

## RESPONSE

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Although ideally a study of this nature would examine the influence of Prebisch on Argentine economic policy-making throughout his lifetime (a task beyond the scope of the current article), I do not believe that analyzing a longer time span would significantly alter the conclusions presented. By focusing on the period from 1950 to 1962, I hoped to illuminate the sources of ambivalence toward Prebisch and, as a consequence, toward CEPAL in Argentina. The episode of the Prebisch Plan was a crucial point of confrontation between Prebisch and his potential intellectual allies in Argentina, leaving in its wake a bitterness that influenced the reception of Prebisch's ideas in Argentina and that diminished only with the passage of time. This slice of history conveys the complex interaction between Prebisch as an individual, his economic ideas, and the political and ideological context in Argentina.

The discrepancies among the comments of the three readers, all economists, inadvertently underscore one of the main points of the article: Prebisch was a man of multiple images whose ideas acquired different meanings derived not only from their content but from the political context. Thus Dr. Krieger Vasena, an associate of Prebisch during the *Revolución Libertadora*, credits Prebisch with sowing the ideas of liberalizing the economy in Argentina, in response to the "controlled" and "corporative" economy of the Peronists. Dr. Schwartz, on the other hand, faults me for neglecting the influence of Prebisch on Peronist policymakers in the early 1940s, during the "critical formative period of the new industrial policy-making."

Which is true? Both and neither. As I point out in the article, strong similarities existed between the Prebisch Plan and the policies adopted by the Frondizi government. But neither Frondizi nor Frigerio nor Alsogaray would ever point to Prebisch or CEPAL as a source of inspiration for their policies. No doubt, as Dr. Schwartz suggests, Perón's minister of economics, Alfredo Gómez Morales, was familiar with Prebisch's writings on industrialization and terms of trade.<sup>1</sup> No Peronist, however, has ever credited Prebisch as an influence on Peronist economic policy. When Peronist politician and economist Antonio Cafiero recognized the work of CEPAL, he followed it with the clarification

that “no significa que comparemos las opiniones y los planes que el Sr. Prebisch sugirió en su oportunidad—a título personal—para ser aplicado en nuestro país.”<sup>2</sup> Prebisch recalled in my interview with him that Cafiero had once claimed that CEPAL derived its ideas from Peronism and not the other way around, a claim that Prebisch disputed while reaffirming similarities between CEPAL’s ideas and Perón’s position on industrialization.<sup>3</sup>

This example raises the difficulty of understanding the influence of ideas. All three commentators suggest that the influence of Prebisch’s ideas in Argentina was surely stronger than I allow for in the article. I sympathize with this position because it was the starting point of my own research. I found extensive evidence of similarities between Prebisch’s ideas and those of other developmentalists and advocates of industrialization in Argentina. Yet as I engaged in the research and interviews in Argentina, these similarities were overshadowed by the failures to attribute influence to Prebisch and the ritualistic and even hostile disavowals of Prebisch’s role. Whatever the conscious or subconscious motivations for these nonattributions, they evidenced political divisions as important in shaping economic policy outcomes as the obvious similarities in the content of the economic ideas.

The political context in which Prebisch operated colored the interpretations of his economic policy recommendations. The commentators, perhaps because they are economists, have deemphasized this central political argument of the article. Thus Dr. Mallon argues that no “serious economists” opposed recommendations for a devaluation of the peso at this time in Argentina. Yet I was not concerned primarily with the responses of “serious economists” but with the political response. The responses of the Peronists and the Intransigentes, that is, from the majority political parties in Argentina, reflected what Mallon calls “traditional populist rhetoric.” It was this “rhetoric,” more than the judgment of economists, that shaped the reception and response to Prebisch’s recommendations. Likewise, Krieger Vasena argues that because Prebisch was the prototype of the public functionary and only worked with the Sociedad Rural as a consultant, it is incorrect to say that he was perceived as an individual tied to landholding interests. What concerns me, however, is not whether Prebisch was actually an independent *técnico* but that in some Argentine political circles he was widely perceived as being associated with private and foreign interests, as I have shown in the article.

Dr. Krieger Vasena dismisses Frigerio’s ideological opposition to Prebisch because Frigerio was motivated by his desire to capture the Peronist electorate. This is exactly the point. But far from bemoaning the influence of politics and rhetoric, I have tried to highlight this effect. It is interesting that the very vocabulary used to describe the influ-

ence of politics often tends to belittle it as unfortunate interference. Thus although Dr. Mallon meant well when he summarized my view by saying Prebisch should have “played” politics more effectively and that the developmentalist coalition was blocked by internal political “bickering,” the effect is to trivialize the political conflicts I discuss. Why does the expression “to play politics” exist in English, but not the expression “to play economics”? I do not believe that the commentators intentionally trivialize the role of politics. They are acutely aware of the political constraints on policy-making in Argentina. Indeed, Dr. Mallon’s book with Juan Sourrouille examines the difficulties of economic policy-making in conflict-ridden Argentine society.<sup>4</sup>

My concern, however, is not merely to discuss the political constraints on economic policy-making. It is to emphasize the absolute centrality of political and ideological factors in not only determining the outcomes of economic policy but influencing the very meaning and interpretation of economic ideas and recommendations. The article draws attention to a number of political and ideological factors that shaped reception of Prebisch’s ideas. It examines political differences created by party and electoral politics. Hence came the division of the Radical party, and the need for each faction to profile itself for voters in upcoming elections, which colored interpretations of the Prebisch Plan. These party and electoral divisions sometimes also reflected more profound class divisions. The exclusion of the Peronist party from the elections in 1958 represented both the exclusion of the party and the disenfranchisement of the majority of the Argentine working class. The positions that parties and politicians adopted toward Peronism also reflected their position on incorporating the Argentine working class into Argentine political life.

In addition to following party and class lines, politics also took the form of discourse. Political divisions according to party and class were exacerbated by an exclusionary, purist discourse characteristic of Argentine politics in this period. Here, Hugh Schwartz’s interesting last comment is particularly to the point. Part of the legacy of the Prebisch Plan was its contribution to an intransigent and exclusionary tone of discourse. Perhaps only in Argentina is the word *intransigente* employed as a positive political slogan, as in the name of Frondizi’s original branch of the Radical party, the *Movimiento de Intransigencia y Renovación*. But discourse and political practice were not separate realms. Exclusionary rhetoric reflected an exclusionary political system in which the solution to populism was found in banning the majority political party. Prebisch’s attitudes toward Peronism were not unusual—they were shared by many of his contemporaries. But in his involvement in Argentine politics, Prebisch lacked the visionary quality that marked

his work as an economic theorist and international diplomat and set him apart from his contemporaries.

A fourth political dimension, one mentioned briefly in the article, is the implication of state structure for the outcomes of economic policy. The policymakers of the *Revolución Libertadora* were intent on dismantling the institutions of the Peronist government but were less concerned with creating new autonomous economic policy institutions. Prebisch's ideas never found resonance with a permanent core of state bureaucrats who might have applied them consistently over time. The weakness of Argentine economic policy institutions and the lack of continuity of economic policymakers comprised yet another barrier to the acceptance and implementation of Prebisch's proposals.

These four dimensions—electoral and party politics, class politics, political discourse, and state structure—created the political context into which Prebisch's ideas and policy recommendations were introduced. Attempts to understand the role of new economic ideas in a particular historical setting must take into account how these political dimensions act as essential filters through which the new ideas and policies are interpreted.

#### NOTES

1. In his lectures to the *Escuela Superior Peronista* in 1951, Gómez Morales used terminology and concepts indicating his familiarity with Prebisch's work. Aside from an oblique reference to the economic commissions of the United Nations, however, he did not attribute any of his comments to Prebisch or CEPAL. These lectures are collected in Alfredo Gómez Morales, *Política económica peronista* (Buenos Aires: Escuela Superior Peronista, 1951).
2. Antonio F. Cafiero, *Cinco años después . . .* (Buenos Aires: El Gráfico Impresores, 1961), 363.
3. Interview with Raúl Prebisch, Buenos Aires, 23 October 1985.
4. Richard Mallon and Juan Sourrouille, *Economic Policymaking in a Conflict Society: The Argentine Case* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).