

NOTAS HISTÓRICAS Y GEOGRÁFICAS

Artículos

**THE STRUGGLE FOR A NEW AMERICA
LOMBARDO TOLEDANO'S TRIP THROUGH THE CONTINENT
AND THE CALL FOR WORKING CLASS UNITY AGAINST
NAZIFASCISM (1942)**

**LA LUCHA POR UNA NUEVA AMÉRICA
EL VIAJE DE LOMBARDO TOLEDANO POR EL CONTINENTE Y
EL LLAMADO A LA UNIDAD DE LA CLASE OBRERA CONTRA
EL NAZIFASCISMO (1942)**

Patricio Herrera

Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile

patricio.herrera@uv.cl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9776-1911>

Recibido el 28 de octubre del 2023 Aceptado el 15 de febrero del 2024

Páginas 344-375

Financiamiento. Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo (ANID) a través del Fondecyt regular 1210448, patrocinado por la Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile.

Conflictos de interés: El autor declara no presentar conflicto de interés.

Agradezco al Seminario Permanente de Historia Social, Centro de Estudios Históricos, El Colegio de México, por permitirme presentar y discutir un primer borrador en 2021.

I am grateful to the Seminario Permanente de Historia Social, Centro de Estudios Históricos, El Colegio de México, for allowing me to present and discuss a first draft in 2021.

Abstract

A special resolution had the president of the Confederation of Latin American Workers (CTAL), Vicente Lombardo Toledano, travelling all around the continent in the months following the confederation's First General Congress. The trip was planned to be between August and December of 1942 and included 12 countries; it was an opportunity to consolidate the continental unionism organized around CTAL. During the trip there were acknowledgements, workers' renewed expectations that they would indeed achieve labour rights, as well as conflicts due to CTAL's political, union and strategic influence. The popular workers' unity, the opposition to "nazi-fascism" and the desire for a better future for the continent were all part of the scope of the trip.

Keywords: Vicente Lombardo Toledano, travel, Latin America, CTAL, workers' unity, antifascism

Resumen

Una resolución especial hizo que el presidente de la Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL), Vicente Lombardo Toledano, viajara por todo el continente en los meses siguientes al Primer Congreso General de la confederación. El viaje estaba previsto entre agosto y diciembre de 1942 e incluía 12 países; era una oportunidad para consolidar el sindicalismo continental organizado en torno a la CTAL. Durante el viaje se produjeron reconocimientos, se renovaron las expectativas de los trabajadores de que efectivamente conseguirían derechos laborales, así como conflictos por la influencia política, sindical y estratégica de la CTAL. La unidad popular de los trabajadores, la oposición al "nazi-fascismo" y el deseo de un futuro mejor para el continente formaron parte del alcance del viaje.

Palabras claves: Vicente Lombardo Toledano, viaje, América Latina, CTAL, unidad obrera, antifascismo

CTAL and the coordination of working class and union action

The Confederation of Latin American Workers had been established in September, 1938, after celebrating the Latin American Workers' Congress and enjoying the significant presence of continental and international union delegates, all reunited in Mexico's capital city. Their first actions focused on strengthening the workers' movement in each nation, developing labour, economic and political studies of the continent and favoring actions coordinated by international unionism in order to confront issues like the Spanish Civil War and the imminent world war.¹

The progress of reformist governments influenced by the continent's working class, such as those developed in Chile, Cuba and Mexico were not the driving factors behind the political détente. On the contrary, it was the international advance of "Nazi-fascism," the expansion of German and Italian economic power and their political alliances with immigrants, parliamentarians and businessmen in territories like Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Peru, as well as Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean.

¹ Although certain international realities greatly concerned CTAL leaders, especially the defense of the Spanish Republic and support for the Soviet Union, as well as the global geopolitical situation of World War II, it would be remiss to consider that only the international sphere motivated their actions as a union. Various authors of labor and political historiography, such as Robert Alexander, *Labour Movements in Latin America*, London, Fabian Publications, 1947; *Communism in Latin America*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1957; *Organized Labor in Latin America*, New York, Free Press, 1965; *International Labor Organizations and Organized Labor in Latin America and the Caribbean; A History*, Santa Barbara; Víctor Alba, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero en América Latina*, México, Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1964; Lourdes Quintanilla, "La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, 1938-1948 (Ideología y política)", *Memorias del encuentro sobre historia del movimiento obrero*, tomo II, Puebla, México, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1980; Lourdes Quintanilla, *Lombardismo y sindicatos en América Latina*, México, Distribuciones Fontamara, 1982; Julio Godio, *Historia del movimiento obrero latinoamericano*, tomo III, San José, Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1985; Ricardo Melgar, *El movimiento obrero latinoamericano. Historia de una clase subalterna*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1988; Daniela Spenser, "Unidad a toda costa". *La Tercera Internacional en México durante la presidencia de Lázaro Cárdenas*, México, CIESAS, 2007; Daniela Spenser, *En combate. La vida de Lombardo Toledano*. México, Debate, 2018, reiterate, in their investigations, that the CTAL disregarded the union demands of its workers, preferentially operating as an organization unconditionally loyal to the politics of Soviet communism. In this respect, we depart sharply from the conclusions of these authors. We affirm, based on a detailed review of archives, press, pamphlets and magazines, that the CTAL leaders carried out a program of defense of the interests of the working class, which called for the participation of the rank and file and created conditions that ensured the trade union and political unity of the workers' movements throughout the continent. This trip is strong evidence of this trade union program. In our investigations we have renewed interpretations of CTAL, Vicente Lombardo Toledano and labor relations on the continent between 1938-1953, see: Patricio Herrera, *En favor de una patria de los trabajadores. Historia Transnacional de la Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (1938-1953)* Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, CEHTI y El Colegio de Michoacán, 2022; Patricio Herrera, "La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina. Una historia por (re)significar, 1938-1963", *Secuencia* 86 (2013a), 195-218; Patricio Herrera, "Vicente Lombardo Toledano y el Congreso Obrero Latinoamericano (1935-1938)", *Relaciones. Estudios de historia y sociedad*, 138 (2014), 109-150; Patricio Herrera, "La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina y la implementación de su proyecto sindical continental (1938-1941)", *Trashumante. Revista Americana de Historia Social*, 2 (2013b) 136-164.

CTAL recognized this advance as a credible threat that could tip the balance to the detriment of the working class.

The World War did not come as a surprise to CTAL's leaders; the foreign press and their international contacts had already anticipated it. Lombardo Toledano and other continental leaders' participation in the conferences organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, as well as their regular contact with regional labour organizations, was what allowed for significant union cohesion on a continental level. In fact, the implementation of the "Good Neighbour Policy" by Franklin D. Roosevelt's government further facilitated the free movement of CTAL's leaders around the continent, including to meetings with US labour organizations. John Lewis and Philip Murray, leaders of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), became associates of Vicente Lombardo Toledano and CTAL in order to connect workers from both Americas. The active protagonism of CTAL's Central Committee against the Axis powers, and in particular against "Nazi-fascism", allowed Roosevelt to amplify his promotion of continental defense against Hitler.

CTAL's First General Congress, which took place in Mexico City between November 21-26, 1941, featured discussions between international leaders that illuminated a plethora of the region's social, economic and political issues. The presence of delegates from a majority of the region's countries helped to guarantee the continental organization's representivity and legitimacy only three years after being founded. There were delegates present from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panamá, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Venezuela and Mexico. Fraternal delegates from Canada, the United States, Spain, Cuba, Mexico, and Geneva (ILO), as well as guests from the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

In Lombardo Toledano's inaugural address, he reiterated CTAL's commitment in their fight for the complete emancipation of Latin American nations. He also mentioned the importance of continuing to fight against those capitalist and imperialist forces that "undermined" the region's sovereignty and continuing to defend democratic governments in America and the world. He also spoke on moving forward with the unification of the labour movement in every country of the continent while simultaneously respecting the autonomy of each affiliated organization and promoting social and material progress of the working class. Finally, he announced the strong collaboration of the "popular movements" against the advance of fascism in America and in the world.²

² Regarding this see: Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, *Primer Congreso*, 21 al 26 de noviembre de 1941 (México, 1941). There are journalistic versions in *El Popular*, México, 22 de julio de 1941; *Futuro*, México, enero de 1942; and reports from correspondents in *Revista Internacional del Trabajo*, Ginebra, febrero de 1942.

Francisco Pérez Leirós, CTAL's vice president, signaled during the sessions that the proletariat was aware of its historical destiny, it was the only social sector with the ability to "honorably and vigorously" pose the transcendental problems facing the continent and the world. The vice president affirmed that CTAL's First General Congress had improved "quantitatively and qualitatively" from the prior congress.³ With respect to political definitions, the labour delegates ruled that CTAL was determined to promote and protect the existence of reformist regimes, or builders of "democracy," in the continent. The delegates were aware of the progress that various countries in the region were undergoing, but they considered it insufficient, as "theoretical expressions" of change on paper were not enough. The absence of fundamental rights and the systemic violation of existing rights was the greatest proof of a non-existent democracy, affirmed the delegates. The persecution of workers, intellectuals, students and party leaders was another glaring expression of the authoritarianism that persisted on a continental level. For this reason, the central committee was empowered to morally sanction "undemocratic" heads of state, with the support of workers, parties and popular organizations.

Finally, regarding the international situation, the delegates decided to support all necessary actions to avoid the advance of Nazism and fascism in Latin America. They vehemently criticized Franco's plans for Spain and gave all of their support to the Spanish refugees around the world. Similarly, they considered the German, Italian and Spanish totalitarian regimes in the region to be very worrying, as there were signs that they were taking root in Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Chile. The delegates were concerned that the Ecuadorian-Peruvian War would expand to include the entire continent, as it was argued that there were Nazi-fascist interests involved.⁴

As for the USSR, delegates expressed their full support for the nation as well as condemnation against the Nazi-based attacks they were suffering. Finally, they agreed to support the "Good neighbour policy" lead by president Franklin D. Roosevelt, as they considered it a historical opportunity to strengthen "friendly relations" with the United States.⁵

A special resolution dictated that Lombardo Toledano travel around the Americas in the months following the First General Congress, between August and December, 1942. Lombardo Toledano's presence in 12 of the region's countries was a big milestone for CTAL; it was the beginning of a new path, one of more recognition, more demands and more conflicts with national governments. External threats intent on dividing workers' unity were frequent. The trip of 1942 would reveal CTAL's power within the continent and the internationalization of its political and union objectives.

³ *Futuro*, enero de 1942, p. 4.

⁴ *Primer Congreso*, pp.163-166.

⁵ *Futuro*, enero de 1942, p. 40.

One people, The same hope

Between August 21 and December 1, 1942, CTAL's president travelled around America. According Lombardo Toledano, the trip was financed by the continental union organization, with partial funds coming from the payment of quotas by the national confederations. However, the majority of funds came from many individual and voluntary contributions made by workers' organizations, from old school-time friends, old labour leaders and militants of the Mexican proletariat.⁶ There was also surely support from the CIO, from Philip Murray in particular, as well as some smaller labour organizations from the United States that opposed the AFL.⁷

During the long trip he visited the United States, Cuba, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, Chile, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. He also received direct news from labour leaders about current events in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Venezuela, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico - countries he could not visit due to time restraints. In the case of Argentina, the government did not authorize his visit, denying his entry visa, a situation that was deeply regrettable for Francisco Pérez Leirós, as public events had been planned in various cities across Argentina anticipating the continental union leader's visit.⁸ However, he conceded with Lombardo Toledano that in Argentina "restrictions on the freedom of the press, public meetings, and speech" was prevalent.⁹

The trip's objective, according to Lombardo Toledano, was to work toward the construction of a new America, to transmit a notion of Americanism and fraternity between peoples and to oust false diplomatic and governmental relations that were based exclusively on personal or elite interests. The war against "Nazi-fascism" was additional motivation to travel around America, given the military triumph of Hitler in European territory, the neutral position of some Latin American countries, particularly of Argentina and Chile, and the economic ties of the continents' numerous businessmen and members of the political class with Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan. All of these aspects, in his mind, were a threat to the democracy, political sovereignty and economic autonomy of the world's nations, particularly for those that still maintained, in the

⁶ Speech made by Vicente Lombardo Toledano before union leaders, political authorities and intellectuals over a meal offered on the eve of his trip around the American continent, Mexico, 21 de agosto de 1942, *El Popular*, 22 de agosto de 1942.

⁷ *El Popular*, 3 de septiembre de 1942.

⁸ The Argentinian government, presided over by conservative president Ramón S. Castillo, rejected Vicente Lombardo Toledano's visa. Fondo Histórico Lombardo Toledano (hereafter FHLT), Id. 27602, legajo 470.

⁹ Letter from Francisco Pérez Leirós to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Buenos Aires, August 21, 1942; FHLT, Id. 27773, legajo 471; Letter from Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Francisco Pérez Leirós, México, August 12, 1942, FHLT, Id. 27573, legajo 469; Letter from Francisco Pérez Leirós to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Buenos Aires, June 13, 1942, Fondo Francisco Pérez Leirós, en Archivo Historia del Movimiento Obrero Argentino, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella.

words of Lombardo Toledano, “semi-colonial or feudal legacies”. The union leader hoped to contribute to the unity of the labour movement in each nation of the continent, as he believed in the power of a single voice to guarantee the proletariat’s political and social rights when facing such pressing circumstances. The trip around America was an opportunity to consolidate CTAL’s position among workers and begin a new future, just as the president had announced before beginning his journey:

And this is the moment to fight for a new America, because the world, yesterday’s world, is crumbling. The war has put an end to many institutions that, until just yesterday, were valid. In the middle of this profound crisis, a new concept of man is emerging, of the individual, a new concept of country, a new concept of international relations, a new concept of humanity. The war is destroying the past, but it is creating the future, and the future needs to be new.¹⁰

Vicente Lombardo’s itinerary began in Washington where he had meetings with CIO leaders. He was interested in transmitting the relevance of the trip, emphasizing his aim to strengthen relations within labour movements, reach a consensus on positions of union leaders and listen to the opinions of political authorities and the demands of the continent’s workers. Philip Murray, the president of CIO, agreed with Lombardo Toledano on the need to commit all of America’s work force to assure that labour and social progress was achieved. Furthermore, both leaders exhorted the continent’s governments to cooperate with the utmost efficiency in the fight against fascism. Murray gave Lombardo Toledano a message directed to all Latin American workers. In the document, the CIO reaffirmed their conviction in unifying the proletariat and requested that workers give their maximum support to CTAL’s leaders.¹¹

On September 6, 1942 the president of CTAL flew from the United States into the Rancho Boyeros airport in Habana. There he was received by a Cuban proletariat delegation and representatives of the nation’s progressive forces. Lázaro Peña, Teresa García, Francisco Malpica, Carlos Fernández, José Morera and Francisco Laya welcomed him on behalf of the Cuban Workers’ Confederation (CTC). Juan Marinello, the president of the Revolutionary Communist Union; Leovigildo Cicienta, Nila Ortega, Ángeles Echevarria and Pedro Pablo Sanchez, members of the Habana Workers Federation, were also part of the welcome committee. Later, two members of the Dominican Revolutionary Party, doctor Juan Isidro Jimenes Gruillón and Juan Bosch,

¹⁰ Speech made by Vicente Lombardo Toledano before union leaders, political authorities and intellectuals, over a meal on the eve of his trip around the American continent, México, 21 de agosto de 1942, *El Popular*, 22 de agosto de 1942.

¹¹ *El Popular*, 3 de septiembre de 1942.

interviewed Lombardo Toledano to inform him of their country's political situation with the recent dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo.¹²

The journey made by CTAL's president included the majority of the island's main places. He visited Mazanillo, Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba, Camagüey, Santa Clara, El Ranchuelo, Matanzas and La Habana.¹³ In each stop, he had an outdoor rally where the Cuban people participated, the crowds composed mainly of manual labourers and "campesinos".¹⁴ In the cities, ports and plantations, Lombardo Toledano held discussions with public employees, foreign residents, professionals, teachers, port workers, manual labourers and campesinos. He learned first-hand of the work conditions, social demands and the fear felt by workers. CTAL's president was also invited to Fulgencio Batista's government palace, where they conversed about the global political situation and the consequences of the war for Latin America. He also had a brief meeting with doctor Suárez Rivas, the Minister of Labour, to understand the labour legislation implemented in Cuba.¹⁵

Before travelling to his next destination, Lombardo Toledano participated in the closing ceremony of the CTC's IV National Council. In the Polar Stadium, before thousands of workers, he manifested a synthesis of what he had observed and heard from the Caribbean people. He was pleased with the consolidation of labour unity by the CTC, which CTAL had collaborated in founding,¹⁶ valuing the work done by Lázaro Peña. He praised the willingness of president Fulgencio Batista to guarantee social and citizen rights, questioning doctor Grau San Martín for not collaborating in the promotion of national unity. He concluded his speech by affirming his conviction that the people of Cuba were those that "marched with the movement of America [...] because of their great civic awareness, because of their efforts to unify the continent and for their tenacity to destroy "Nazi-Fascism".¹⁷

The next stop was Colombia. He travelled around the territory from the Caribbean coast to the border of Ecuador. Barranquilla, Puerto Colombia, Cartagena, Bogotá, Cali, Popayán, Pasto and Ipiales were all meeting points with manual labourers,

¹² "Sílabo del discurso de Vicente Lombardo Toledano, presidente de la Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, pronunciado la noche del 29 de diciembre de 1942, en el Palacio de las Bellas Artes, de la ciudad de México", FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486; *Hoy*, La Habana, 8 de septiembre de 1942; revista *CTC*, La Habana, 32, septiembre de 1942.

¹³ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

¹⁴ *Campesinos*: workers, often with a mix of indigenous and European roots (mestizo), who were not paid with money but by supplies of goods, for example food, clothing, shelter, etc.

¹⁵ *Hoy*, La Habana, 9 de septiembre de 1942.

¹⁶ Patricio Herrera, "Desplazando a las "fuerzas retardatarias": La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina y sus primeras acciones sindicales en Cuba, 1938-1939", *Historia (Santiago)*, 50(1) (2017 a), 105-120.

¹⁷ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486; *Hoy*, La Habana, 20 de septiembre de 1942; *El Popular*, 21 de septiembre de 1942; Ernesto Madero, "Lombardo Toledano en Cuba", *Futuro*, diciembre de 1942.

campesinos, domestic workers, artisans, manufacturers and intellectuals. Rallies in public squares, spontaneous gatherings in the street, speeches at railways stations and welcome parades were all part of the everyday activities experienced by CTAL's leader during his trip around Colombia. In his speeches, before throngs of people, he reaffirmed the great importance of the progressive forces' unity and expressed his appreciation for the Colombian proletariat's protagonism, in particular the actions of the Confederation of Colombian Workers (C.T.C) to promote the creation of a democratic society in the country. He recognized president Alfonso López Pumarejo for Colombia's progress was in political, social and economic matters.

Lombardo Toledano criticized the cities' "bourgeoisie" for being a middle class that, in his opinion, "turned their backs on the rest of the country." He questioned the permanence of the latifundio,¹⁸ as it hindered land distribution and prevented the democratization of production. He held large landowners responsible for the poverty experienced by campesinos, manual laborers and indigenous people, who were subjected to a life of "servitude", uprooted from their ancestral cultures. Thousands were condemned, in the words of CTAL's president "to survive in the hills and forests around the big cities" and "left to their own devices".¹⁹ Finally, he lashed out at the Catholic clergy, condemning their extreme wealth and the monopoly they had over primary and secondary education, as well as their support for the Right; he saw it as a way to delay the changes that the country needed.

¹⁸ *Latifundios*: Large estates on land stolen from indigenous peoples in the times of colonialism with histories of indentured servitude.

¹⁹ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486; *El Popular*, 27 de septiembre de 1942; Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos para una nueva América*, México, Universidad Obrera de México (México, 1943).



Photograph 1: Vicente Lombardo Toledano with workers in Bogotá, Colombia during his tour around Latin America as the president of CTAL. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

In his dialog with Colombia’s organized proletariat, Lombardo Toledano called on them to cooperate with the government of Alfonso Lopez, who was governing the country for the second time despite complications due to the war and the conservative opposition. He suggested integrating all social organizations into their ranks, particularly those of black and mulatto populations; in his trip he had observed that “they were rarely incorporated in various areas”, such as economic, political and union activities. At the end of his visit he encouraged the C.T.C to continue promoting national unity and to be ready for combat, together with López Pumarejo, against the fascism appearing in the continent.²⁰

In the first days of October 1942, CTAL’s president arrived in Ecuador where he was welcomed by a multitude of an estimated ten thousand people.²¹ His itinerary included visits to Tulcán, Ibarra, Otavalo, Cayambe, Quito, Latacunga, Ambato, Cotopoxi, Chimborazo, Río Bamba, El Milagro, Eloy Alfaro and Guayaquil. Lombardo Toledano found the country to be in a devastated state after its recent border war with

²⁰ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

²¹ *El Universal*, Guayaquil, 9 de octubre de 1942; *El Popular*, México, D. F., 9 de octubre de 1942.

Peru and under the power of large land owners, “latifundistas”. The numerical proportion of the indigenous population was of particular interest and concern for him, as he considered it primordial to integrate them into the national economy and union activities. In Otavalo and Cayambe, he was moved by the welcome and affection given to him by indigenous communities. Months later, upon his return to Mexico, he remembered his welcome in Otavalo:

Upon arrival it was raining heavily, yet the parade continued in the rain, with great jubilation and with a vanguard of no less than five hundred children from the town; the men and women followed behind. I spoke from a makeshift tribune in the public square, and there was no one trying to take shelter from the rain.²²



Photograph 2: Vicente Lombardo Toledano and his wife, Rosa María Otero y Gama, with indigenous workers in Cayambe, Ecuador, during his tour around Latin America as the president of CTAL. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

In Quito, in the Plaza de toros Arena, Sucre theatre, and the Universidad Central, before the presence of a multitude of manual laborers, campesinos, political leaders, state workers, students and intellectuals, CTAL’s president thanked them for coming and for their monetary support. In his speeches he referred to the world conflict and the danger that Latin America was subject to, emphasizing that this was due to the presence

²² Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*.

of a “fifth column”. Lombardo Toledano believed that Francoists and fascists were being protected by the numerous businesses that they managed in the continent and warned the Ecuadorians to remain vigilant in order to neutralize their seditious actions against the unity of the people. He suggested that labour organizations overcome their dogmatic differences, affirming that “without the existence of authentic national unity, and while the country’s workers do not unify around a Single Workers’ Center, the Republic of Ecuador will not hold a significant role in the fight against Hitler and his allies, in defense of democracy.”²³ He emphasized that unity implied “negotiation, sacrifices and giving up personal and party interests.”²⁴

In Guayaquil, the most important event of Lombardo Toledano’s visit to Ecuador occurred. First, in the Casa del Obrero, he met with an Ecuadorian workers’ delegation containing union representatives from different areas of production. In the meeting, workers exchanged their impressions of political and ideological obstacles that were preventing the unification of the proletariat. CTAL’s president explained the importance of coming together to make a confederation, pointing out that unified union action was a “powerful ally in the debate and resolution” of some of the country’s major economic and labour problems.²⁵ Subsequently, he was the main speaker at a rally for Ecuadorian workers’ organizations held in the Huancavilca coliseum. He recommended once again the unity of the proletariat, analyzing the serious problems that the World War posed for Ecuador and the rest of the continent’s countries. At the end of the meeting, workers signed a “treaty of unification”, with Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Guillermo Rodríguez (a well-known leader and founder of the C.T.C.) and other members of CTAL’s central committee acting as witnesses.²⁶

The Ecuadorian labour organizations began the process of unification in January 1943 with the selection of the first workers’ representatives to convoke a national congress. However, they also had to face the opposition of the Liberal party and the political persecution of dictator Carlos Arroyo del Río, which delayed their commitment to unity.

Pedro Saad, a communist labour leader, consistently exchanged letters with CTAL’s president informing him of Ecuador’s internal situation and their difficulty in consummating the “treaty of unity”.²⁷ Although the imprisonment of recognized labour

²³ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486 *El Universal*, Guayaquil, 10 de octubre de 1942; *El Popular*, México, D. F., 11 de octubre de 1942.

²⁴ Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*.

²⁵ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

²⁶ *El Universal*, Guayaquil, 15 de octubre de 1942.

²⁷ Letter from Pedro Saad to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Guayaquil, February 22, 1943, FHLT, Id. 29840, legajo 498.

leaders such as Saad, Juan Lovato and Ezequiel Paladine²⁸ possibly delayed the proletariat's unification, it was also an incentive for political and union organizations to defeat the dictator Arroyo, together with armed forces and under the leadership of José María Velasco Ibarra on May 28, 1944.²⁹ Finally, on July 9, 1944, the Confederation of Ecuadorian Workers (CTE) could materialize, with Pedro Saad being elected as the General Secretary and Juan Isaac Lovato as vice president.³⁰

After his stay in Ecuador, Vicente Lombardo Toledano travelled to Peru. Although it was a short visit, it had positive results for the unity of the organized workers' movement. In his trip around Lima, el Callao, Pasco hill's mining zone, and part of the altiplano, the continental leader observed the difficult work of the miners who were largely indigenous and mestizo people. He also made his way to rural areas in order to sustain a dialog with campesinos, verifying their status as impoverished peons and indigenous peoples without land, a situation similar to that which he observed in Cuba, Colombia and Ecuador.

²⁸ Letter from Pedro Saad, while imprisoned, to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Guayaquil, April 17, 1943, FHLT, Id. 30465, legajo, 504. Letter from Salvador Ocampo, CTAL Secretary of the South Pacific zone, and Juan Briones, CTCh Secretary of Conflicts, to Carlos Arroyo del Río, president of Ecuador, requesting the release of political prisoners, FHLT, Id. 30602, legajo, 507.

²⁹ Telegram from Pedro Saad to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, reporting the "restored democracy" in Ecuador, May 31, 1944, FHLT, Id. 33910, legajo 557; Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Pedro Saad, congratulating the Ecuadorian people for their "democratic triumph," June 2, 1944, FHLT, Id. 33844, legajo 558.

³⁰ Telegram from Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Pedro Saad, celebrating the Ecuadorian proletariat workers' unity, July 14, 1944, FHLT, Id. 34250, legajo 563; Telegram from Pedro Saad to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, in which he affirms, "the Confederation of Ecuadorian Workers sends greetings to the great boss of the continent, and promises to continue fighting for the definitive liberation of our class," July 16, 1944, FHLT, Id. 34840, legajo 564.



Photograph 3: Vicente Lombardo Toledano with Salvador Ocampo (CTCh) in talks with indigenous peoples of the highlands surrounding Lake Titicaca during his tour of Latin America as the president of CTAL. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”

Regarding his diagnosis of the political situation there, he affirmed that Peru was experiencing civic polarization. From his perspective, the country was entering the fight from two extreme counterpoints; on one hand was the mining-landowning oligarchy, who, in alliance with the commercial-mining bourgeoisie, only managed the exportation economy to their personal benefit and to the detriment of general social well-being. On the other hand, according to Lombardo Toledano, there was a popular sector that was politically disjointed and without party representation, even with the existence of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). In fact, CTAL's president held Victor Raul Haya de la Torre responsible for having disenfranchised organized sectors of the population by delaying political actions conducive to obtaining national political and social benefits, limiting the popular opposition's strategies to party and personal interests. He also expressed his concern that president Manuel Prado Ugarteche lacked a plan to confront the political crisis, although he did recognize his “fair and correct attitude” towards “*Nazi-fascism*”.³¹

³¹ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

Towards the end of his visit to Peru, Lombardo Toledano attended numerous local rallies with unions in Lima with local leaders, explaining the “urgent necessity to disassociate themselves [from APRA]”.³² Regarding this request, the union representatives “were all in agreement – communist, socialist and unionist APRA members- in maintaining independence from the labour organization and in establishing the Confederation of Peruvian workers in a short time.”³³ All of the union organizations, although they were not unified, joined CTAL. These conferences were the prelude to a Peruvian Proletariat assembly, which congregated in the main theatre of Lima where “thousands of workers” filled the facility. Another thousand people had to listen to the organized proletariat’s speeches from the streets. The massive participation, which brought the working class together after ten years, was attended by Lombardo Toledano. In his speech to the Peruvian workers, he emphasized the importance of CTAL for the unity of the organized workers’ movement in Latin America, he discussed the significance of democracy in the continent and persuaded the attendees to “begin a new life in Peru”.

A few months later, in September, 1943, Peruvian labour leaders Manuel Ugarte, Bernardo Valdivia, Arturo Sabroso, Luis Negreiros, Juan Cerpa, Juan Luna and Victor Gallardo were guests at the Confederation of Chilean Workers’ (CTCh) Second National Congress. At the meeting they signed an agreement – in the presence of Lombardo Toledano who had travelled to be present alongside the Chilean workers- to consolidate the unification of the workers’ movement in the Andean country. The stated objective was to use the agreement “as the basis for unifying the people [of Peru]”³⁴ in complete independence from the APRA, the government and the Communist party. Just as had occurred in Ecuador, CTAL’s president made a substantial contribution to achieve the unity of the organized workers in Peru, which was concentered on May 1, 1944.³⁵

His itinerary led him next to Chile. The leader of CTAL travelled around all of the important economic, social and political centers of the country. He stayed in Santiago and Valparaíso, an industrial zone close to the country’s capital. He was also in the mining region of Rancagua, a coal producer, visiting Coya, Caletones and El Teniente. He then headed south, with his first stop being in Chillan, a town that had recently been hit by a large earthquake in 1939. There he visited the Mexico School,

³² Lombardo Toledano expressed his differences in terms of strategies to achieve workers’ unity with the Peruvian leader Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre. Lombardo criticized the Peruvian leader for prioritizing his own personal interests over the needs of the workers (Haya de la Torre was hoping to become president of the Andean nation).

³³ Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*.

³⁴ Report and commitment for the unification of Peruvian workers, September 16, 1943. FHLT, Id. 31587, legajo 52.

³⁵ Letter from Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Juan Luna, Luis Negreiros and Víctor Gallardo about the imminent unification of Peruvian workers, Mexico, February 11, 1944 FHLT, Id. 33108, legajo 546.

constructed with the support of Lázaro Cárdenas, where David Alfaro Siquieros had painted a mural that remains there to this day. Next he travelled to Valdivia, home of German immigrants, and also Corral, a small port, but with important commercial activity. After that he continued his journey to Lota, a coal-bearing region, where he had one of his most “grandiose” rallies. According to references made by the press, there were more than 70,000 people, among them miners, manual laborers and popular grass-roots organizations.³⁶ He also visited Concepción and Talcahuano port. His presence in Chile concluded in the Atacama Desert, moving between Pedro de Valdivia and María Elena’s saltpeter works, then to Chuquicamata, a copper mining town, located at the region’s shared border with Bolivia.



Photograph 4: Vicente Lombardo Toledano makes his way through a multitude of coal workers in Lota, Chile, during a tour of Latin America as the president of CTAL. Source: Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

The Chilean press, both pro-government and opposition, gave full coverage of Lombardo Toledano’s presence, signaling the transcendent nature of his visit for politics and unionism. There were daily announcements about his interview with President Juan Antonio Ríos and with the leaders of CTCh, such as Bernardo Ibañez, Salvador

³⁶ “Multitudinario apoyo por la unidad de los trabajadores de América Latina”, *El Siglo*, Santiago, 2 de noviembre de 1942.

Ocampo, Bernardo Araya, Juan Vargas Puebla and Juan Briones.³⁷ There were chronicles of his meeting with the workers at their job sites³⁸ and detailed reports on rallies with workers and the Radical Party.³⁹

CTAL's president could perceive a close collaboration occurring in Chile between the Frente Popular Government and the proletariat, who were assembled by the CTCh. In his interviews with manual laborers, campesinos, artisans, state workers, small manufacturers and private workers, he reaffirmed that the political experience, the union organizing, and the "common people's civic maturity" was vigorous and enthusiastic, and that it could be considered an example for "other peoples of Latin America." Regarding this he specified that "their political life is intense, representatives of all social classes participate. This is the country, along with Cuba, in all of America, that has the highest participation of women in civic duties. The CTCh plays a great role in the orientation and general awareness of the people; it has been, as with Cuba, a determining factor in the defense of democratic principles and in the creation of the Frente Popular".⁴⁰

One of the most relevant events from the visit to Chile was a resolution that was shared by Chile's then president, Juan Antonio Ríos with Vicente Lombardo Toledano. During a private interview between the two that took place in the Moneda Presidential Palace on October 22, 1942, they discussed their opinions regarding the global armed conflict and the neutral position that the country was taking. CTAL's leader explained to Ríos that Chile, as one of "the hemisphere's very valuable powers", must be part of the continental effort to defend democracy. At the end of the exchange, the president told the union leader "Mr. Lombardo, the government of Chile, after understanding the position of Chile's people, will end relations with the Axis powers".⁴¹ Juan Antonio

³⁷ "Lombardo Toledano llegó ayer. Su viaje tiene por objeto estrechar los lazos de la solidaridad continental", *El Siglo*, Santiago, 23 de octubre de 1942; "Cariñoso recibimiento se tributó al presidente de Confederación de Trabajadores de la América Latina", *La Nación*, Santiago, 23 de octubre de 1942"; "Lombardo Toledano visita a S. E. y al Ministro del Interior", *La Nación*, Santiago, 23 de octubre de 1942; "Llegó a esta capital Vicente Lombardo Toledano", *El Mercurio*, Santiago 23 de octubre de 1942.

³⁸ "A obreros de San Bernardo y Puente Alto visitará hoy Lombardo Toledano", *El Siglo*, Santiago 23 de octubre de 1942; "Algunas actividades del señor Lombardo Toledano", *El Mercurio*, Santiago, 24 de octubre de 1942; "Lombardo Toledano visita Rancagua", *El Mercurio*, Santiago, 28 de octubre de 1942; "Homenaje de hoy del sindicato obrero Mademsa a Lombardo Toledano", *La Nación*, Santiago, 23 de octubre de 1942.

³⁹ "El pueblo de Santiago escuchará el domingo la palabra de Lombardo Toledano", *El Siglo*, Santiago, 24 de octubre de 1942; "Lombardo Toledano hablará en el gran mitin de mañana", *El Siglo*, Santiago, 24 de octubre de 1942; "Los países de América deben unirse en la lucha contra el fascismo, dijo Lombardo Toledano", *El Siglo*, Santiago, 26 de octubre de 1942; "Actos en honor de Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Cámara de Diputados y asamblea radical", *El Mercurio*, Santiago, 27 de octubre de 1942; "La asamblea radical sesionó en honor del líder mexicano Lombardo Toledano", *La Nación*, Santiago, 27 de octubre de 1942; "Triunfal fue la jira [sic] de Lombardo Toledano por la América Latina", *CTCh*, Santiago, 24 de marzo de 1943.

⁴⁰ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

⁴¹ Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*.

Roja's declaration was made public in a rally for CTAL's president on October 25, which united thousands of workers in Constitution square, adjacent to La Moneda Palace. The attendees broke out in applause and jubilation upon receiving the news, recalled Lombardo Toledano. Later, in a message to the Mexican proletariat on December 29, 1942, the workers' leader reflected "I have never seen more discipline, more political awareness, than in this act carried out by the Chilean people".⁴² The diplomatic break of the Chilean Government with the Axis Powers was made official on January 20, 1943. CTAL, represented by Lombardo Toledano, helped to speed up Chilean authorities' decision making processes, which, together with the pressure of CTCh and the Roosevelt government, ended in a triumph for the Allies of the continent. The news elicited immediate approval from CTAL's Central Committee, which sent a telegram of congratulations to Chile's government authorities and workers.⁴³ Upon receiving the telegram, the leaders of CTCh and President Ríos' government, through the Minister of Foreign Relations, Joaquín Fernández, recognized Lombardo Toledo's role in the resolution:

For Mr. Lombardo Toledano, The Chilean government offers its sincere appreciation for your message of congratulations, and also for your various contributions; due to your noble initiative, many of our sister countries in the continent are celebrating Chile's adhesion to our international policy.⁴⁴

⁴² Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*.

⁴³ Telegram from Vicente Lombardo Toledano to Bernardo Ibáñez, CTCh's Secretary General, congratulating the Chilean workers, government and people, Mexico, January 22, 1943, FHLT, Id. 29567, legajo 494.

⁴⁴ Letter from Joaquín Fernández, Minister of Chilean Foreign Affairs, to Bernardo Ibáñez requesting that he send Greetings to Vicente Lombardo Toledano on behalf of the Chilean Government, Santiago, February 12, 1943, FHLT, Id. 29827, legajo 497; A letter from Osvaldo Fuenzalida, the government's Secretary General, to Bernardo Ibáñez to thank him on behalf of Chilean president Juan Antonio Ríos, for the congratulations sent by CTAL's president, Santiago, March 2, 1943, FHLT, Id. 29866, legajo 499.



Photograph 5: Vicente Lombardo Toledano is welcomed in Corral Port, located in the province of Valdivia, Chile, during his tour of Latin America as the president of CTAL. Flags from the CTCh and the Pro-Emancipation Movement of Chilean Women (MEMCh) can be observed, among others. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

His itinerary in Chile ended in the northern territory. In the mining towns of Pedro de Valdivia and Maria Elena, he had meetings with Argentinian and Uruguayan workers, among them Francisco Pérez Leirós, José Domenech and Camilo Almarza,⁴⁵ who informed him of the political and union context in their countries. In a great closing ceremony in Chuquicamata, a copper mine, Bernardo Ibañez, Salvador Ocampo, Francisco Pérez Leirós, the Chilean senator Elias Laferte and workers’ delegations from Peru, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile bid farewell to the continental leader and

⁴⁵ FHLT, Id. 28441, legajo, 479.

accompanied him to the border of Bolivia, where representatives of the Union Confederation of Bolivian Workers (la Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia) were waiting.⁴⁶

The continental leader's stay in Bolivia was brief, between November 10-16, 1942, where he first visited the altiplano, specifically the borders of Lago Titicaca, where he observed the heart-breaking poverty of the Andean indigenous peoples. He affirmed that the Bolivian altiplano was the "saddest region in the world". He later travelled to La Paz where he met with union and political leaders. However, due to Bolivia's context of social instability and political crisis, he was not able to hold events in public places like plazas and avenues in sectors populated by the working-class.

It was in Potosi, home of a mining operation, where he was able to converse with tin workers. Lombardo Toledano became emotional upon observing the work conditions and everyday lives of the workers, the majority indigenous. When describing his observations inside of a mining shaft, he said affirmed:

I was inside the mining galleries and shafts for many hours, watching the miners work, sometimes in places full of water, sometimes under high temperatures, sometimes in very deep places. And I saw them work from 4000 to 4500 meters above sea level, almost naked, some with only sandals, without gloves, without helmets, without any protection, with the eternal ball of coca in their mouth, earning the minimum wage of 6.60 Bolivian pesos, which is equivalent to 15 cents of a dollar for a day's work [...] the average amount of work-able years for a miner is ten years. This is the story of Potosi!⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Telegram from Salvador Ocampo to Alejandro Carrillo, *El Popular*, informing him of Vicente Lombardo Toledano's visit and meetings in Bolivia, FHLT, Id. 28751, legajo, 480.

⁴⁷ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486; Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*.



Photograph 6. Vicente Lombardo Toledano is welcomed by Bolivian workers at their shared border with Chile during his tour of Latin America as the president of CTAL. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

CTAL’s president expressed his hope for a better future for Bolivia, he considered that organizing workers, along with the other countries of the continent, could help the country to overcome its social crisis. He advocated for access to the sea for Bolivia and requested that political parties establish a unifying political project to face the imminent threat of civil war.⁴⁸

His schedule continued with a visit to Costa Rica. His trip there was mainly in the central plateau, “the wealthiest and most organized region”, according to Lombardo Toledano. The union leader praised the Central American country, considering it to be exemplary in terms of civic freedoms, education for all and national awareness. During his visit he was able to coordinate the first meetings to establish a congress for workers’ unity. Rodolfo Guzmán, secretary of the union liaison committee, helped with this task, establishing the first basis for the program in order to assure the maximum amount of attendees at the congress. Among the main demands for the congress were: lowering the prices of basic necessities, a 30% increase in wages, regulating minimum and maximum

⁴⁸ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

prices, financial aid for the unemployed and worker representation in emergency boards.⁴⁹

Before leaving Costa Rica he met with president Rafael Calderón Guardia. He valued the political willingness of the president to include a set of collective rights in the constitution, under the title “social guarantees,” similar to article 123 of the Mexican Constitution, according to Lombardo Toledano. For CTAL’s leader, the unification of Costa Rica’s workers was of great importance, as it would consolidate their rights and constitute a social basis from which they could collaborate with President Calderón Guardia.⁵⁰ In the following months, the continental leader continued to wait for the news of the unifying congress until it finally happened, in September, 1943.



Photograph 7. A street rally improvised by Vicente Lombardo Toledano in San José, Costa Rica during his tour around Latin America as the president of CTAL. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

On November 27, 1942 he arrived in Managua, where he travelled around the Pacific coast, home to two large lakes, and then visited León. The leader met with

⁴⁹ Letter from Rodolfo Guzmán to Vicente Lombardo Toledano, San José, September 11, 1942, FHLT, Id. 28439, legajo 472.

⁵⁰ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486; Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*.

Anastasio Somoza, the Nicaraguan dictator, to express his position concerning the labour and social contexts of workers in America. He engaged with Somoza about anti-fascist continental unity, reaffirming CTAL's position on the topic at a Liberal party rally. While Lombardo Toledano's visit was controversial (his presence was believed by some to be due to Russian interference, or by others in defense of the "Good Neighbor Policy"),⁵¹ it was still considered to have had favorable results. Students and workers gathered in the auditorium of the Universidad de Leon to listen to a lecture by Lombardo Toledano about the importance of the Mexican Revolution which later began a dialog in the country that helped to intensify the organization of the country's progressive powers.⁵²

One of the results of Lombardo Toledano's visit to Nicaragua was that, on December 13, 1942, Juan Lorio, Efraín Rodríguez and Francisco Hernández Segura, communist union leaders, promoted meetings to unify Nicaraguan workers. However, attendees and organizers of the meetings were prone to persecution and imprisonment by the government.⁵³ During 1943, there were ups and downs in the workers' attempts to establish a unified workers' confederation. Somoza modified his position in March of 1944, coming to an agreement with the country's main labour leaders, as he wanted to be reelected as a "paternalistic dictator". In order to achieve this, he tried co-opt the working class, offering political openness to the communists and promoting union organizations. Somoza, using the Inter-union Labour Council (el Consejo Intergremial Obrero), sought to establish worker unity, but the union organizations were divided between "collaborators" and "autonomous". The "collaborators" faction, made up of communists, socialists and liberals, most actively worked towards the unification of Nicaraguan workers.

⁵¹ The Nicaraguan Catholic press and some Nicaraguan communists questioned Lombardo Toledano's visit. See Mario Trujillo, *Historia de los trabajadores en el capitalismo nicaragüense (1850-1950)*, (México, 1992), pp. 182-194. See Nicaraguan newspapers: *Hoy, Índice, Verdad, Tribuna Obrera*.

⁵² FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

⁵³ Letter from Juan Lorio, Efraín Rodríguez and Francisco Hernández to president Anastasio Somoza, Managua, December 13, 1942, FHLT, Id. 28937, legajo 484.



Photograph 8. Vicente Lombardo Toledano presides over a parade for union and labour organizations during a visit to Managua, Nicaragua, on his tour of Latin America as the president of CTAL. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

On May 1 in Managua, a commemorative event dedicated to workers took place in anticipation of the imminent creation of a national union organization. Lombardo Toledano returned to the country after a year and a half. Both he and Somoza presided over the parade of fifty thousand people. The “dictator” made promises of labour benefits and the enactment of a Labour Code. CTAL’s president carefully observed the circumstances; he was suspicious of Somoza’s intentions, but he also knew similar strategies used in Cuba with Batista had achieved results.⁵⁴ His presence in the massive event was essential for the consolidation of labour unity in Nicaragua; the Confederation of Nicaraguan Workers (CTN) was formed on May 26, 1944.⁵⁵

Vicente Lombardo Toledano’s 1942 trip concluded with a visit to Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, where he made various stops of a few hours in each country. His observations about the Central American countries were very critical, he affirmed that they shared chronic poverty, dictatorial governments and “archaic” civic engagement. He sustained that only an international treaty, with Mexico and the

⁵⁴ Herrera, “Desplazando a las fuerzas retardatarias”

⁵⁵ See: M. Trujillo, *Historia de los Trabajadores*, 190.

Caribbean's support, would allow them to implement economic organization, new bases of production and the creation of a path towards democracy.⁵⁶

On December 2, 1942, when the continental leader arrived in Mexico City, a caravan accompanied him from the central airport to Madero avenue. Standing in front of the headquarters of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), Lombardo Toledano spoke to a multitude of people, announcing, "the Confederation of Latin American Workers is the first organization of popular power that exists in the Western Hemisphere [...] I come back full of faith, enthusiasm for our future, and profoundly saturated in our America".⁵⁷

CTAL, an influential union movement

On December 29, 1942, CTAL's president presented a detailed report about his trip around Latin America at the Bellas Artes Palace in Mexico City, detailing the material, social, political and cultural conditions of each nation visited.⁵⁸ He stood before thousands of manual labourers, professionals, domestic workers, public servants, resident immigrants and political authorities, among them Naval Secretary, Heriberto Jara, Secretary of Labour and Social Welfare, Ignacio Garcia Téllez and President of the Mexican Revolution Party, Antonio Villalobos. In his presentation, he affirmed that Latin America was undergoing a "different future," a "promising future", one that necessitated the collaboration of all of the continent's working-class organizations.⁵⁹

He listed a series of suggestions and demands for Latin American governments, of which we deem especially significant the following: a) guarantee real possibilities for progress for the working class; b) elevate the quality of life for the masses of workers; c) overcome the "semi-feudal" structure seen in many of the nations visited; allocate land to campesinos and indigenous peoples, giving technical support and credits provided by the State, or under its regulation; d) guarantee that social and political rights consecrated in the constitution be upheld, promoting democratic co-existence; e) favor, protect and expand the continental economy with the objective of strengthening production, industrialization, commercial trade and job sources; f) define and implement the foundations of a primary education oriented towards promoting an

⁵⁶ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

⁵⁷ *El Popular*, México D. F., 3 de diciembre de 1942.

⁵⁸ The edited text, *Prolegómenos*, indicates that the date of the presentation was December 19, 1942. However, the typed syllabus that was used in reading of the ceremony points to the date being December 29, 1942, FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

⁵⁹ Juan Marinello, "Vicente Lombardo Toledano constructor de la unidad americana", *Futuro*, diciembre de 1942.

“sense of Americanism,” respect for universality and democracy when associating with other individuals.⁶⁰

Vicente Lombardo Toledano’s trip contributed to the consolidation of CTAL’s continental project as a workers’ organization. Having experienced the workers’ needs, the desires of the progressive sector and the social, economic and political limitations of the Latin American people, he offered ideological capital to the project that in turn strengthened the basis of its program: the trip helped to position the union organization as an influential, international union movement, one with sovereignty over its decisions and respected by international governments and organizations.

In retrospect, the journey made by CTAL’s president guaranteed workers’ unity. Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Costa Rica and Nicaragua committed, in Lombardo Toledano’s presence, to establishing a workers’ confederation in their respective countries, and these materialized, to a large extent, in 1944. Cuba, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, further strengthened their ties to CTAL, becoming the most collaborative countries in the Central Committee. Finally, the union leader was able to convince various government leaders to commit to improving the social rights of the working class. In Cuba, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru perspectives around union organization and the working and living conditions made significant progress. CTAL was able to condemn political restrictions in Argentina and Bolivia, in addition to accelerating the Chilean government’s diplomatic break with the Axis.

The trip also made it clear that CTAL, and Lombardo Toledano, were a threat to certain continental political and economic interests, especially those of anti-communist, conservative tendencies “enchanted” by “Nazi-fascism”. His trip was plagued by propaganda in the press, which oscillated between accusing him of following “Moscow’s orders” to starting a communist revolution, being a “agent of Yankee imperialism,” speaking poorly of the Mexican Revolution, the railway workers of Mexico and the President of Venezuela or that he defended the Jewish people.⁶¹ In the end, all of these issues reaffirmed CTAL’s position as a political and union structure that possessed a solid program of unification of the continent’s labour and progressive forces.

At the end of 1942 the CTAL’s influence on the continent was verified. On December 7, the Central Committee sent a telegram to the workers’ organizations and affiliated union organizations to carry out a 15-minute strike in protest of Hitler’s “killing and extermination” of millions of men, women and children. The halt in labour-related activities took place on December 11, with Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico,

⁶⁰ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486.

⁶¹ FHLT, Id. 28886, legajo 486; Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *Bolivia mártir*, (México, 1943), 12

Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panamá, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Venezuela and Uruguay responding to the call.⁶²

Bolivia also presented a social crisis when the workers of Potosí went on strike. Lombardo Toledano, representing CTAL, sent a letter to president Enrique Peñaranda and to the vice president of the United States, Harry A. Wallace.⁶³ In the letter he defended the claims of the tin mining workers and advocated for the release of workers Enrique Alcoba and Waldo Álvarez from jail, both leaders of the Union Confederation of Bolivian Workers. He believed the businessmen in charge of the mining operation, in particular Moritz Hochschild, considered one of the barons of tin, were responsible for pressuring the government to not enact the Labour Codes in exchange for a salary adjustment. CTAL's president indicated that raising salaries would not be enough; the workers needed access to clean water, homes, hospitals and medicine. In the letter he encouraged president Peñaranda to intervene on behalf of the workers. Similarly, he challenged Wallace to "force producers to allocate" resources, from the purchase-sale contracts with the United States, to meet the workers' vital needs. Over the next few days, various confederations sent telegrams to Peñaranda and Wallace, reaffirming the requests made by CTAL's president.⁶⁴ While the conflict did not have a quick solution, the continental union organization executed a coordinated and influential action; such collective actions would only increase with the intensification of the Second World War.

Lombardo Toledano's trip around Latin American ended a few months later in New York, where he was invited by Phillip Murray and Jacob S. Potofsky, CIO's head leaders, in the first weeks of February, 1943, along with Pablo Neruda and Alejandro Carrillo, the director of *El Popular*.⁶⁵ Murray in particular was anxious to know first-hand of Lombardo Toledano's trip around the continent.⁶⁶ The meeting strengthened ties between CTAL and CIO, in fact, Potofsky was commissioned by the international leadership of the United States labour organization to coordinate the creation of a Latin American committee, made up of nine representatives. Murray gave instructions to each of them to give the highest priority to all problems that affected relations between Latin American and US workers.⁶⁷

⁶² *El Popular*, 8 de diciembre de 1942; *Justicia*, Montevideo, "Contra el terror pardo será el paro obrero del Lunes", 11 de diciembre de 1942.

⁶³ Message sent to the President of Bolivia, General Enrique Peñaranda and to the US vice president, Henry A. Wallace, December 24, 1942, in FHLT, Id. 29178, legajo 485. A version of the letter can be found in Vicente Lombardo Toledano's book *Bolivia Mártir*, 30-33

⁶⁴ FHLT, Id. 29172, legajo 485.

⁶⁵ *Futuro*, febrero de 1943.

⁶⁶ The main welcoming event, organized by the CIO, for Vicente Lombardo Toledano took place in the Martin Beck theatre on Broadway, in New York. The journalistic version of what occurred that evening was reported in *El Popular*, México D. F., 15 de febrero de 1943.

⁶⁷ *Futuro*, marzo de 1943.



Photograph 9. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, president of CTAL, with Jacob S. Potofsky and Philip Murray, labour leaders of the CIO. Alejandro Carrillo was also present on this date. New York City, February, 1943. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México “Vicente Lombardo Toledano”.

On February 14, 1943, both Murray and Lombardo Toledano attended a CIO meeting in the Martin Beck Theater, supported by the Council for Pan-American Democracy, where commitments were made to consolidate continental union relations, unifying the workers' voices against famine, for more union freedoms and to fight for victory against “Nazi-fascism”. In his speech to those present, Lombardo Toledano invited them to construct workers' unity together, without flags or borders. Regarding this, he stated:

Fortunately, the great masses of Latin America have begun to learn and, why should I not say it, the great masses of the United States in the last few years have also begun to learn. We, already in Latin America, and I am proud to say this, distinguish between the imperialist forces, between the representatives of the trusts who have often bled our souls and our bodies in Latin America and the great, magnificent people of the United States who have a splendid democratic

tradition [...] This is an essential task, especially of organized labor of the American continent, Brother Philip Murray. [...] Since the very creation of the Confederation of Latin American Workers which was born in 1938, that has been our fundamental purpose [...] that in the near future the Confederation of Latin American Workers will cease to exist and there will be born in the American continent the Confederation of Workers of the American Continent.⁶⁸

As a reaffirmation of this new deal between both America's workers, Henry A. Wallace began a trip around Costa Rica, Panama, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Chile from March 16 to April 25, 1943.⁶⁹ It was an unprecedented trip; it was the first time a US vice president had visited South America. Surely Lombardo Toledano's visit months earlier facilitated the vice president's reception and was a precursor to the message that Wallace delivered during his stay to statesmen, politicians, businessmen and workers about the possibility of building a different humanity in the postwar period.

In this way, at the beginning of 1943, the CTAL and Vicente Lombardo Toledano consolidated their position in the international arena, crossing ideological, party and continental borders.

Bibliography

Archives

Fondo Histórico Lombardo Toledano (FHLT), México
Archivo Fotográfico Universidad Obrera de México
Archivo Historia del Movimiento Obrero Argentino, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella. Buenos Aires, Argentina

Print Sources

CTAL. 1941. *Primer Congreso*, 21 al 26 de noviembre, ciudad de México.

Lombardo Toledano, Vicente. 1943. *Bolivia Mártir*. México: Universidad Obrera de México.

Lombardo Toledano, Vicente. 1943. *Prolegómenos para una nueva América*. México: Universidad Obrera de México.

Murray, Philip and Vicente Lombardo Toledano. 1943. *Labor's Good Neighbor Policy*. USA: Council for Pan American Democracy.

⁶⁸ Philip Murray and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *Labor's Good Neighbor Policy*, Council for Pan American Democracy, (USA, 1943), 14-15. Also reported in *Futuro*, March and April, 1943 and *El Popular*, February 15 and 23, 1943.

⁶⁹ Jody Pavilack, "Henry A. Wallace y sus "amigos" en América Latina (1940-1949)", in Patricio Herrera (coord.), *El comunismo en América Latina (1917-1955)*, (Chile, 2017b), p. 445. There is also an important column dedicated to Henry A. Wallace in *Futuro*, April 1943, called "Wallace y la quinta columna".

Newspapers and Magazines

CTC, La Habana, Cuba
CTCh, Santiago, Chile
El Mercurio, Santiago, Chile
El Popular, Ciudad de México, México
El Siglo, Santiago, Chile
El Universal, Guayaquil, Ecuador
Futuro, Ciudad de México, México
Hoy, La Habana, Cuba
La Nación, Santiago, Chile
Revista Internacional del Trabajo, Suiza

Books and Articles

Alba, Víctor. 1964. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero en América Latina*, México, Libreros Mexicanos Unidos.

Alexander, Robert. J. 1947. *Labour Movements in Latin America*, London, Fabian Publications.

_____. 1957. *Communism in Latin America*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.

_____. 1965. *Organized Labor in Latin America*, New York, Free Press.

_____. 2009. *International Labor Organizations and Organized Labor in Latin America and the Caribbean; A History*, Santa Barbara, Praeger/ABC-CLIO.

_____. 1985. *Historia del movimiento obrero latinoamericano*, tomo III, San José, Editorial Nueva Sociedad.

Herrera, Patricio. 2022. *En favor de una patria de los trabajadores. Historia Transnacional de la Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (1938-1953)* Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, CEHTI y El Colegio de Michoacán.

_____. 2013 (a). "La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina. Una historia por (re)significar, 1938-1963", *Secuencia*, 86.

_____. 2013 (b). "La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina y la implementación de su proyecto sindical continental (1938-1941)", *Trashumante. Revista Americana de Historia Social*, 2.

_____. 2014. "Vicente Lombardo Toledano y el Congreso Obrero Latinoamericano (1935-1938)", *Relaciones. Estudios de historia y sociedad*, 138.

_____. 2017 (a). "Desplazando a las "fuerzas retardatarias": La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina y sus primeras acciones sindicales en Cuba, 1938-1939", *Historia (Santiago)*, 50(1).

_____. 2017 (b). *El Comunismo en América Latina: experiencias militantes, intelectuales y transnacionales (1917-1955)*. Valparaíso, Chile, Universidad de Valparaíso.

Melgar, Ricardo. 1988. *El movimiento obrero latinoamericano. Historia de una clase subalterna*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial.

Pavilack, Jody. 2017. "Henry. A. Wallace y sus "amigos" en América Latina (1940-1949)", in Patricio Herrera (coord.) 2017 (b). *El comunismo en América Latina (1917-1955)*. Valparaíso, Chile, Universidad de Valparaíso.

Quintanilla, Lourdes. 1980. “La Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, 1938-1948 (Ideología y política)”, *Memorias del encuentro sobre historia del movimiento obrero*, tomo II, Puebla, México, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.

_____. 1982. *Lombardismo y sindicatos en América Latina*, México, Distribuciones Fontamara.

Spenser, Daniela. 2007. “Unidad a toda costa”. *La Tercera Internacional en México durante la presidencia de Lázaro Cárdenas*, México, CIESAS.

_____. 2018. *En combate. La vida de Lombardo Toledano*. México, Debate.

Trujillo, Mario. 1992. *Historia de los trabajadores en el capitalismo nicaragüense (1850-1950)*. México, UNAM.