.

35. *El Día*, May 15, 1851; *La Civilización*, May 15, 1851.

36. AC, Cámara, Informes de comisiones, 1851, VI, 464–473r.

37. *El Baile*, Nov. 24, 1850; *El Día*, Dec. 21, 1851; *La Reforma*, Aug. 24, 1851; *El Neo-Granadino*, Dec. 12, 1851; Ballesteros, *La teoría i la realidad*. In early 1852, Miguel León, then the society's president, bitterly assailed *Gólgota* Manuel Murillo Toro for the repeated refusals of the López administration to raise tariffs, but its obvious willingness to shed artisan blood. Miguel León, *Satisfacción que da el que escribe, al Sr. M. Murillo, Secretario de Hacienda* (Bogotá, 1852); *El Pasatiempo*, Jan. 24, 1852.

38. One artisan supporter in 1853 observed that democracy in the country was an illusion, "we are republicans in theory and slaves in practice. . . ." *Un amigo de los artesanos* (Bogotá, 1853).

ditional society. In particular, reduction of the church's temporal position was viewed as socially harmful.³⁹

The final stage of the society's history represented the movement toward political alignment and cooperation with groups of more compatible ideological orientation. The society's ideology paralleled the sentiments held by the emerging Draconian wing of the Liberal party, which favored a slower reform schedule, less "radical" reforms, and maintenance of both a strong executive and a permanent military establishment. Draconians were most concerned with reforms that would weaken the central government and its military institutions. One Draconian spokesman frankly called his group reactionary, as it garnered its strength in response to Gólgota measures that "weakened" Colombian society.⁴⁰ Draconians were perhaps logical allies of the society's artisans. At any rate, both groups turned to each other to form a political alliance in the face of external threats—the Draconians reacting to the proposed abolition of the regular army and the artisans to the imposition of lower tariffs.

In early 1852, the Democratic Society committed itself to the presidential candidacy of Draconian General José María Obando, and several craftsmen played prominent roles in the Obando campaign. One, Emeterio Heredia, served as president of the capital's electoral assembly. The general fared well in the capital's voting, winning 23 out of the 39 possible electors, and he gained an easy victory nationwide over the Gólgota-backed Tomás Herrera.⁴¹ The Democratic Society was weakened as an organization by this time, however. Through most of 1852, scant mention of it or its members appeared in the city's press. The defeat of the Conservative party the previous year had removed much of the organization's value to the Liberal administration, and certainly the Gólgotas were no longer collaborating with it. Not until the first months of 1853 did it reappear prominently on the scene.

Predictably, the society's first venture during the Obando administration consisted of a petition to the congress in favor of increased tariff rates. While no longer in control of the executive branch of government, Gólgotas still controlled the congress, and the petition was denied. Democrats were outraged. Their furor was met by that of young Gólgotas who now viewed the popular organization with contempt and who actively challenged the society for "control" of the city's streets. A brawl between

39. See, for example, López, *El desengaño*, 19, 30–35, 41, 84.

40. *El Orden*, May 1, 1853; *El Pasatiempo*, Apr. 11, 1853; Ángel Cuervo and Rufino José Cuervo, *Vida de Rufino Cuervo y noticias de su época*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Bogotá, 1946), II, 252–253. For a discussion of generational and ideological differences between Gólgotas and Draconians, see Germán Colmenares, *Partidos políticos y clases sociales*, 178–201.

41. *El Pasatiempo*, June 9, 1852; *Los Principios*, June 30, 1852; *El Neo-Granadino*, Aug. 5, 1852.

the two forces outside the congress ensued, resulting in the death of a young Democrat.⁴²

Enactment of a new constitution shortly thereafter exacerbated the tense climate of the capital. The Constitution of May 21 weakened the power of the executive and central government, instituted universal male suffrage, began political decentralization, and declared religious tolerance. The church and state were formally separated soon after. Many artisans and especially Draconians saw these reforms as a threat to social and political order. Clashes between Democratic *guaches* (a derisive term applied to the popular sector) and *cachacos* (from the European-style coat worn by Gólgotas) were common during the next month. Artisan participants in the conflicts came from both Democratic and Popular organizations; one contemporary observer labeled the June turmoil “a true class struggle in action.”⁴³

Gólgotas—mostly upper-class youths—and many Conservatives took the lead in berating the artisans, while the latter were increasingly linked with Draconians, who included numerous military men of humble origins. Obando’s reorganization of the National Guard in July, which brought many Democrats to positions of authority, strengthened the relationship.⁴⁴ Elections in October, the first in Colombia under the universal suffrage of the new constitution, revealed a three-way political division—Conservatives, Draconians, and Gólgotas—with the artisans cooperating with Draconians. Elite Conservatives tended to side with Gólgotas where politically expedient, as they also disliked Obando, the military, and the social threat represented by organized artisans.

Early in 1854, the Democratic Society was reorganized to formally reflect the alliance of artisans and Draconians. Lorenzo María Lleras became the society’s first nonartisan director.⁴⁵ The society formed a Junta Central Directiva to reorganize the Liberal party along Draconian lines; the

42. Cuervo and Cuervo, *Vida de Rufino Cuervo*, II, 255; *La Gaceta Oficial*, May 23, 1853; *Democracia. Documentos para la historia de la Nueva Granada* (n.p., n.d.); W. Breves anotaciones para la historia sobre los sucesos del 19 de Mayo último (Bogotá, 1853); José María Cordovez Moure, *Reminiscencias de Santa Fé y Bogotá*, 9 vols. (Bogotá, 1910), III, 371–374; *Alcance a la Gaceta Oficial*, May 20, 1853; José Manuel Restrepo, *Diario político y militar; Memorias sobre los sucesos importantes de la época para servir a la historia de la Revolución de Colombia y de la Nueva Granada, desde 1819 para adelante*, 4 vols. (Bogotá, 1954), IV, 288.

43. Alirio Gómez Picón, *El golpe militar de 17 de abril de 1854* (Bogotá, 1972), 119. Cordovez Moure makes detailed observations on the class character of the June conflicts in *Reminiscencias de Santa Fé y Bogotá*, 236, 241, and *passim*.

44. República de Colombia, *Codificación nacional de todas las leyes de Colombia desde el año de 1821, hecha conforme a la ley 13 de 1912*, 34 vols. (Bogotá, 1924–), XV, 661–668; *Causa de responsabilidad contra el ciudadano presidente de la República i los señores secretarios del despacho* (Bogotá, 1855), 346–349.

45. Andrés Soriano Lleras, *Lorenzo María Lleras* (Bogotá, 1958), 78.

capital's junta was to coordinate the affairs of provincial and district juntas pursuing the same purpose.⁴⁶ The new Democratic Society was no more purely artisan in nature than it had been in 1850; Draconian nonartisans held the most important positions and apparently directed its activities. However, no division of interests in the society of 1854 paralleled the uneasy artisan/Gólgota relationship of 1850.

Although purely "artisan" objectives took back seat to Draconian themes, they were not abandoned altogether. A March petition to the congress dealt with a wide array of issues important to craftsmen. These included: abolition of imprisonment or forced labor for debts; monetary reform to allow the minting of smaller coins for everyday use; improved regional transportation; establishment of industrial workshops to foster the introduction of technical advances; redefinition of the terms of service in both the army and the national guard; and a reduction in municipal taxes.⁴⁷ Craftsmen of the society still concerned themselves with tariff increases in 1854, but their political expression included a far broader range of socioeconomic issues than had been the case in 1847.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the worsening political climate of the capital and country dominated the society's energies. In the months before the coup, rumors abounded that some sort of a movement was forthcoming. By Holy Week, in April, an explosive situation paralleling that of June 1853 pitted artisans, national guardsmen, and Draconians on the one side versus Gólgotas and, to a lesser extent, Conservatives on the other. Numerous street fights marred the religious festival. Finally, on April 17, General José María Melo staged his coup against the Gólgotas and the Constitution of 1853.

Melo's orders described the movement as in favor of the "conservation of public order and the triumph of social regeneration."⁴⁹ To that end, one of the first measures of the rebel administration was to abrogate the Constitution of 1853 and to reinstate its 1843 predecessor until a constitutional convention could frame a new document. Specific features of the 1853

46. *El Neo-Granadino*, Jan. 12, 1854; *Causa de responsabilidad*, 72; Gómez Picón, *El 17 de abril*, 59.

47. AC, Cámara, Informes de comisiones, 1854, 296–300; *El Neo-Granadino*, Mar. 20, 1854; *Causa de responsabilidad*, 179, 341–344. The military sympathized with some of these issues, particularly those that would reduce their occasional service as laborers on public projects. Anthony P. Maingot, "Social Structure, Social Status, and Civil-Military Conflict in Urban Colombia, 1810–1858," in *Nineteenth-Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History*, Stephen Thernstrom and Richard Sennett, eds. (New Haven, 1969), 331.

48. Salvador Camacho Roldán noted that the society did not include a request for an increase in tariffs in the 1854 petition because it was rumored that Senator Julio Arboleda had plans to introduce legislation in favor of higher duties to the congress. His failure to do so contributed to the artisans' frustrations. Camacho Roldán, *Escritos varios de Salvador Camacho Roldán*, 3 vols. (Bogotá, 1892–95), I, 53–56.

49. AHN, República, Guerra y Marina, tomo 1081, f. 142.

constitution to be corrected included: universal male suffrage; popular election of governors; reduced executive powers; and various restrictions on the church.⁵⁰ On April 25, Melo decreed the establishment of several charity houses, schools, and salt stores to ensure, as “much as possible,” the continuity of social order. Persons employed in such agencies earned exemption from guard or army service.⁵¹ Melo made no mention of tariff reform in his pronouncements.

The contribution of craftsmen to the Melo coup has perhaps been overstated. To be sure, threatened craftsmen and military men together formed the most visible social sectors in the coup; yet none of the positions of leadership in the movement went to an artisan, all were assumed by Draconians or military officials. Surely the most significant role of craftsmen was their service as guardsmen, who supported the regular army and served as the capital’s police force.⁵² Numerous craftsmen were officers of the guard, some of whom were charged with procurement of supplies for the city during the rebellion. Others, such as Emeterio Heredia, had minor political posts.⁵³ Artisans were less involved in the actual military defense of the *17 de abril* regime until its final days, when they vainly resisted the onslaught of constitutionalist forces. The December 4 battle for Bogotá resulted in the death of blacksmith Miguel León, probably the society’s most fiery orator.

Not all artisans had lent their support to the coup. At its inception, several craftsmen declared their opposition to the violent turn of events. Ambrosio López and others apparently operated as informers for constitutionalist forces, penning several letters on activity inside the city to “Ana Patriota.”⁵⁴ (López would support the 1856 presidential bid of Tomás C. Mosquera, one of the generals who fought actively against Melo, which may give an indication of his loyalties during the coup.)

Artisan Melistas were affected by the defeat of Melo for years. Those who had been caught with weapons in hand and who faced no criminal charges were offered a pardon. They could accept the pardon—and serve three to four years of military service in Panama—or they could be tried in circuit court—also in Panama. In either instance, to cite José Manuel Restrepo, “This is an excellent method of purging Bogotá of the Democratic

50. *El Neo-Granadino*, Apr. 27, 1854; *La Gaceta Oficial*, Apr. 24, 1854; *El 17 de Abril*, May 14, 1854.

51. AHN, República, Guerra y Marina, tomo 1081, 386.

52. Colmenares, “Formas de la conciencia de clase en la Nueva Granada,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*, 9:2 (1966), 2412.

53. Heredia was *jefe político* of Fusagasugá. AHN, República, Guerra y Marina, tomo 1081, f. 323, *passim*.

54. Ambrosio López to Ana Patriota, Oct. 1854, ms. 337, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango; Carol M. Muñoz to same, Oct. 1854, ms. 367, *ibid*.

pest.”⁵⁵ At least 324 people faced the unenviable choice, but authorities in Panama and craftsmen in Bogotá noted that numerous men not included in the pardon lists were sent to the lowlands.⁵⁶ It seems reasonable that up to 400 Melistas were purged from the capital’s political scene by the “pardons.”⁵⁷ Most of these men had simply been soldiers in the Melista army.

Large numbers of Melista officials, including several artisans, remained in jail after the pardons. In February and in June 1855, they too were excused of all political charges, contingent on their exile from the capital for a specific period. Agustín Rodríguez, the first director of the society, for example, was ordered to leave the country for three years; artisan guard Captain José Antonio Saavedra had to spend a similar time in Panama; and Cruz Ballesteros, author of *La teoría i la realidad*, faced four years in exile. Melo and his cabinet were exiled for seven years.⁵⁸ President Obando, widely accused of having aided the movement, was eventually dismissed from office.

In the years immediately after the coup attempt, craftsmen continued to be visible in Bogotá’s politics, but not as autonomous spokesmen for their interests. Liberal Manuel Murillo Toro made considerable efforts in his 1856 presidential campaign to recruit Melista and artisan voters. So too did the National party candidate Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera.⁵⁹ After the devastating civil war of 1859–63, a new artisan political movement emerged, culminating in the organization of the Union Society of Artisans (1866–68). Just as had the Democratic Society, the Union Society endeavored to obtain tariff protection for the city’s skilled laborers. The Union Society, however, vehemently rejected association with partisan political groups in favor of independent political activity. Many members of the Union Society claimed that they would not serve as an electoral base for partisan ambitions as had the Democratic Society, a stance that echoed Ballesteros’s complaint in 1851.⁶⁰ After 1868, mutual aid societies, which tended to be less broadly representative of the artisan class than either the Democratic or Union Societies, were the most visible organizations of craftsmen in Bogotá. When Colombia’s modern labor movement

55. Restrepo, *Diario político y militar*, 523.

56. AHN, República, Guerra y Marina, tomo 843, f. 953.

57. *El Repertorio*, Dec. 20, 1854; *La Gaceta Oficial*, Jan. 5, 15, 1855. Not all men went alone, at least two dozen women accompanied their husbands into exile. Lorenzo María Lleras, *San Bartolomé en 1855* (Bogotá, 1855), 12.

58. *La Gaceta Oficial*, Mar. 1, June 8, 25, July 11, 18, 1855.

59. *El Ciudadano*, May 31, June 26, July 29, 1856; *El Nacional*, May 29, Aug. 7, 1856; *El Tiempo*, Apr. 8, 1856; *El Artesano*, May 22, 1856.

60. *La Alianza*, Oct. 20, Dec. 10, 1866; Jan. 20, Feb. 13, Mar. 4, Apr. 3, Sept. 5, 1867; Jan. 25, 1868.

emerged in the 1910s, it expressed the interests of wage laborers, who by their productive function differed in their concerns from the independent craftsmen of the midnineteenth century.

Patterns of Alignment

Suggestive clues as to the nature of popular political participation in this period are revealed by further examination of the documents associated with the society. Of those craftsmen who signed the 1846 tariff petition and are known to have been linked with society activity after that year (only one in four), 44 percent were found on the 1851 petition; 36 percent were definitely involved in the Melo coup; 28 percent were associated with the Union Society of Artisans in the late 1860s; 24 percent became officers in the National Guard before the coup; and 22 percent publicly backed Manuel Murillo Toro for Colombian president in 1856. Only 8 of the 29 early officers (pre-1850) of the society signed the 1846 petition; most seem to have become members when the society was organized the next year. However, it appears that only 1 officer of the organization had been associated with the proclerical (and proto-Conservative) petition of 1839. Five had been members of the SDRAL. Leaders of the early society were thus more likely to have been associated with mobilization efforts of the Liberal party than were its general membership, although their post-1850 political activities on behalf of the society did not vary greatly from those of the rank-and-file membership.⁶¹

Like its counterpart in 1846, the 1851 petition illustrates various trends. Signed by 229 men, fully 59 percent of them are not known to have been associated with the society in any other fashion. Eighty men had either prior or subsequent visible political activity; 29 percent had signed the earlier petition; 16 percent had signed the Conservative 1839 document; and 7 percent had been members of the SDRAL. Half of those who continued their activity after the 1851 petition were directly associated with Melo's coup; 23 percent supported the presidential candidacy of Murillo; and 22 percent were members of the Union Society.

A quick glance at the 376 men exiled, jailed, or drafted into the army for their complicity in Melo's coup suggests the need for some reassessment of the extent to which artisans of the Democratic Society were prime movers of the rebel movement. Seventy-one percent of these men do not appear on any of the aforementioned documents relating to society activity. Of the 80 who do appear, only 28 had signed the 1851 petition,

61. Sixteen of the officers continued their activity into the 1850s. Nine signed the 1851 petition; seven were involved in the coup; six were guard officers; and several backed Murillo or joined the Union Society.

4 had been officers of the society, and 23 had been National Guard officers in 1853.⁶² The January 1854 reorganization of the society, which brought Draconians such as Lorenzo María Lleras into the most important leadership positions, provided far more officials in the Melo administration than did the older society's leadership. The close correlation between society and National Guard membership, and the full ramifications of the Draconian/military/guard sponsorship of the rebellion, merit closer scrutiny.

What patterns are suggested by the names associated with the society's activities? First, the society was a fluid organization. Very few people were continuously associated with the group; individual participation fluctuated dramatically from year to year, although its leadership tended to be stable. About 600 different names are at different times directly associated with the society, perhaps 30–40 percent of the city's artisans and a large number considering the craftsmen's need to practice their trades. Secondly, no firm partisan leanings characterized the society's membership. Each document reveals supporters of all political tendencies. However, the politics of artisans associated with the society were more openly partisan before 1846 and after 1855. Only 1 of the 32 men active before their signing the 1846 petition appeared both on the *ministerial* document and in the *progresista* SDRAL. Similarly, only 1 signer of the 1851 petition both backed the Liberal Murillo and joined the Union Society, which was oriented more toward Conservative politics. While analysis is made more difficult by a lack of socioeconomic information, it seems probable that class interests rather than partisan principles united members of the Democratic Society. Nonetheless, linkages with partisan politics, especially to the Liberal party, were crucial to the society's operations. From May 1848 until December 1854 (and beyond) the Democratic Society was an active entity in the capital's political scene. One can disassociate neither class nor politics from the group's energies.

There remains the need to discuss the ideological orientation of the society itself. Almost all of its demands were "reactionary" in that they originated in response to changes in the status quo. Bogotá's artisan class perceived that further foreign imports into the Colombian market would threaten its economic position and thereby weaken its social status. In time the inherent conflict on this issue above all between artisan and Gólgota interests redefined the political associations of the society in favor of the Draconians. Indeed by the latter stages of the society, its members had come to see numerous reforms as socially damaging, thereby evidencing

62. Some, such as Miguel León, were members of both the guard and the society.

a critical awareness of the reform process and its impact on Colombian society.

The reactive nature of artisan political activity in the reform era should be a warning against the tendency to see “socialist” ideas as being accepted and forwarded by artisans of the Democratic Society. Both Conservative contemporaries and leftist writers of the present argue that socialist influences were strong, albeit from different points of view.⁶³ In either case, the socialism of the society has been misstated. Contemporaries applied socialist labels as a means to undermine the group’s appeal. Modern writers attempt to analyze the socialist content of the era’s speeches and proclamations, but draw on the works of young Liberals such as José María Samper, Manuel Murillo Toro, and Francisco Javier Zaldúa, who were at one point associated with the society but hardly representative of its artisanal base. Socialist rhetoric is to be found in the writings of these men, but laissez-faire individualism guided their reforms.⁶⁴ Although Joaquín Posada, editor of *El Alacrán*, *El 17 de Abril*, and the presumed author of broadsides published under the pseudonym “Sabanero,” exhibited obvious socialist sentiments, there is no evidence to suggest that either the coup or the artisans who participated in it shared the same social vision.

Instead, the words of Cruz Ballesteros, Ambrosio López, and the petitions of the society stressed the virtue of personal labor and called only for a government that would enable productive citizens to achieve their potential without the threat of foreign competition. The petitions of the society plead that the government be socially responsive and that it not act as the protector of selfish individualism or laissez-faire economic policies, both of which were seen as detrimental to the Colombian pueblo. It would naturally be a mistake, however, to label artisan political mobilization in this period as uniformly “reactionary.” The political activity of craftsmen came to be a radical threat to the desires of the established elite to reshape the country. The artisans’ participation in the *17 de abril* directly challenged the existing status quo. In the face of such threats, elites of

63. See, for example, Jaramillo Uribe (who of course is not one of the “leftists” referred to), “La influencia de los románticos franceses y de la revolución de 1848 en el pensamiento político colombiano del siglo XIX,” in *La personalidad histórica de Colombia*, 181–201. See also Víctor Manuel Moncayo and Fernando Rojas, *Luchas obreras y política laboral en Colombia* (Bogotá, 1978); Edgar Caicedo, *Historia de las luchas sindicales en Colombia*, 4th ed. (Bogotá, 1982); Enrique Gaviria Liévano, “Las Sociedades Democráticas o de Artesanos en Colombia,” *Correo de los Andes*, 24 (Jan.–Feb., 1984), 67–76; and Anatoli Shulgovski, “La ‘Comuna de Bogotá’ y el socialismo utópico,” *América Latina* (Moscow), Aug. 1985, pp. 45–56.

64. Robert Louis Gilmore, “Nueva Granada’s Socialist Mirage,” *HAHR*, 36:2 (May 1956), 190–210. See Shulgovski for an example of the use of Gólgota sources, “La ‘Comuna de Bogotá,’” 55–56.

both parties tended to lay aside their differences and repress the coup.⁶⁵ The constitutionalist union of Gólgotas and Conservatives illustrates that while the parties differed on some ideological points, they had few disagreements on political or economic issues, and none at all on who should direct the state. The ideological principles of the Democratic Society favored a more socially responsible and republican government, notions in keeping with the theories of the reformers, but alien to their practices and to those of the nineteenth-century Colombian state.

65. Fals Borda, *Subversion and Social Change*, 87.