

A LATIN AMERICAN THIRD WAY? *Juan José Arévalo's Spiritual Socialism, 1916–1963*

ABSTRACT: Scholars and US officials mocked Juan José Arévalo Bermejo, the first democratically elected president of Guatemala (1945–51), for the opacity and alleged incoherence of his “spiritual socialism.” He was eclipsed by his successor, Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, who introduced sweeping land reform to Guatemala and whose overthrow in a CIA-orchestrated coup in 1954 launched the Latin American Cold War. But Arévalo’s ideology is not only decipherable but potentially of great value—when we trace its origins back to Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, a forgotten philosopher who was Hegel’s contemporary, and the Argentine intellectuals who developed Krause’s abstract theories into an approach to governance that shaped Argentina’s experience in social democracy under Hipólito Yrigoyen, while Arévalo was living in exile there. Arévalo’s social reforms, which improved the standard of living for workers and peasants without sacrificing individual liberties or property rights, reflect a Krausean philosophical commitment to harmonious nationalism based on ethical relationships rather than hierarchies. The experiment was foreclosed by the 1954 coup and a lesser known, US-backed coup in 1963 that denied Arévalo a second term in office. This analysis of Arévalo’s writings and governing practices shows their relevance to Latin America’s search for a third way between revolutionary class struggle and neoliberal authoritarianism.

KEYWORDS: Guatemala, socialism, Juan José Arévalo, Hipólito Yrigoyen, Caribbean Legion, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, Krausismo, Krausean

Juan José Arévalo, “the anti-American, super egotistical ‘spiritualist’ would be the likely forerunner of communism in Guatemala as he was once before.”
– US Ambassador John O. Bell¹

Arévalo is “not a sound thinker . . . [but] a second-rate *pensador* who became an ineffective commentator-from-exile like so many before him.”
– Walter A. Payne, book review, *Hispanic American Historical Review*²

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1. John O. Bell to Latin America Policy Committee, “Guatemala,” March 8, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter JFKL), White House Files, Schlesinger Papers, Box WH-40.

2. Walter A. Payne, review of *Anti-Kommunismus in Latin America* in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 45: 1 (1965): 112.

“As he blanketed the country with his flowery dissertations, I was constantly trying to find out what the substance of spiritual socialism was, but I never succeeded.”

– US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Robert Woodward³

President of Guatemala from 1945 to 1951, the philosophy professor Juan José Arévalo Bermejo, if he is known outside that country, has the aura of a warm-up act.⁴ Taking office after the fall of a dictator, he preceded Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, who introduced sweeping land reform to Central America and whose overthrow in a CIA-sponsored coup in 1954 launched the Latin American Cold War. Arévalo’s own political philosophy, which he called “spiritual socialism,” perplexed US officials, who found the expression ethereal or ridiculous, often putting it in scare quotes. Some historians have compared Arévalo’s governing program to Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, as if he were engaging in mimicry, or have emphasized the “sybilline” or “nebulous” quality of his speeches and writings, which made him “the butt of jokes.”⁵ The considerable invective he received from Guatemalan conservatives was sometimes equally disparaging, as when Luis Coronado Lira, a top aide to the 1954 coup leader Carlos Castillo Armas, wrote caustically of his “eccentric and undigested mentality.”⁶

This article argues that Arévalo’s ideology was neither indecipherable, imitative, nor unique.⁷ Instead, Arévalo sought to implement through policy the political philosophy known as *krausismo*, derived from a largely forgotten rival of Hegel’s, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause. Arévalo absorbed this influence during his years of educational work in Argentina,

3. Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 38.

4. I wrote this sentence before Arévalo’s son, Bernardo Arévalo de León, was unexpectedly elected president of Guatemala in 2023, producing a brief flurry of news accounts that referred to his father’s presidency as a success—another reason for the need for greater understanding of his father’s intellectual legacy.

5. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 36, 38; Stephen Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954–1961* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 14. Charles D. Ameringer writes: “He spoke vaguely of ‘spiritual socialism,’ placing the liberation of the human spirit above the distribution of material goods.” Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion: Patriots, Politicians, and Soldiers of Fortune, 1946–1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 4–5. Gleijeses concludes that other scholars, such as Marie-Berthe Dion and Angela Delli Sante-Arrocha, have made “vain attempts to penetrate the mysteries of Spiritual Socialism.” *Shattered Hope*, 39 n40. Marie-Berthe Dion, *Las ideas sociales y políticas de Arévalo* (Mexico City: Editorial América Nueva, 1958); Angela Delli Sante-Arrocha, *Juan José Arévalo: pensador contemporáneo* (Mexico City: Corte-Amic Editores, 1962).

6. Coronado Lira also called Arévalo fat, an Argentine, and a pawn of “Muscovite communism.” Luis Coronado Lira, “Yo acuso: el Plan TRIR, plan de locura y de crimen, un peligro continental,” August 1947, University of Texas Libraries Collections, Benson Latin American Collection, Revolution and Counter Revolution in Guatemala, Taracena Flores Collection, <https://collections.lib.utexas.edu/catalog/utblac:55f94fc7-1c8b-4c6c-bbc8-75e99fc5c6c9>, accessed October 28, 2023.

7. Arévalo himself acknowledged an affinity for Roosevelt’s program but drew a sharp distinction between their respective philosophical orientations and priorities in governance. Juan José Arévalo, *Escritos complementarios* (Guatemala: CENALTEX, Ministerio de Educación, 1988), 145.

where he was an active member of a vibrant academic community. He was deeply impressed by Argentina's experiment with social democracy (1916–30), led by Hipólito Yrigoyen, in whom some of his friends and some historians have seen a *krausista* (follower of Krause). Arévalo's political thought emerges clearly when one places it within the framework of the Argentine connection, as an effort to turn the theory of krausismo into actionable principles of governance.

As president, Arévalo advocated a form of democratic socialism to empower workers through social welfare, enfranchisement, popular education, and labor rights, while recognizing and regulating private property rights within the national interest. While in office, he also championed a transnational anti-imperialism, diplomatically and sometimes covertly, through the anti-dictatorial Caribbean Legion, and continued to promote it through post-coup speeches and writings like *The Shark and the Sardines* and through his political work in exile after Árbenz's overthrow.⁸ Throughout his career, Arévalo advanced a form of social and international justice in the framework of a political philosophy whose coherence has been largely ignored in the United States.

In 1963, as Arévalo was preparing to return from exile to run for the presidency, the US CIA predicted he would win by a landslide. He was optimistically identifying the Kennedy administration as “men of the university, educated at Harvard, sympathizing with the working class, like us,” even as he denounced Marxism as the “philosophy of the firing squad,” having broken publicly with Fidel Castro.⁹ Nonetheless, declassified documents show that President John F. Kennedy green-lighted another coup that year to prevent Arévalo from winning the election.¹⁰ As the path twice not taken—because it was twice thwarted by right-wing Guatemalan opposition with a crucial assist from the United States—Arévalo's spiritual socialism might have offered a third way between revolutionary class struggle and military authoritarianism, deeply rooted in Latin American philosophy, and bearing a vision of harmonious nationalism grounded in ethical relationships.

8. From exile, Arévalo kept up a steady stream of denunciations of the 1954 coup, chief among them *Fábula del tiburón y las sardinas* (Mexico City: Editorial América Nueva, 1956), published in English as *The Shark and the Sardines* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1961). See also Miles Culpepper, “The Exile of Juan José Arévalo and the Decline of Guatemala's Democratic Left, 1954–63,” *The Americas* 79:1 (January 2022): 101–130.

9. Juan José Arévalo, *Carta política al pueblo de Guatemala* (Guatemala City: Editorial San Antonio, 1963), 4, 32, 38; Arévalo, *Escritos complementarios*, 101, 153.

10. See Max Paul Friedman and Roberto García Ferreira, “Making Peaceful Revolution Impossible: Kennedy, Arévalo, the 1963 Coup in Guatemala, and the Alliance against Progress,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 24:1 (Winter 2022): 155–187. The article demonstrates that the Guatemalan actors hostile to Arévalo's return waited for Kennedy's support before taking action.

That was not a recipe for defanging Latin American reactionaries, as Guatemala's grim political history attests. Nor could it eliminate the notorious factionalism of the Guatemalan left.¹¹ But in the absence of US intervention, and given the widespread popularity of Arévalo's reforms, might there have been enough political space for the mid-century Guatemalan Spring to have unfolded further in constructive ways? This article examines the transnational influences on and consequences of Arévalo's political thought and action, as a historical case that matters not only for rescuing Arévalo from what E. P. Thompson in another context called "the enormous condescension of posterity," but for understanding *Arevalismo's* unrealized potential to help address the Latin American development dilemma. It also shows that US leaders could benefit from more curiosity and less stereotyping when they encounter Latin American ideation.¹²

KRAUSISMO

Arévalo's political philosophy was inspired directly and indirectly by Krausean thought. Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, a German legal philosopher, was a contemporary of Hegel (Krause came in second for a chair in philosophy in Berlin that Hegel won, only one station on a lifelong itinerary of disappointments). Krause argued in the early nineteenth century that government should serve the quest for harmony in the "organism" that unites nature and the divine. Principled action was a sacred duty of those holding power and could be codified into "a law of the good," reflected in legal institutions that would project the moral relations expected among individuals to the level of society and relations among states.¹³

Quickly forgotten in the Germanic and Anglophone worlds, Krause was translated by his students into Spanish and came to be influential among thinkers in the First Spanish Republic (1873–74), who adapted his ideas and transmitted them across the Atlantic. Krausismo emerged as a Latin American interpretation of Krause's thought that sought to replace his abstract musings, rendered irrelevant in northern Europe by Krause's own failure to step out from under Hegel's shadow, with practical ideas for fostering a less hierarchical society that could harmonize antagonistic forces for the greater good while

11. The infighting on the left is thoroughly documented by Culpepper in "The Exile of Juan José Arévalo."

12. E. P. Thompson's unforgettable formulation is in *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 12.

13. Claus Dierksmeier, "Karl Christian Friedrich Krause und das 'gute Recht,'" *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 85:1 (1999): 75–94. For an introduction to Krause, see Klaus-M. Kodalle, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832). Studien zu seiner Philosophie und zum Krausismo* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1985); and Enrique M. Ureña, *K. C. F. Krause: Philosoph, Freimaurer, Weltbürger. Eine Biographie* (Stuttgart: Frommann Verlag, 1991).

preserving domestic liberty and peace among nations. It called not for the atomized existence produced by liberal individualism, nor for Hegel's absolutist state, but for social solidarity among free people. Krausismo seemed to offer an alternative to the positivism that authoritarian modernizers from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego had used to justify repressive policies in the late nineteenth century, and Krause's combination of a commitment to harmonious democratic organization with a nonhierarchical spiritual component presented a welcome counterpoint to the materialism and utilitarianism that seemed to characterize US expansionism (famously condemned in the Uruguayan philosopher José Enrique Rodó's influential treatise *Ariel* in 1900).¹⁴

To be sure, there was a wide range of influences at work in competing Latin American political movements, from the Thomistic philosophy behind Catholic social teaching to liberal versions of French positivism to Marxism, from the social democratic and anti-imperialist claims of Peru's Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre to Americanist conceptions of international law promoted by Chile's Alejandro Álvarez.¹⁵ Often overlooked in that varied list of influences, krausismo touched figures as diverse as José Martí of Cuba, who introduced Krause in his philosophy courses while teaching in Guatemala, and José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay, whose social reforms were inspired by Krausean ideas about the responsibility of the state to its citizens.¹⁶ However, Krausismo was not a one-way transfer of ideas from Europe to the developing world, but the opposite: a transformation in which Latin American thinkers and leaders turned the utopian fantasizing of a failed German academic into actionable political thought.

Arévalo spent 14 formative years in Argentina, exposed to Krausist influences in the country where they were most pronounced. In the early twentieth century, krausismo, according to some accounts, helped shape Argentine public policy in the fields of constitutional politics, education, and foreign affairs. It was well represented in the Unión Cívica Radical, and arguably in the thinking of Hipólito Yrigoyen, who as president (1916–22, 1928–30) was an innovator in

14. On Rodó's affinity for krausismo, see Alfonso García Morales, "José Enrique Rodó a la luz del *krausismo* español," *Río de la Plata* 15–16 (1992): 415–424.

15. Greg Grandin has described the important role of Álvarez and other Latin American jurists in the development of an American style of international law that diverged from the Argentine model by sacrificing an absolute commitment to national sovereignty in favor of creating pan-American institutions of interdependence. See Greg Grandin, "Your Americanism and Mine: Americanism and Anti-Americanism in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 111:4 (October 2006): 1042–1066; and Greg Grandin, "The Liberal Traditions in the Americas: Rights, Sovereignty, and the Origins of Liberal Multilateralism," *American Historical Review* 117:1 (February 2012), 68–91.

16. The best work on Krause's impact in Spain and Latin America is O. Carlos Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and His Influence in the Hispanic World* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1998). Stoetzer's section on Arévalo (136–146) inspired this article. See also Hebe Carmen Pelosi, *Rafael Altamira y la Argentina* (Alicante [Spain]: Universidad de Alicante, 2004).

all three areas. Some historians, such as Tulio Halperín Donghi, have doubted that evidence of Krausist influence could be gleaned from the sparse record of written or spoken words emitted by the laconic Argentine leader whom Halperín dubbed “the enigma.”¹⁷ According to others, including Arturo Andrés Roig, Osvaldo Álvarez Guerrero, Juan José Sebrelli, and O. Carlos Stoetzer, Yrigoyen used Krause’s moral language in explaining the need for fair elections, labor rights, university reform, and Argentine neutrality in World War I.¹⁸ (He also helped persuade US president-elect Herbert Hoover to undertake a policy of non-intervention in Latin America.)¹⁹

In the telling of Roig and his cohort, Yrigoyen, who had taught philosophy at a teacher training school, was most influenced by three key krausista works. One is Julián Sanz del Río’s edition of Krause’s *La ideal de la humanidad para la vida* (1860), in which the author developed the concept of humanity (*Menschheit*) as an organic entity comprised of innumerable individuals whose harmony with one another should be fostered by a state that balances justice, love, morality, religion, science, and art. Krause’s philosophy circulated widely in Spain and thence to Latin America, thanks to the work of Heinrich Ahrens, one of his former students teaching in exile in Belgium. Ahrens’s *Curso de derecho natural* (1839) argued that the state should intervene in the social and economic realms on behalf of the weaker members of society to establish justice.²⁰ Ahrens’s student Guillaume Tiberghien defended Krause against charges of teleological optimism, albeit by projecting his principles over the very long term, arguing that “the utopias of one century are the realities of the century that follows.”²¹ Yrigoyen used Tiberghien’s *Introducción a la filosofía* (1875) while teaching at the Escuela Normal de Profesores de Buenos Aires in the 1880s.²²

Arévalo had already read Krausist texts during his early legal studies in Guatemala, especially Ahrens’s *Curso de derecho natural*. When he received a scholarship to do

17. Tulio Halperín Donghi, “El enigma Yrigoyen,” *Prismas, Revista de Historia Intelectual* 2 (1998): 11–21.

18. Arturo Andrés Roig, *Los krausistas argentinos* (Puebla: Editorial José M. Cajica, 1969); Osvaldo Álvarez Guerrero, *El radicalismo y la ética social: Yrigoyen y el krausismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Leviatan, 1986); Juan José Sebrelli, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2011); Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*. See also Juan López Morillas, *El Krausismo español: perfil de una aventura intelectual* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955); Antolín C. Sánchez Cuervo, *Krausismo en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003); and José Manuel Vázquez-Romero, “Una revisión del panorama krausológico actual: libros sobre krausismo (1988–1998),” *Notas: Reseñas Iberoamericanas* 6:1 (1999): 2–14.

19. Max Paul Friedman, “Investment and Invasion: The Clash between Capitalism and State Sovereignty in Latin America, 1903–1936,” in *Diplomacy and Capitalism: The Political Economy of US Foreign Relations*, Christopher Dietrich, ed. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 15–30, esp. 26.

20. Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 66.

21. Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 33.

22. Roig, *Los krausistas argentinos*, 66; Antolín C. Sánchez Cuervo, *Las polémicas en torno al krausismo en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004), 11–12; Ureña, *K. C. F. Krause*, 59.

graduate work in Argentina starting in 1927, he encountered krausismo there, as a philosophical current in academia as well as a philosophy of governance applied in the country's emerging progressivism under Yrigoyen's guidance. He earned a doctorate in philosophy and educational sciences in 1934 at the Universidad de la Plata, which had become a center of krausismo, thanks to the influence of visiting Spanish Krausistas like Rafael Altamira, who helped found the Permanent Tribunal of International Justice, and, later, Spanish Republican refugees like Manuel García Morente and Lorenzo Luzuriaga.²³ The latter two became Arévalo's colleagues when he was hired to teach literature at the newly founded Universidad de Tucumán. After a time as secretary of the Faculty of Humanities and Education Sciences at the Universidad de la Plata, he returned to Tucumán. His doctoral dissertation "La pedagogía de la personalidad" (The Pedagogy of Personality) introduced to Latin America the spiritualist philosophy of Rudolf Eucken, an admirer of Krause.²⁴ His own teaching on pedagogy and his participation in university reforms were guided by Krausist educational principles, about which more will be said below.

Beyond such academic influences, Arévalo became a devoted political follower of Yrigoyen, whom he called "the highest voice of America." When he left Argentina in 1944 to join the Guatemalan revolution against the dictator Jorge Ubico, a friend, Gabriel del Mazo, handed him a copy of his new book on Yrigoyen's political thought. Arévalo told him with emotion, "I assure you, Gabriel, I shall govern with this book."²⁵

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES

Arévalo came to power during the "democratic spring" that swept across Latin America in the 1940s, unseating dictators in El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Guatemala's long-time tyrant Ubico, who had filled his jails with dissidents and his palace with busts of Napoleon, was toppled in an uprising led by middle-class professionals, university students, urban workers, and junior military officers. They called on Arévalo to return from exile. He was nominated for the presidency by friends among the teachers and professionals in the Movement for National Renovation, one of the factions in the

23. Pelosi, *Rafael Altamira*; Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 139–141.

24. Juan José Arévalo, *La pedagogía de la personalidad* (La Plata: Biblioteca Humanidades, 1937). See Marie-Berthe Dion, "The Social and Political Ideas of Juan José Arévalo and Their Relationship to Contemporary Trends of Latin American Thought" (MA thesis: American University, 1956), 21, published subsequently as *Las ideas sociales y políticas de Arévalo* (Mexico City: Editorial América Nueva, 1958); and Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 142.

25. Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 142; Hipólito Yrigoyen and Gabriel del Mazo, *El pensamiento escrito de Yrigoyen* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Raigal, 1945).

revolutionary coalition, and also drew support from many students involved in the revolution. Since he was affiliated with neither a political party nor with the former regime and had a reputation for integrity, he quickly emerged as the most popular candidate.²⁶ He won Guatemala's first free presidential election in December 1944, with 85 percent of the vote, and upon taking office in March 1945, began to implement a program of political and social reform.²⁷ He spoke of spiritualism but was at the same time eminently realistic, seeking workable solutions to serious problems.

Under Arévalo's prodding, the Guatemalan Congress ended the feudal system of peonage the country had inherited from its Spanish colonial rulers, under which Mayan peasants would be seized by the army and delivered to plantation owners to perform forced labor at harvest time. He formulated a labor code calling for an eight-hour day and guaranteeing the right to strike for urban workers. The new constitution he sponsored to replace Ubico's dictatorial system "created a hybrid between the socialist and capitalist conceptions of man. The 1945 Constitution was designed to balance individual rights with social responsibilities."²⁸ It was written by a Committee of Fifteen charged with drafting it in only six weeks so that Arévalo's upcoming inauguration would place him within a constitutional structure. The president-elect was in constant discussion with the committee's younger members and his influence radiated through the document they produced.²⁹ It called for equal pay for men and women, absolute equality of husbands and wives before the law, and an end to racial discrimination. It set Guatemala on the path from being one of the most repressive dictatorships in Latin America to becoming one of its most progressive democracies.

The reforms had tangible effects. The provision of clinics and potable water in rural areas and sewers in poor urban neighborhoods, along with improved caloric intake through greater access of peasants to land for farming, improved the standard of living.³⁰ None of this was easy to accomplish in the face of vested interests, embittered right-wing opposition, and rivalries among the heirs of the revolution of 1944. Arévalo's time in office was marked by

26. Kenneth J. Grieb, "The Guatemalan Military and the Revolution of 1944," *The Americas* 32:4 (April 1976): 524-543.

27. US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala (1952-1954)*, xxiv; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 32-35.

28. Raymond N. Ruggiero, "The Origins of a Democratic National Constitution: The 1945 Guatemalan Constitution and Human Rights" (PhD diss.: Florida State University, 2013), 23.

29. *Diario de sesiones de la Comisión de los Quince encargada de elaborar el proyecto de la Constitución de la República* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1953). See also Kalman Hirsch Silvert, *A Study in Government: Guatemala* (New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute, 1954); and Ruggiero, "The Origins."

30. Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 107.

recurrent political conflict, including more than 20 coup attempts, during which he generally behaved with moderation and preserved freedom of the press.³¹ Those many failed domestic coup attempts, in contrast to the two successful coups in 1954 and 1963, suggest that the enmity of the Guatemalan right wing was a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for terminating reform. In this, US interference was decisive.

The language Arévalo used in speeches and publications was mystifying to some observers. Piero Gleijeses, in his masterful work *Shattered Hope*, quotes Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Robert Woodward: “As he blanketed the country with his flowery dissertations, I was constantly trying to find out what the substance of spiritual socialism was, but I never succeeded.”³² President Kennedy’s talking points for a meeting with Rómulo Betancourt, the president of Venezuela, noted that Arévalo “disturbs us in view of his confused and erratic thinking.”³³ Even sympathetic readers longed for him to spell out exactly what his philosophy meant. Andrés Iduarte, a Mexican professor of literature at Columbia University who had published books on Simón Bolívar and José Martí, wrote in a 1947 review of Arévalo’s *Escritos políticos*: “The thesis of ‘spiritual socialism’ that Arévalo defends is very interesting because of its sincerity and its enthusiasm, and the reader hopes to see it clearly developed in future work.”³⁴ Those words were more charitable than those of John W. Fisher of the US State Department’s Central America desk, who dismissed Arévalo as a “cloudy intellectual” beset by “towering egotism.”³⁵

But the meanings of Arévalo’s political philosophy are entirely decipherable once one understands his Argentine connections and his aim to turn krausista theory into praxis. In his own inaugural address, Arévalo declared:

“We are going to inaugurate the era of sympathy for the man who works in the fields, in the workshops, in the barracks, in commerce. We are going to put man on the same level with man. . . . We are going to add justice and happiness to order, because order on the basis of injustice and humiliation is worth nothing

31. On Arévalo’s time in office in the 1940s, as well as a controversy over the death of potential rival Francisco Javier Arana, see Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 30–71.

32. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 38.

33. US Department of State, President’s Briefing Memorandum for President Betancourt’s Visit, Washington, February 19–21, 1963, US National Archives, College Park, MD [hereafter NARA], Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of Central American and Panamanian Affairs, Subject and Country Files, 1955–1963, RG 59, Box 7.

34. “La tesis del ‘socialismo espiritualista’ que Arévalo sostiene resulta, a través de su sinceridad y su entusiasmo, muy interesante, y el lector deseará siempre verla plenamente, desarrollada en futuros trabajos.” Andrés Iduarte, review of Arévalo’s *Escritos políticos*, in *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 13:3/4 (1947): 291–292.

35. J. W. Fisher, “Latin American Policy Committee: Guatemala Situation,” March 8, 1963, JFKL, White House Files, Schlesinger Papers, Box WH-40.

to us. . . .And we are going to achieve it through common agreement, without violence, without clumsy demands, without pettiness or usury.”³⁶

The lines about “putting man on the same level as man,” adding “justice and happiness to order,” and achieving these goals “through common agreement” all speak to the Krausean aim of “harmonic rationalism” with social justice. Later, Arévalo would explain: “We never stimulated violence. Our method was persuasion, and my presidential speeches were an attempt to promote concord among Guatemalans of diverse social, economic, and cultural situations. We believed, and we still believe, in the grandeur of the concept of the human personality, understanding it as a commitment to lift up every individual as long as they serve the community in which they live.”³⁷ If concord is harmony achieved through rational agreement, that is a core Krausean goal in governance. Likewise, enabling the development of every person’s own personality, with an awareness of oneself as an individual with social responsibilities, is a key Krausean concept.

CAPITAL AND LABOR

Arévalo wrote elsewhere in clear krausista terms: “Our liberation will be the liberation of groups not the liberation of individuals. . . .We will liberate and protect the worker, without persecuting nor injuring the owners.”³⁸ The first sentence is a central krausista critique of positivism and classical liberalism, which was seen by some as valuing individual liberty too highly, at the expense of other members of the community, and leaving entire groups shut out of the possibility of a decent and fulfilling life. In Guatemala’s case, a significant group was the large indigenous population. The line about liberating workers without injuring owners was a critique of Marxist revolutionaries, who had sought to empower the working class and were ready to use force to replace the overweening power of capital with a dictatorship of the proletariat. Krausismo held that opposing sectors in society should be brought into balance, rather than having one sector crush or supplant another. Thus, Article 56 of the Guatemalan constitution of 1945 reads, “Capital and labor, as factors of production, shall be protected by the State.”³⁹

Elsewhere, Arévalo elaborated further on the role of capital: “We will liberate and protect Guatemalan capital, so that in an honest competition with foreign capital, it can provide to the republic’s workers the services that they [foreign and

36. Arévalo, *Discursos en la presidencia, 1945–1947* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1948), 23.

37. Arévalo, *Escritos complementarios*, 153.

38. Arévalo, *Escritos políticos* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1946), 163.

39. For this and subsequent citations of articles of the 1945 Constitution, see Ruggiero, “Origins.”

Guatemalan capital together] can and should give.”⁴⁰ This declaration reflects a tangible effort to turn a particular understanding of property rights in Krausean thought into state policy. The leading Argentine krausista Wenceslao Escalante, who began teaching philosophy and law at the Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1884 and whose textbook was required reading there for a quarter-century, explained the origins and limits of property rights: whereas some individual rights have “their principal elements in one’s own personality, in a purely internal subjective order,” humans also have “a natural whole which also has physical necessities to satisfy.” This means there is a “right to incorporate those material objects necessary for one’s existence,” which in turn constitutes “the foundation and the root of the right to property.”

Escalante maintained, however, that although property rights are genuine, they are not unlimited:

“Man does not have the right to abusive use of the things that belong to him. He makes them his by incorporating them into his personality, because he needs them to satisfy his necessities and to fulfil his destiny, which is the aim of the relationship between the subject and the thing before a moral order and before the order of natural law. Thus, wherever this aim does not exist, property has become denaturalized, and ceases therefore to be a right.”⁴¹

Article 90 of the Constitution of 1945 sought to implement this principle by declaring private property rights and at the same time imposing three substantial limitations: “The State recognizes the existence of private property and guarantees it as a social function, with no limitations other than those which may be imposed by law for reasons of public necessity or welfare or national interest.” As in Escalante’s formulation and Arévalo’s statement about capital’s obligation to workers, this part of the constitution offered a clear defense of the principle of private property and at the same time identified it as a social phenomenon that can be regulated by the state for the common good. This principle accords with Krause’s admonition that the state should intervene on behalf of the weaker members of society, taking action to redress unjust situations in the social and economic realm.⁴²

In practice, Arévalo avoided taking this to the logical conclusion of agrarian reform through expropriation, as Árbenz did—an act of courage that would cost the latter his office. While he may have been less radical in the economic

40. Arévalo, *Escritos políticos*, 163.

41. Quoted in Roig, *Los krausistas argentinos*, 35, 59.

42. Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 66.

arena than his successor, Arévalo sought to use the state to put capital at the service of workers, where he judged it to be politically feasible in a harmonious, nonviolent way. When he took office, the Guatemalan government controlled about 130 large coffee estates, the *fincas nacionales*, confiscated from the German community during World War II and from Ubico and his generals after they were deposed. Together these lands were worth tens of millions of dollars.⁴³ Seeking to mitigate the highly inequitable land-tenure patterns in the country without mounting a direct attack on private property, Arévalo rented out part of those lands to peasants and cooperatives. This project was accompanied by a law requiring the forced rental of uncultivated lands on large plantations, as well as the implementation of a national literacy program, the creation of a social security program for workers, and the devotion of a third of the national budget to social welfare, education, and housing. These reforms helped bring down mortality rates by 2.5 percent a year.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the labor code contributed to an 80 percent increase in urban wages during Arévalo's term.⁴⁵ The Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS) provided health care, injury compensation, and maternity benefits, and was "undoubtedly the best administered and most effective of the social reforms of the Arévalo administration," according to U.S. foreign service office John W. Fisher.⁴⁶

To encourage progress that would foster social harmony, Arévalo created the National Institute to Encourage Production (INFOP), which grew from a series of discussions among the various sectors of the Guatemalan economy to stimulate cooperation among government, business, and labor. INFOP, intended to help direct development in a socially productive manner and promote indigenous enterprise, was capitalized with 6.5 million *quetzales*. In part because it provided loans to private investors, INFOP was accepted by the business and financial community and viewed as a useful tool for economic development, thereby helping to pry open political space for labor and other reforms.⁴⁷

Of course, none of this would bring an end to Guatemala's stark inequality, and no serious reform program could proceed without provoking conflict. The question

43. "Guatemala Takes German Land," *New York Times*, July 23, 1945, 5; "End of War' Act Aids Guatemala," *New York Times*, November 25, 1956. On the German expropriations, see Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

44. Susanne Jonas and David Tobis, eds., *Guatemala* (Berkeley: NACLA, 1974), 46; Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas, 1982), 55.

45. Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 108.

46. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 42.

47. Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 109.

at hand is not whether Arévalo wielded a magic wand, but whether his ideological orientation and general program, if allowed to mature over many years, might have brought evolutionary change to Guatemala, like the path followed in more economically developed countries that did not face external intervention to snuff out their experiments in equitable development.

Economic progress and fairness were not the only goals. Arévalo believed the purpose of better treatment of laborers was not merely to assure them more dignified material conditions, but to enable each person to develop fully into a spiritual being. In this, too, he was in line with Krausean principles. Krause's student Ahrens wrote that the purpose of life "cannot consist in an extrinsic good but in an intrinsic one, and that this intrinsic good can be none other than the development of one's own self in the full extension of one's faculties."⁴⁸ This sort of development would of necessity be accompanied by an independence of thought, in contrast to what Arévalo called "ecclesiastical spiritualism," a system that "imposes upon believers a tablet of values, established by the prophets and obligatory for all." Philosophical spiritualism, on the other hand, "leaves each man at liberty to establish his own scale of values: for some, the supreme value will be *beauty*, for others *truth*, for others *goodness*, for others *justice*, for others *holiness*. . . . Our world is the world of intellectual liberty and moral liberty."⁴⁹ The Krausean influence is evident when we compare that text to another passage, from Escalante: "Man feels himself in his consciousness and is, in the objective order, perfectly master of himself, free, empowered, and obligated by moral relations, to realize for himself, with his own forces . . . his own destiny, the goal that his intelligence indicates to him."⁵⁰

A government that would enable workers to become full persons would be required to do much more than meet physical needs, Arévalo wrote, for people are "not primarily stomach." Spiritual socialism, he argued, must "make each worker a man in the absolute fullness of his psychological and moral being."⁵¹ Thus Article 58 of the 1945 Constitution framed requirements for the minimum wage as tied to "the *moral*, material and *cultural* necessities of the laborers" [emphasis added]. And that kind of uplift, in turn, would require massive investments in education; under Arévalo, education spending in Guatemala increased by 155 percent.⁵²

48. Cited in Roig, *Los krausistas argentinos*, 32.

49. Arévalo, *Escritos complementarios*, 145–146, italics in original.

50. Quoted in Roig, *Los krausistas argentinos*, 59.

51. Arévalo, *Escritos políticos*, 147.

52. Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 108.

EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENTALITY

Unsurprisingly for a professor of pedagogy, education lay at the center of Arévalo's thinking about shaping a just society. "We schoolteachers are spiritualists," he wrote. "The profession impregnates us with moral commitments and ideals that we try to inspire in children and youths. Our mentality has something of the apostolic, without being religious, and something of the heroic, because we learn and practice the subordination of material goods and sensual pleasures to norms of conduct that develop the self on the path toward the perfection of citizenship."⁵³ The same conception of human rights that meant workers should be able not only to toil and to earn but also to think for themselves placed education squarely on the agenda of *Arevalista* reform—just as it was squarely at the center of krausismo, a philosophy that was perhaps most influential in Latin America among educators.⁵⁴ Krause had maintained that the solution to the dilemma of preserving individual liberty in the context of a community lay not in making the individual a means (as Marxism would) but through a moral and cultural education that would allow adults to make ethical choices. O. Carlos Stoetzer, the leading expert on krausismo in Latin America, has written that for Krause, "education was by far the single most important task."⁵⁵

So it was for Arévalo, and for the same reason. While positivism swept across many of Latin America's universities, Arévalo and the krausista pedagogues remained devoted to a different kind of valuation, one that saw the path to human dignity begin at the schoolhouse door: "Education should help man to construct a legitimate table of values, compatible with the welfare of society in general."⁵⁶ As president, he tried to practice what he preached. "Months after we have put into practice our Labor Code," Arévalo announced early in his tenure, and "while hospitals and markets and schools are being built in the Departments, we will begin the final phase of the revolution: the cultural revolution will consist in the diffusion of the alphabet to every corner of Guatemala."⁵⁷ For him, the alphabet had huge significance; he once called it "the greatest cultural creation of mankind."⁵⁸ The new constitution was permeated with the importance of education and culture. Article I itself

53. Arévalo, *Escritos complementarios*, 140.

54. Krause did not care for the phrase "human rights" ("*derechos humanos*"), which he put in scare quotes because the powerful "trumpeted it" too often. Arévalo, *Escritos complementarios*, 147.

55. Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 37. For the debate between positivism and krausismo among Mexican educators, see Sánchez Cuervo, *Las polémicas*.

56. Dion, "Social and Political Ideas," 21, citing Arévalo, *La filosofía de los valores en la pedagogía* (Guatemala City: Imprenta López, 1939), 17–18.

57. Arévalo, *Discursos*, 54.

58. Arévalo, *La Argentina que yo viví, 1927–1944* (Mexico City: Costa-Amic, 1974), 121.

included culture, unusually, as a primary mission of the republic: “Guatemala is a free, sovereign, and independent Republic, organized toward the primary end of assuring to its inhabitants the enjoyment of liberty, culture, economic welfare, and social justice.”

Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality holds that government shapes behavior by instilling docility through technologies of power, such as prisons or schools. For Foucault, this was always a repressive concept.⁵⁹ Derek Kerr challenged Foucault’s concept, arguing that power comes not only from the top, and that governmentality seems to ignore the potential for subjective experience and popular resistance.⁶⁰ Arévalo understood the potential power, risks, and limitations of governmentality, including its role in state-mandated education. His central focus was education reform with the express desire to form free citizens, but he was critical of states that sought to constrict behavior through the same mechanism. He thought education could be an instrument for instilling free thinking and human liberation and criticized any dogmatic implementation of it. In the modern era, he complained, the church’s dogma, as imparted through religious education, had given way to the state’s dogma in secular education, and that now, whether in right-wing dictatorships or in the Soviet Union, “the state swallows children like the Moloch of mythology, and it swallows them in order to instruct them in its own terms, in what the State believes to be truth.”⁶¹ In contrast, Article 80 of the 1945 Constitution read: “It is the function of the teacher to preserve and intensify the natural personal dignity of the children and youths.”

This high idealism posed a direct challenge to a center of conservative power in Guatemala: the Catholic Church. Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano was a harsh and influential critic who led the Church to accuse Arevalo of seeking to “de-Christianize the souls of our people.” The Constitution’s Article 29 forbade the Church from participating in politics—a principle of Latin American liberalism since the nineteenth century—so Archbishop Rossell duly instructed Guatemala’s priests to ensure their statements could not be construed as intervention in politics.⁶² The Church’s complaints focused on the

59. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1977).

60. Derek Kerr, “Beheading the King and Enthroning the Market: A Critique of Foucauldian Governmentality,” *Science & Society* 63: 2 (1999): 173–203.

61. Arévalo, “Política y Pedagogía,” *Panoramas* (1964), 11, quoted in Fernando Berrocal Soto, “Juan José Arévalo: el hombre y el político,” *Revista de Filosofía de la Universidad de Costa Rica* 18 (1966), 190–205.

62. Mariano Rossell Arellano, “Circular del Excmo. Señor Arzobispo de Guatemala a los sacerdotes de la arquidiócesis,” August 21, 1946, University of Texas Libraries Collections, Benson Latin American Collection, Revolution and Counter Revolution in Guatemala, Taracena Flores Collection, <https://collections.lib.utexas.edu/catalog/utblac:3fe6c2e6-a1ff-45fb-8cfl-c9069c956dc6>, accessed October 28, 2023.

Arévalo government's promotion of secular education and its alleged constraints on religious liberty. The Catholic weekly *Acción Social Cristiana*—which, as Kirsten Weld has deftly put it, “owed its existence to the very Arévalo-era religious liberties it claimed were under attack”—characterized Arévalo's secular education policies as “pure totalitarianism” and “the most anti-democratic institution of which it is possible to conceive.”⁶³

Certainly, Arévalo was vulnerable to the charge of valuing expert discourse as a way to produce the kind of citizen he believed most suitable for society.⁶⁴ Indeed, the elitism inherent in his high esteem for education led him to hope that the spread of public schooling in the countryside would integrate the indigenous population into the majority ladino culture.⁶⁵ A quintessential state modernization project, the National Indigenist Institute (IIN), reinforced racial hierarchies even as it achieved some successes in improving the material conditions of life in indigenous areas. The urban ladino elites designing the new Guatemala from their offices in the capital generally reflected a continuing neocolonial attitude toward the indigenous rural population.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, in the context of Guatemala's semifeudal and authoritarian history, the Arevalist parenthesis remained progressive and potentially emancipatory: it sought to replace the more direct and invasive mechanisms of control of the pre-1945 dictatorial regime, and even more so to avoid those of the post-1954 regimes, which combined new technologies of power with mass surveillance and intimate violence.⁶⁷

Arévalo's response to the degradation of spiritual values under Guatemala's legacy of dictatorship was to found a Humanities Department at the Universidad Nacional (renamed the Universidad de San Carlos) in September 1945. At the launch of his long-dreamed-of Facultad de Humanidades, he announced that its goal would be “not to create political figures, but to produce the type of personalities whose conduct and whose words will inspire the youth of a nation with faith, courage, and self-sacrifice.” These persons, in

63. Kirsten Weld, “The Other Door: Spain and the Guatemalan Counter-Revolution, 1944–54,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51:2 (2019): 307–331, especially 320–321. *Acción Social Cristiana* was published by the Seminario del Social Rerum Novarum, an explicitly anticommunist Catholic lay group that cooperated closely with the archbishop.

64. Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

65. See Heather Vrana, *This City Belongs to You: A History of Student Activism in Guatemala, 1944–1996* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 27–61.

66. See Sarah Foss, “‘Una obra revolucionaria’: Indigenismo and the Guatemalan Revolution, 1944–1954,” in *Out of the Shadow: Revisiting the Revolution from Post-Peace Guatemala*, Julie Gibbins and Heather Vrana, eds. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 199–219; and Jorge Ramón González Ponciano, “The ‘Indigenous Problem,’ Cold War US Anthropology, and Revolutionary Nationalism: New Approaches to Racial Thinking and Indigeneity in Guatemala,” in Gibbins and Vrana, *Out of the Shadow*, 107–124.

67. Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Linda Green, “Fear as a Way of Life,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9:2 (1994): 227–256.

turn, would inoculate the body politic with “democratic antitoxins” of the kind that had placed university students at the center of the democratic revolution of 1944.⁶⁸

Be careful what you wish for, as the saying goes. Arévalo’s beloved university, which grew rapidly under his reforms, diversified enough to welcome not only students who quickly became impatient with Arévalo’s moderation and formed leftist groups that seeded the Guatemalan communist party.⁶⁹ It also came to house a center of resistance to his own principles. In the subsequent Árbenz era, conservatives formed the Committee of Anticommunist University Students (CEUA) and contributed to the domestic opposition that helped make the CIA-orchestrated coup of 1954 a success.⁷⁰

In that regard, Arévalo’s vision for higher education as a guarantor of democracy was a victim of its own commitment to free thinking. Education’s role in preserving democracy lay not in propagandizing the young, he insisted, but in teaching them to think for themselves. “Philosophers, men of letters, historians, are the *caudillos* of non-conformity,” Arévalo claimed. “In every critical cultural moment, we always see the omnipresent hand of the solitary and misanthropic humanist.”⁷¹ Arévalo saw the role of the philosopher as going well beyond what Sartre called the *intellectuel engagé*, who was always framed as engaged in resistance to the state: Arévalo thought they could lead. “*Caudillos de la inconformidad*” is the kind of clever and discomfiting turn of phrase that confused US officials, who could not see that it pithily summed up not only Arévalo’s taste for irony, but his view of how power could be wielded ethically. Unfortunately for the Guatemalan Spring, nonconformity in the university came to include nationalist-conservative dissent from Arévalo’s imagined harmonious community.

FOREIGN POLICY

At the University of Buenos Aires, Arévalo had studied under the leading Argentine philosopher Coriolano Alberini, dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, who knew Yrigoyen and was one of the first to see that Argentine foreign policy was at the time based on Krausean principles.⁷² Alberini elaborated these principles at the International Congress of Philosophy held at Harvard in

68. Arévalo, *Seis años de gobierno*, 78–79.

69. Arturo Taracena Arriola, “Youths and Juan José Arévalo’s Democratic Government in Guatemala, 1945–1951,” in Gibbings and Vrana, *Out of the Shadow*, 125–143.

70. Vrana, *This City Belongs to You*, 58–61.

71. Arévalo, *Seis años de gobierno*, 77.

72. Roig, *Los krausistas argentinos*, 64.

1926, where his “Philosophy and International Relations” was the only lecture delivered in Spanish.⁷³ “Philosophers should have no country,” he declared, yet “every nation tends to believe that its values are the truest [and] the most ideal, which leads to turning facts into law, the particular into the universal. This is the source of imperialism in all its forms.” Axiology, the study of values and valuation, was the work of philosophers, he continued, but they often engaged in “normative axiology” that led from description to prescription, and thence to catastrophic consequences in the international arena. “Imperialism . . . is a type of axiological petrification of nationality. . . a teratological [in this sense, abnormal] manifestation of the particular” in which one nation imposes its own values on others. Alberini concluded that “it is the essential educative work of philosophers to foster equity by developing consciousness of the relativity of one’s own values versus the possible range of values, and of the possibility that foreign values contain truth.”⁷⁴ The logical consequence was that philosophers can show why it is wrong to impose one’s system on others by force.

This was strong stuff at a time when US Marines were occupying countries across the Caribbean Basin and Argentina was in the midst of a 30-year diplomatic contest with Washington to get nonintervention accepted as a pillar of inter-American relations.⁷⁵ Arévalo imbibed such ideas during his long Argentine sojourn and sought to put them into practice in Guatemala’s foreign policy. In the words of Marie-Berthe Dion’s underappreciated study of Arévalo’s texts, “Values are the central preoccupation of Arévalo’s thought, the leitmotiv of all his writings, whether concerned with philosophy, pedagogy, psychology or sociology. Axiological concepts provide a solid foundation for his theories of individual and social improvement.”⁷⁶ This was equally true of his foreign policy, which emphasized anti-imperialism and national sovereignty—a common enough stance for Latin American leaders across the twentieth century. In this, he found an ally in Juan Domingo Perón of Argentina, whose nationalism, anti-imperial rhetoric, and empowerment of Argentine workers he admired, even if he himself was more circumspect about maintaining democratic processes. The two men cooperated in conspiracies against the dictator Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, and Arévalo bestowed upon Perón the Order of the Quetzal, Guatemala’s highest honor.

73. Coriolano Alberini, *Problemas de la historia de las ideas filosóficas en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 1966).

74. Alberini, *Problemas de la historia*, 108, 111, 117.

75. See Max Paul Friedman and Tom Long, “Soft Balancing in the Americas: Latin American Opposition to US Intervention, 1898–1936,” *International Security* 40:1 (Summer 2015): 120–156.

76. Dion, “The Social and Political Ideas,” 21.

But unlike other contemporary anti-imperialists in Latin America, Arévalo added Krausean elements based on seeking justice through constructive relationships, a principle he supported by promoting regional integration and inter-American cooperation in combating foreign dictators. In his own time, Krause had published a plan for a league of nations in 1814. It was deliberately pluralistic; the league's members would have to pledge "respect for every people's peculiar national genius," an idea echoed in Alberini's lecture on avoiding the kind of particularistic axiology that leads to imperial imposition. Krause's league plan asserted the "equality of national and personal ethics," which is to say that sovereign governments do not have a morality different from that of individual human beings, and implying that they could not stand idly by while national interest seemed to indicate they should abstain from taking action on behalf of suffering foreigners.⁷⁷

Whereas Immanuel Kant's project *On Perpetual Peace* was limited to the avoidance of war and the admission of republican states, Krause wanted peace in order to promote justice, and believed that the former depended on the latter.⁷⁸ In the same vein, Guatemala under Arévalo was an activist force in the international arena. Arévalo's representative to the United Nations was Carlos García Bauer, who had served on the Committee of Fifteen that drew up Guatemala's 1945 Constitution. At the United Nations, García Bauer worked on a committee that finalized the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and became chair of the UN Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee. During the May 1948 conference at Bogotá that led to the establishment of the Organization of American States, Arévalo's government advocated for a democratic structure with no veto power, unlike the United Nations Security Council. The Guatemalan delegation presented resolutions in defense of democracy and against imperialism. In both venues, the UN and the OAS, Guatemala advocated on behalf of the principle of human dignity, advancing proposals for free expression and the prohibition of torture.⁷⁹

In his challenges to neighboring autocracies—the Dominican Republic under Rafael Trujillo, the Nicaragua of Anastasio Somoza, and the Costa Rica of Teodoro Picado—Arévalo's efforts through the Caribbean Legion were not an imperial gesture aimed at spreading Arevalismo, but a recognition that other countries' populations could not develop justice, their own cultures, or their own human dignity under oppressive regimes. In 1947, he persuaded exiles fighting an array of dictatorships to sign the Pacto del Caribe, calling for the

77. Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 40–43.

78. *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1795).

79. Ruggiero, "The Origins of a Democratic National Constitution," 21–25.

strengthening of democracy and mutual defense. The ultimate aim was the formation of a Caribbean Federation to unite the small countries for protection from future imperialists, but it was not intended as an anti-US alliance. In fact, the signers pledged that if they came to power they would “ally themselves in perpetuity with the United States and Mexico for the common defense.”⁸⁰

Arévalo provided assistance for several failed uprisings and one successful effort, in Costa Rica, that brought to power José Figueres Ferrer, a democratic socialist credited with launching modern Costa Rica’s considerable achievements in democracy, stability, and peace.⁸¹ Arévalo’s inter-American policy reflected Krausean thinking. Krause’s league envisioned the absolute equality of states and a ban on unilateral war-making; only a council of the league’s states could decide to go to war, with each state having one vote, no *primus inter pares*.⁸² There was already tension in the inter-American system, where the United States had sought to dominate the pan-American diplomatic process for years. In 1945–46, Arévalo had supported a landmark Uruguayan-led project known as the Larreta Doctrine to develop a regional consensus process for the defense of democracy and human rights throughout the region. This project would have attenuated the absolute prohibition on interference in the internal affairs of other states to allow for multilateral action, while constraining the ability of the United States to intervene unilaterally in Latin America, as it had so often done and would soon do again, with tragic outcomes, in Arévalo’s own country.⁸³

EXTINGUISHING A LATIN AMERICAN THIRD WAY

Just as Krause found Kant too rationalistic and Hegel too authoritarian, Arévalo’s spiritual socialism posed a contrast to scientific socialism, that is, the socialism of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. His version aimed at the same goal, a society based on justice and equality, but one in which the state would work to preserve liberty and freedom of the spirit while promoting social solidarity and harmony among disparate groups and interests, rather than elevating one faction above the others through force. Of course, it would be difficult to implement such a

80. Piero Gleijeses, “Juan José Arévalo and the Caribbean Legion,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21:1 (February 1989): 133–145. See also Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*; Aaron Coy Moulton, “Building Their Own Cold War in Their Own Backyard: The Transnational, International Conflicts in the Greater Caribbean Basin, 1944–1954,” *Cold War History* 15:2 (2015): 135–154.

81. Kyle Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk: Costa Rica and the United States during the Rise of José Figueres* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

82. Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 45.

83. Tom Long and Max Paul Friedman, “The Promise of Precommitment in Democracy and Human Rights: The Hopeful, Forgotten Failure of the Larreta Doctrine,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18:4 (December 2020): 1088–1103.

program. Corruption, long rife in Guatemala, did not end overnight, and Arévalo was accused of nepotism for placing his brother in charge of a key aspect of land reform. Piero Gleijeses judges most of Arévalo's reforms to have been failures: "The weakness of the doctrine of Arevalismo may well lie in its having been overly spiritual and too little economic."⁸⁴ However, Richard Immerman and Susanne Jonas find more to praise.⁸⁵ So does Paul Dosal, who credits Arévalo with beginning the import-substitution industrialization that helped diversify the Guatemalan economy and produced incipient industrial growth—until that path was choked off by opposition of the anticommunist bourgeoisie and the CIA coup.⁸⁶

On agrarian reform, Arévalo sought recommendations and supported research, but "nothing happened," in Gleijeses's words.⁸⁷ Still, Árbenz's later land reform legislation drew on the studies and statistics prepared by his predecessor's government.⁸⁸ Arévalo's half-measures, such as the passage of two agricultural rent-control laws fixing rents at a low percentage of a sharecropper's harvest, did provide some relief, and the overall improvement in national income and life expectancy were significant.⁸⁹ In any case, it is true that Arévalo did not go as far in trying to improve the lot of rural Guatemalans as did Árbenz. But Árbenz was not constrained by Arévalo's philosophical and political commitment to moderation, and he had Arévalo's achievements to build upon.

We will never know whether Arévalo could have offered a viable alternative to the destructive forces of right-wing dictatorship and left-wing one-party rule in Latin America, because like later attempts in Chile after 1970 or Nicaragua after 1979, the Arévalo experiment was aborted by domestic reaction, crucially catalyzed by US intervention. In Arévalo's case, this happened twice. The first time was when his reforms were further advanced by Árbenz but then terminated by the CIA in 1954. The second time came in 1963, when his candidacy for a second term as president was cut short. Here, again, the United States interrupted Guatemala's political evolution toward a more equitable society.

Arévalo had not gained a following, nor even attracted much interest, in the United States between those two portentous dates. Marie-Berthe Dion, who

84. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 38–39, 44–47.

85. Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, [1982] 1988), 53–57; Susanne Jonas, "Guatemala: Land of Eternal Struggle," in *Latin America: The Struggle with Dependency and Beyond*, Ronald H. Chilcote and Joel C. Edelman, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1983 [1974]), 89–219.

86. Paul J. Dosal, "The Political Economy of Industrialization in Revolutionary Guatemala, 1944–1954," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 15:29 (1990): 17–36.

87. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 43.

88. Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 127.

89. Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 109–110.

wrote the best analysis of his political thought as an academic thesis at American University, could publish it only in Spanish. In 1959, Robert J. Alexander, a lifelong socialist and professor at Rutgers who published groundbreaking work on Latin American politics, labor, and leadership, wrote in a review of Dion's book: "The reviewer does not consider Arévalo the great political thinker that Miss Dion pictures him to be. However, there is no doubt about his importance for Guatemala and Latin America. His influence continues over a broad area. He is still young, and the changing fortunes of politics may once again bring him to the front."⁹⁰

Alexander's words were prescient. Three years later, in 1962, Arévalo made plans to return from exile to run again for the presidency of Guatemala in the election scheduled for the following year. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), often an outlier and sometimes a dissenter in the intelligence community with its sophisticated analyzes grounded in knowledge of foreign societies, judged him "not under the control of international communism" and his political program "consistent with specific reform goals of the Alliance for Progress." Because of his "record of substantial accomplishments in the fields of social security, education, and labor legislation between 1945 and 1951," it concluded, he "would win a free election in 1963."⁹¹ The administrator of the Alliance for Progress, Teodoro Moscoso, thought Arévalo was no further to the left than Kennedy's friend President Betancourt of Venezuela, to whom JFK often turned for advice on Latin American affairs.⁹²

Indeed, it might seem that the potential resumption of Arévalo's moderate reform program, which had brought economic development to the country in the late 1940s, would be very much in line with Kennedy policy and the US interest in promoting stability through reform in Central America. But that is not how his candidacy was viewed by US officials. Most of them were aghast at the prospect of Arévalo's return, and the positive conclusions of the INR study were set aside. The CIA called him the "rabidly anti-US former president of Guatemala" who regrettably enjoyed "wide popularity."⁹³ The CIA daily brief reported that "if Juan Jose Arévalo again assumes the Presidency of Guatemala, it will likely open the way to a Communist regime."⁹⁴

90. Robert Alexander, review of Marie-Berthe Dion, *Las ideas sociales y políticas de Arévalo*, in *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 1:2 (1959): 260.

91. Roger Hilsman to Edwin M. Martin, March 1963, JFKL, White House Files, Schlesinger Papers, Box WH-36.

92. Georgie Anne Geyer, "US Backed Guatemala Coup after Vote of Kennedy Aides," *Miami Herald*, December 24, 1966, 12A.

93. CIA, *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, November 9, 1959, NARA, CIA Records Search Tool, CIA-RDP79T00975A004700480001-1.

94. Office of the Deputy Director *Daily Log*, November 13, 1962, CIA-RDP80B01676R001300090027-2.

US analysts were especially disturbed by two of Arévalo's books, *The Shark and the Sardines* and *Anti-Kommunism in Latin America*. "Anti-Kommunism" was the sarcastic moniker—inspired by a Madison Avenue fad for the letter "k"—that Arévalo gave to the campaigns by anticommunists against communists who existed only in their imaginations.⁹⁵ In Latin America, where real communists at the time of his writing in 1959 existed on the margin of politics and pro-Soviet organizations were usually docile, law-abiding parties, right-wing dictators could collect lucrative support from the United States by labeling all manner of reformers and social movements "communist" and promising to fight them. Arévalo counted himself among the imaginary communists—the "Kommunists"—who were the victims of "anti-Kommunism."⁹⁶ In *Anti-Kommunism*, he explained that early on in his presidential term in 1945, he had visited plantations where the workers received four cents a day. He decided, just like Henry Ford, to pay the workers more so they could consume more and help build a middle class. His government "did not rest until it could offer these workers a minimum wage that met their family needs. And schools. And hospitals. That is how our Kommunism began," he wrote. "They never called Henry Ford a Kommunist, for the North American workers belonged to another race." He criticized the "gendarme governments," Catholic Church hierarchy, and "New York millionaires" for promoting "anti-Kommunism" in a crusade that destroyed reformist governments and helped keep illegal military regimes in power.⁹⁷

When *Anti-Kommunism* appeared in English translation in the United States, it caused a minor tempest.⁹⁸ "I am not anti-American," he insisted. "I am a Christian and an idealistic anti-Marxist." He stated that communism was a failed system.⁹⁹ But his argument went over the heads of US officials, who were oblivious to the irony of using a sober explanation of non-communism as

95. The letter "k" does not occur in Spanish, except in foreign words like kilo and kiwi. Arévalo was playing with what Peter Viereck called "the most awkward-looking, absurdity-connoting letter in our alphabet," and alluding to what Louise Pound derided as American advertisers' mania for the "konspicious use in the clever koinages of kommerce," as seen in business names such as Crazy Korner and Kwik Kar Wash. Peter Viereck, *Strict Wildness: Discoveries in Poetry and History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 27–28; Louise Pound, quoted in William Safire, *Take My Word for It: More on Language* (New York: Times Books, 1986), 64. Viereck continues: "The letter 'K' even looks lopsided, about to topple helplessly forward, an off-balance rube with metaphoric hay wisps in its hair. More than any other letter, it connotes the awkward yokel. The words 'awkward' and 'yokel' themselves would not connote half so much awkwardness, were they not so conspicuously spelt with a 'K.'" He goes on to list awkward, disrespectful, or comic words such as aardvark, kangaroo (whose Italian name, *canguro*, is not funny), kook, Crazy Kat, Hoboken, Yonkers, Omsk, and Kalamazoo, not to mention Ku Klux Klan.

96. Juan José Arévalo, *Antikomunismo en América Latina: radiografía del proceso hacia una nueva colonización* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Palestra, 1959).

97. Arévalo, *Antikomunismo*, 17, 85.

98. Juan José Arévalo, *The Shark and the Sardines*, June Cobb and Raul Osegueda, trans. (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1961).

99. "Guatemala: Echoes from a Sardine," *Time Magazine*, January 5, 1962. On Arévalo's private distancing from communism, see Culpepper, "The Exile of Juan José Arévalo," 108–109.

evidence of communist danger. Nor were they impressed by his denunciation of Fidel Castro, or the sharp distinction he made in his criticisms of the United States between the Kennedy administration, which he praised, and the era of John Foster Dulles and Dwight Eisenhower, whom he considered interventionist “in the old imperial policy of the Republican Party”—those responsible for the 1954 coup.

In April 1963, Arévalo entered Guatemala secretly, disguised in a laborer’s clothes and wearing a wig, then called a secret press conference to which journalists were driven in blindfolds. Asked if he was a “*comunista*” he told them that as long as Kennedy was president of the United States he himself would be a “*kenmedista*,” but if a new John Foster Dulles were to appear, he would have to write a new edition of *The Shark and the Sardines*.¹⁰⁰ He did not know that Kennedy himself had already approved a covert effort to prevent the Guatemalan people from choosing Arévalo as their president. The US embassy in Guatemala City, understanding its mission to be “preventing Arevalo’s succession to power,” connived with Defense Minister Enrique Peralta Azurdia to stage a coup, overthrow the outgoing president Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, and cancel the elections, all to prevent the most popular candidate from taking office.¹⁰¹ Peralta announced that Arévalo would not be permitted to run in future elections. A British diplomat on the American desk in Whitehall observed drily, “One wonders what sort of ‘elections’ there will be, if the candidate who is unarguably the most popular is not allowed to stand.”¹⁰²

Finding himself once again in exile, Arévalo resumed writing but never managed to get through to any new audiences in the United States. In 1965, Walter Payne wrote a disparaging review of *Anti-Kommunism* in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*: “The idea grows unchallenged among former supporters in Guatemala and the hemisphere that he is not a sound thinker and that he had no real philosophy or political program. Serious doubt exists that he could make a political comeback in Guatemala. The further possibility exists that he will fade into history as a second-rate *pensador* who became an ineffective commentator-from-exile like so many before him.”¹⁰³ That his political comeback would have been successful without US interference—according to the worried assessments of US officials themselves—does not seem to have given Payne pause.

100. Manuel Cabieses, “Con peluca y disfrazado de obrero entró Arévalo en Guatemala” *El Nacional*, April 17, 1963, 24.

101. Status of US Country Team Plans, Both Short and Long-Term Military and Political Objectives, for Guatemala, October 10, 1962, Declassified Documents Retrieval System. For more on the coup of 1963, see Friedman and García Ferreira, “Making Peaceful Revolution Impossible.”

102. S. C. minute, May 28, 1963, National Archives, Kew, UK, FO 371/168076.

103. Walter A. Payne, review of *Anti-Kommunism*, in *Latin America in Hispanic American Historical Review* 45: 1 (1965): 112.

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The mantle of democratic socialism was taken up in Chile, where Arévalo had found his initial refuge after the 1954 coup, and where the CIA funded parties opposed to Salvador Allende in the 1960s and then worked for his overthrow in the early 1970s.¹⁰⁴ Some Chileans had learned from Guatemala what democratic socialism might look like, although they were more impressed by Árbenz's version than Arévalo's. Federico Klein Reidel, a co-founder with Allende of the Chilean Socialist Party, found the Arévalo and Árbenz eras "a phase of indubitable progress."¹⁰⁵ He had served as ambassador to Guatemala in 1954, and his perspicacious dispatches on the Guatemalan experiment and its tragic end are among the most insightful and poignant written by any observer of the Guatemalan Spring and its violent descent into winter.¹⁰⁶

Latin America today is still seeking a third way between repressive leftist nationalist projects collapsing in slow motion (Cuba) or at a dizzying pace (Nicaragua, Venezuela), and more or less repressive neoliberal projects elsewhere on the continent. Formerly charismatic leftish movements in Argentina and Mexico seem unable to deliver the progress their followers so desperately need. The idea of the nonviolent harmonization of society, where human dignity and economic fairness can coexist with growth, remains an alternative vision still in search of the opportunity to unfold without being short-circuited by domestic opposition decisively strengthened by an order from Washington. As recovered history, if not as a program, Arévalo's attempt to turn theory into praxis may yet offer something of value.

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104. On domestic and regional influence on these events, see Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

105. "Informa sobre realidad económico-social e infiltración comunista en Guatemala," February 13, 1954, Archivo General Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, Embajada de Chile en Guatemala, Fondo: Oficio Confidencial, No. 12/4.

106. Mark T. Hove, "The Árbenz Factor: Salvador Allende, US-Chilean Relations, and the 1954 US Intervention in Guatemala," *Diplomatic History* 31:4 (2007): 623–663.