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SIMON BOLIVAR AND THE AGE OF REVOLUTION*

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Bolívar spoke with great eloquence and precision to the Congress of Angostura. It was there that he described the Spanish American revolution as he saw it:

A republican government, that is what Venezuela had, has, and should have. Its principles should be the sovereignty of the people, division of powers, civil liberty, prohibition of slavery, and the abolition of monarchy and privileges. We need equality to recast, so to speak, into a single whole, the classes of men, political opinions, and public custom.¹

These few words not only sum up the Liberator's hopes for the new Venezuela; they also describe to perfection the model of revolution developed in the western world since 1776.

The second half of the eighteenth century was an age of revolutionary change in Europe and America, a time of struggle between the aristocratic and the democratic concept of society, between monarchical and republican systems of government. Reformers everywhere put their faith in the philosophy of natural rights, proclaimed ideas of popular sovereignty, and demanded written constitutions based on the principle of the 'separation' of powers. The concurrence of these radical movements and their culmination in the North American and French revolutions have led some historians to see in the period a common pattern of radical reform, an Atlantic revolution in which political principles were transmitted from one part to another and the basic common denominator was a search for specifically democratic change.² The thesis of a single great democratic revolution, however, ignores a number of important differences between the various movements, not least between those inside and those outside Europe, and it underestimates the strength and endurance of the counter-revolution. Democracy, moreover, was not the only medium of change.

This was the age of absolutism, when monarchs too looked for change but sought it in other directions. Their object was to make themselves as absolute in practice as they were in theory, in order to overcome resistance to modernisation, to defeat rivals for power such as the Church, and to survive in a world of international conflict. Some rulers attempted to reform their government and administration, and in the process they began to employ a professional bureaucracy, to improve the flow of information, and to perfect the financial machinery. To what extent were they influenced by the ideas of the time? Was the new absolutism a servant of enlightenment or convenience? The programme was informed by a spirit of empiricism and responded to needs rather than ideas. It is true that rulers invoked new theoretical justification for their position, whether it

*A shorter version of this paper was presented in the University of London to mark the bicentenary of the birth of Simón Bolívar.

was the contractual theory of Locke, or the theory of 'legal despotism' advanced by the Physiocrats, who saw monarchy as justified by its functions; these were to defend liberty and property, and if it was to do this effectively it needed strong legislative and executive powers. But on the whole it is difficult to trace a consistent pattern of Enlightenment ideas in the monarchies of the time, which continued to operate within the existing framework of authority and hierarchy.

The political ideas of the Enlightenment were far from systematic, but a number of characteristic themes can be observed. Human government was by natural rights and social contract. Among the basic rights were liberty and equality. These could be discerned by reason, and reason, as opposed to revelation and tradition, was the source of all human knowledge and action. Intellectual progress should be unhindered by religious dogma, and the Catholic Church was identified as one of the principal obstacles to progress. The object of government was the greatest happiness of the greatest number, happiness being judged to a large extent in terms of material progress. The aim was to increase wealth, though different means were envisaged, some advocating state control of the economy, others a system of *laissez-faire*. The success of the *philosophes* in propagating their ideas – and in silencing their opponents – concealed a number of flaws and inconsistencies in their view of the world. One of the blind spots of the Enlightenment was nationalism, whose embryonic forms it failed to detect and whose demands it did not recognise. Another was social structure and change. The Enlightenment was not essentially an instrument of revolution; it bestowed its blessing on the existing order of society, appealing to an intellectual élite and an aristocracy of merit. While it was hostile to entrenched privilege and to inequality before the law, it had little to say on economic inequalities or on the redistribution of resources within society. It was for this reason that it could appeal to absolutists as well as to conservative democrats, while to those interested in colonial liberation it remained virtually silent.

The political and intellectual movements of the time were marked by diversity rather than unity. The concept of a single revolution inspired by democracy and nurtured on the Enlightenment does not do justice to the complexity of the period, nor does it discriminate sufficiently between minor currents of revolution and the great wave of change unleashed by the most powerful and radical movements of all. The age of revolution was that of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. The former, which started in Britain, was responsible for the growing economic ascendancy of the bourgeoisie in early nineteenth-century Europe, while the latter was responsible for its political preponderance. This 'dual revolution' was the key to historical change in the years between 1789 and 1848. 'If the economy of the nineteenth century world was formed mainly under the influence of the British Industrial Revolution, its politics and ideology were formed mainly by the French. Britain provided the model for its railways and factories, the economic explosive which cracked open

the traditional economic and social structures of the non-European world; but France made its revolution and gave them their ideas.³ Yet even this conceptual framework does not accommodate all the liberation movements of the time, and it cannot provide a precise place for the movement led by Bolívar.

The fact is that the revolutions for independence in Spanish America did not conform exactly to political or social trends in Europe. Even the most liberal thinkers were guarded in their response to the French Revolution. As Miranda observed in 1799, 'We have before our eyes two great examples, the American and the French Revolutions. Let us prudently imitate the first and carefully shun the second'.⁴ No doubt first impressions had raised greater hopes, and many young creoles were attracted by the ideas of liberty and equality and by the war against tyrants. But the more radical the French Revolution became the less it appealed to the creole elite. They saw it as a monster of extreme democracy and anarchy, which, if admitted into America, would destroy the social order which they knew. It was only indirectly and in terms of military and strategic consequences that events in France produced repercussions in Spanish America, first by drawing the hostility of Britain on France's ally Spain after 1796 and thus isolating the metropolis from its colonies, and then, in 1808, by precipitating a crisis of legitimacy and power in America when France invaded Spain and removed the Bourbons.

The influence of Britain also requires careful definition. It was from 1780 to 1800 that the industrial revolution became really effective and Britain experienced an unprecedented growth of trade, based mainly upon factory production in textiles. Virtually the only limit on the expansion of British exports was the purchasing power of their customers, and this depended on what they could earn from export to Britain. These factors help to explain the particular attraction of the Spanish American market. As there was little possibility of rival industrialisation among the impoverished people of the Hispanic world, it was a captive market. And although it produced only a limited range of commodity exports capable of earning returns in Britain, it had one vital medium of trade, silver. Britain therefore valued her trade with Spanish America and sought to expand it. The market was vulnerable to British penetration, especially in the event of international crisis, and the consumers were willing. During times of war with Spain, while the British navy blockaded Cadiz, British exports supplied the consequent shortages in the Spanish colonies. A new economic metropolis was displacing Spain in America. It would be an exaggeration to say that British trade undermined the Spanish empire, or that Spanish Americans took up arms only to end the Spanish monopoly. But the invidious contrast between Britain and Spain, between growth and stagnation, between strength and weakness, had a powerful effect on the minds of Spanish Americans. And there was a further psychological refinement. If a world power like Britain could lose the greater part of its American empire, by what right did Spain remain in the New World?

Yet the North American revolution found only a distant echo in the subcontinent. In the years around 1800, of course, the influence of the United States was exerted by its mere existence, and the close example of liberty and republicanism remained an active inspiration in Spanish America. The proclamations of the Continental Congress, the works of Thomas Paine, the speeches of John Adams, Jefferson and Washington all circulated among creoles, and many of the precursors and leaders of independence visited the United States and saw free institutions at first hand. But Spanish American independence was not a projection of the American Revolution, nor was there a direct influence from one to the other. North American government, especially federalism, drew a very mixed response from the new republics and was anathema to Bolívar.

The object of the present paper is to study the ideas and policy of Bolívar in the framework of the age of revolution. My purpose is to place his thought in a wider context, to view it against its historical background, and to observe it in action after 1810. In doing this I do not propose to relate Bolívar to individual thinkers or to specific movements. My intention is not to seek the origins of his thought, or to assess the political influences which the Enlightenment and the French Revolution may have exerted upon him, much less to measure the impulse given to events in the Hispanic world by revolutionary change outside.

We can obviously see in Bolívar varied evidence of the age in which he lived, of Enlightenment and democracy, of absolutism and even counter-revolution. According to Daniel Florence O'Leary, his aide and confidant, he was especially impressed by Hobbes and Spinoza, while he also studied Helvetius, Holbach and Hume.⁵ We know too that the works of Montesquieu and Rousseau left their imprint on him. But it does not follow that these thinkers exercised a precise or exclusive influence. Bolívar read widely in order to educate himself, to acquire knowledge in general rather than a specific programme. It is true that his reading of the philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a major and probably a preferred part of his education, but it seems more likely to have confirmed his scepticism than created it, to have enlarged his liberalism than implanted it. Precision in tracing ideological influences and intellectual causation is notoriously elusive, not least in a leader like Bolívar, whose ideas were a means to action and whose actions were based on many imperatives, political, military and financial, as well as intellectual. The temptation inherent in seeking intellectual origins and influences is to overemphasise those aspects in which the influence of the past is shown, and by linking a thinker too closely with his predecessors to obscure his real originality. Bolívar was not a mere creature of his age, not a slave to French or North American examples. His own revolution was unique, and in developing his ideas and his policies he followed not the models of the western world but the needs of his own America.

2

Revolutionary change in the period 1776-1848 was accompanied by criticism of the *ancien régime*. This tendency was reflected too in the thought of Bolívar. In the struggle between aristocracy and democracy, between monarchy and republic, between conservatism and liberalism, he was to be found on the side of enlightenment, invoking the favoured concepts of sovereignty of the people, natural rights, and equality, while defending 'constitution', 'law', and 'liberty', though his understanding of these things was not conventionally democratic. With the exception of the English version, he was critical of monarchy in general and particularly hostile to its adoption in Spanish America. 'I do not favour American monarchies', he said, and gave two reasons.⁶ Republics directed their energies to internal prosperity, not to expansion or conquest, whereas a king always sought to increase his power and wealth by increasing his territorial possessions, a reason which may have reflected his reading of the dynastic wars of the eighteenth century but which curiously ignored the record of the French republic. Secondly, he rejected constitutional monarchy, which he saw as a combination of aristocracy and democracy. Although Britain had achieved wealth and power with such a government, it was beyond the political capacities of Spanish Americans. If these were the only reasons for Bolívar's republicanism, it would lack credibility. His basic conviction, however, was that the sovereignty of the people and the right to freedom and equality could find expression only in a republic; this was an instinct rather than an argument.

The aristocratic concept of society drew less criticism from Bolívar. On more than one occasion he expressed great admiration for the English aristocracy and the House of Lords. 'Its aristocracy is immortal, indestructible, tenacious, and as durable as platinum'; above all it was useful and active in the service of arms, commerce, scholarship and politics.⁷ No doubt Bolívar's view of the English aristocracy was that of a distant observer and of one who had seen at closer quarters the Spanish court and nobility. The concept of *noblesse oblige*, moreover, was something which he envied for Spanish America. The *philosophes* had not been uniformly hostile to aristocracy (or indeed to monarchy), and like them Bolívar tended to take society as he found it. While he was socially aware, he was not a social revolutionary. He was a product and to some extent a spokesman of the landowning élite; in criticising the colonial monopoly and economic restrictions imposed by Spain, these were the interests which he voiced.⁸ Yet he did not identify completely with his class, and his political judgement was superior to that of the Venezuelan oligarchy. He realised that independence could not be won without gaining the support of the dispossessed and widening the social base of his following. So he sought a mean between aristocracy and anarchy. 'I imagine that in Lima the rich will not tolerate democracy, nor will the freed slaves and pardos accept aristocracy. The former will prefer the tyranny of a single man, to avoid the

tumult of rebellion and to provide at least a peaceful regime'.⁹ Independence, he argued, would have to avoid falling into 'demagogic anarchy or monocratic tyranny'.

The Church as well as the state had come under the scrutiny of the Enlightenment. Deistic and free-thinking writings, first introduced from England, acquired a new lease of life in France in the eighteenth century. When deism emerged into the open with the writings of Voltaire and the Encyclopedists, it was not a precise theology but a vague form of religion used as a sanction for politics and morals and a cover against the charge of atheism. The growth of scepticism in religion and the specifically anti-Christian offensive of the *philosophes* not only represented intellectual positions; they also supported proposals to increase the power of the state over the church and even to create a state religion which, however spurious, was regarded as necessary for public order and morals. Bolívar seems to have been marked by some of these influences, though whether they totally destroyed his belief it is impossible to say. He usually handled the subject of religion with caution, but beneath his outward observance there was an element of scepticism, and in private he ridiculed religion. Did he then reject the religion as well as the government of the *ancien régime*? According to O'Leary, an Irish Catholic, Bolívar was 'a complete atheist', who believed only that religion was necessary for government, and whose attendance at Mass was purely formal; this is corroborated by other evidence that the books which Bolívar read in church were not always religious.¹⁰ O'Leary also hints that Bolívar's tutor, Simón Rodríguez, had deliberately instilled in the young man a philanthropic and liberal view of life rather than a Christian one, and had introduced Bolívar to the works of eighteenth-century sceptics and materialists: 'Yet in spite of his scepticism and consequent irreligion, he always believed it necessary to conform to the religion of his fellow citizens'.¹¹

Bolívar, in other words, was too political to allow his basic objectives to be jeopardised by gratuitous anti-clericalism, much less by overt free-thinking. Whenever he rebuked the clergy it was for specific actions. The earthquake of 1812 was openly exploited by priests who preached against the republic, in Bolívar's view, 'sacrilegiously abusing the sanctity of their office', and displaying a fanaticism on behalf of the royalist cause out of pure opportunism.¹² On other occasions too he was angered by the royalism of the clergy. He subsequently did what he could to disestablish the church, but in a deeply Catholic society he had to move carefully. In his speech to the constituent congress of Bolivia he explained that his Bolivian Constitution excluded religion from any public role, and he came close to saying that it was a purely private concern, a matter of conscience, not of politics. He specifically declined to provide for an established church or a state religion: 'The sacred precepts and dogmas are useful, enlightening and metaphysical in their nature; we should profess them but this is a moral duty, not a political one'.¹³ The state should guarantee freedom of religion, without prescribing any particular religion. Bolívar thus defended

a view of toleration in which religion exists on its own strength and merits without the support of legal sanctions. He never subscribed to Rousseau's idea of a civil religion, designed for its social and political utility, and intended to take the place of existing churches. Bolívar was a man of ideas but he was also a realist; and we must leave the final word to him. During his last dictatorship he decreed specific measures – the imposition of Roman Catholic teaching in education and the restoration of dissolved religious houses – in favour of the traditional religion of Spanish America. On his death-bed he received the Last Sacraments and died a Catholic, in the Church 'in whose faith and belief I have lived'.¹⁴ Yet there are few traces of that belief in his political thought.

In the absence of strong religious motivation, Bolívar seems to have developed a philosophy of life based on utilitarianism. The evidence for this comes not simply from his formal contacts with James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, though these undoubtedly existed, but from his own writings, where the greatest happiness principle emerges as the driving force of politics. Spanish Americans, he argued, held unrealistic expectations of proceeding directly from servitude to freedom, from colony to independence. He attributed this to their eager search for happiness: 'In spite of the lessons of history, South Americans have sought to obtain liberal, even perfect institutions, doubtless out of that universal human instinct to aspire to the greatest possible happiness, which is bound to follow in civil societies founded on the principles of justice, liberty and equality'.¹⁵ A few years later, in his Angostura Address, he stated that 'the most perfect system of government is that which results in the greatest possible measure of happiness and the maximum of social security and political stability'.¹⁶ In 1822, writing to the vice-president of Colombia, Francisco de Paula Santander, at a time when there were fears that congress might revise the constitution of 1821, Bolívar observed: 'The sovereignty of the people is not unlimited, because justice is its base and perfect utility sets limits to it'.¹⁷ We may take this as further evidence that Bolívar was still following Bentham. Others went further; Santander and his liberal associates sought to incorporate Bentham's treatises into the study of law in Colombia, until their efforts were overtaken by a conservative reaction.

The works of Bentham came under attack from the clergy and other conservatives, and the materialism, scepticism and anti-clericalism of the English philosopher were declared harmful to the Catholic religion. Bolívar was forced into painful decisions. Convinced by now that the constitution and laws of Colombia were excessively liberal and threatened the dissolution of society and the state, and pressed by conservatives on the specific issue of Bentham, Bolívar had to take sides. In 1828 he forbade the teaching of Bentham's *Tratados de Legislación Civil y Penal* in the universities of Colombia.¹⁸ The attempt to assassinate him in September 1828 and the implication of university personnel in the conspiracy further convinced him that university students were being dangerously indoctrinated, and his government issued a circular on public

education (20 October 1828) denouncing the study of 'principles of legislation' by authors 'like Bentham and the others' and ordering that these courses be replaced by the study of the Roman Catholic religion. The period of his dictatorship, however, and the exceptional circumstances surrounding it are not the only test of Bolívar's political ideas, and the fact remains that he never abandoned his guiding principles.

Bolívar's basic objectives were liberation and independence, and his criticism of the *ancien régime* was conditioned by these. Liberty, he said, is 'the only object worth the sacrifice of a man's life'.¹⁹ But for Bolívar liberty did not mean simply freedom from the absolutist state of the eighteenth century, as it did for the Enlightenment, but freedom from a colonial power, to be followed by true independence under a liberal constitution. 'It is not enough that our armies be victorious and our enemies evicted, or that the whole world recognise our Independence; it is even more essential that we become free under the auspices of liberal laws, deriving from the most sacred source, namely the will of the people'.²⁰ The second stage would take more than one generation to accomplish. Meanwhile, as an immediate objective, he fought for liberation from Spain; this was a liberty with a dimension unknown to European thought.

European intellectuals and statesmen of the eighteenth century were blind to the existence of nationality as a historical force. The cosmopolitanism of the *philosophes* was hostile to national aspirations; the majority of these thinkers disliked national differences, ignored national sentiment, and seem to have been totally unaware of the possibility of new and embryonic nationalities or of any right of colonial independence. The English conservative theorist and statesman Edmund Burke came close to developing a theory of national self-determination, but he was far from admitting that colonists had rights to independence as a separate nation. Theory of nationality was taken further by Rousseau, who argued that if a nation did not have a national character it must be given one by appropriate institutions and education. Rousseau, moreover, was the leading intellectual defender of political freedom against the despotic monarchies of the eighteenth century. But even he did not apply his ideas to colonial peoples. And the fact remains that few of the eighteenth-century progressives were revolutionaries. Neither Montesquieu, nor Voltaire, nor Diderot went to the logical conclusion of advocating revolution; even Rousseau stopped short of sanctioning violent political change.

The Enlightenment, therefore, did not reach the point of applying the idea of freedom and equality to relations between peoples, and did not produce a concept of colonial liberation or war of independence. It needed the makers of North American and Spanish American independence to do this. In most parts of the Atlantic world post-Enlightenment liberalism was not in itself an effective agent of emancipation. Jeremy Bentham was one of the few reformist thinkers of the time to apply his ideas to colonies, to advocate independence as a general principle, and to

expose the contradiction inherent in regimes which practised liberalism at home and imperialism abroad. But Bentham was exceptional, and most liberals remained no less imperialist than conservatives. This need not surprise us if we remember that liberal political ideas tended to appeal to the new bourgeoisie, many of whom were involved in industry and trade, and were ready to promote formal or informal empire in order to secure captive markets. This is nowhere more clear than in the Cortes of Cadiz and the Spanish Constitution of 1812, which, under the influence of the business community of Cadiz as well as of Enlightenment ideas, firmly rejected any idea of independence for Spanish America.

Bolívar, therefore, could find little direct inspiration for ideas of emancipation either from European or from Hispanic sources. He was not, of course, the first to construct a justification of independence. In North America Richard Bland, John Adams, the declarations of the Continental Congress, and the Declaration of Independence itself had all made important contributions to the colonial debate. But Bolívar was convinced that North American experience was different from that of his own people and could not provide a useful model. He had to design his own theory of national self-determination, and this was a contribution to, not a mere copy from, the age of revolution.

Bolívar's theory of liberation is to be found mainly in his Jamaica Letter.²¹ This was an exercise in applied liberalism rather than a theoretical discourse, though we can observe certain political and moral assumptions – that people have natural rights, that they have a right to resist oppression, that nationalism has its own imperatives, that deprivation of office and of economic freedom justifies rebellion. He began by arguing that the unjust policy and oppressive practice of Spain severed the ties with America and authorised the sixteen million Americans to defend their rights, the more so when counter-revolution brought increased oppression. These rights were natural rights, granted by God and nature. It was true that 'a principle of affinity' had bound Americans to Spain, and this could be seen in the enduring habit of obedience, community of interest, of understanding and of religion, mutual goodwill and, on the part of Americans, a regard for the birthplace of their forbears. But all these bonds were broken, as affinity changed to alienation and the elements of community turned into their opposites and became – though Bolívar did not use the word – signs of incipient nationalism. But there were problems of identity. Americans by birth, they were neither Indian nor European, but in an ambiguous position between usurped and usurpers. And under Spanish rule their political role was purely passive: 'America was denied not only its freedom but even an active and effective tyranny'. Most despotic rulers, he argued, at least had an organised system of oppression in which subordinate agents participated at various levels of administration. But under Spanish absolutism Americans were not allowed to exercise any functions of government or even of internal administration. Thus, he concluded, they were not only deprived of their rights but kept in a state of political infancy.

Bolívar then proceeded to give significant examples of inequality and discrimination, arguing that Americans were deprived in particular of economic opportunity and public office. Americans were destined by Spain to be a source of labour and a consumer market. They were not allowed to compete with Spain and supply themselves, either in agricultural products or manufactured goods. They were allowed to be no more than producers of raw materials and precious metals, and the export of even these was controlled by the Spanish trading monopoly. Moreover, he added, this applied 'today, and perhaps to a greater extent than ever before', an observation which modern research confirms, showing as it does that by *comercio libre* Spain sought to expand its colonial trade and channel it more effectively through the peninsular monopolists. The new imperialism of the Bourbons also sought to restore to Spain domination over appointments. Bolívar states that Americans were barred from senior offices and prevented from acquiring any experience in government and administration. 'We were never viceroys or governors, save in the rarest of cases; seldom archbishops or bishops; never diplomats; among the military only subordinates... In brief, we were neither magistrates nor financiers and seldom merchants.' Recent research concludes that Americans received public office (mainly through purchase) in considerable numbers in 1650-1750 but were then restricted in a 'Spanish reaction' which Bolívar himself probably observed. Bolívar went further. He maintained that Americans possessed 'constitutional rights' to public offices, deriving from a pact between Charles V and the conquerors and settlers, whereby in return for their own enterprise and risks they received lordship over land and administration. As history the idea is questionable, but there is a contractual concept embedded in the argument which Bolívar sought to transplant in American soil.

In the Jamaica Letter Bolívar consciously saw himself on the side of change against tradition, in favour of revolution against conservatism. It is characteristic of civil wars, he argues, to form two parties, 'conservatives and reformers'. The former are commonly the more numerous, because the weight of habit induces obedience to established powers; the latter are always fewer in number although more vocal and learned, so numbers are counterbalanced by moral force. Polarisation causes prolonged conflict, but he continues the struggle in hope, because in the war of independence the masses are following the reformers. The international situation, too, he saw in terms of division between conservatism and liberalism, between the Holy Alliance and, in effect, Great Britain. Speaking of America's isolation (in 1815) and the need for a sympathetic ally, he wrote: 'As soon as we are strong and under the guidance of a liberal nation which will lend us her protection, we will achieve accord in cultivating the virtues and talents that lead to glory'.

Bolívar's view of the old regime and of revolutionary change was not that of a European or a North American, and there were basic limitations on the extent to which outside models could serve him. He lived in a world

with a different history, capacity and social organisation, and worked among a people with different expectations. Political solutions and modes of government, he appreciated, must conform to American conditions and satisfy American needs. The government of Colombia, he thought, must be based 'on our own customs, our own religion and our own habits, and finally on our own origins and history. The laws enacted for Colombia have not had a salutary effect, for they are derived from foreign sources, entirely alien to our conditions'. The First Venezuelan Republic fell, he argued, because its government ignored the characteristics of the people; other imitations would fare equally badly. Americans were used to tyranny and accepted it, but they were ignorant of freedom, and it would be difficult to change this habit. 'The vestiges of Spanish domination will long be with us...the contagion of despotism infects the atmosphere about us'.²² He therefore specifically rejected French and North American models and recommended instead an adapted version of the British constitution, unperturbed apparently by the unreformed state of the latter and the criticisms levelled against it by *philosophes* and radicals alike. Such a compromise would admit freedom and keep anarchy at bay, and this was what he wanted for America.

3

Bolívar believed in liberty and equality, and these were the foundations of his revolution. From Montesquieu he inherited a hatred of despotism and a belief in moderate constitutional government, in the separation of powers and the rule of law. But liberty in itself is not the key to his political system. Indeed he distrusted theoretical concepts of liberty, and his hatred of tyranny did not lead him to the glorification of anarchy. 'Abstract theories create the pernicious idea of unlimited freedom', he said, and he was convinced that absolute liberty invariably deteriorated into absolute power. His search for freedom therefore was a search for equilibrium, and for what he called practical liberty, or social liberty, a mean between the rights of the individual and the needs of society. This was secured essentially by the administration of justice and the rule of law, so that the just and weak could live without fear, and merit and virtue could receive their due reward.²³ He believed, with Rousseau, that only the law can be sovereign, and law is the result not of divine or despotic authority but of human will and the sovereignty of the people.

Equality too was a right and an objective. There were two senses of equality in Bolívar's political thought. First, equality of Americans with Spaniards, of Venezuela with Spain. This equality was absolute, and was the basis of his argument for independence. Secondly, equality between Americans. European political theorists wrote for communities of relative social homogeneity and appealed to fairly distinct classes, such as the petty bourgeoisie favoured by Rousseau. Bolívar had no such advantage. He had to begin with more complex human material and to legislate for a society with a peculiar racial formation. Americans, he was never tired of saying, were neither European nor indigenous people but a mixture of Spanish, Africans and Indians. 'All differ visibly in the colour of their skin, a difference which places upon us an obligation of the greatest importance'.²⁴ This obligation was to correct the disparity imposed by nature and inheritance, by making men equal before the law and the constitution. 'Men are born with equal rights to share the benefits of society', he observed, but obviously they do not possess equal talents, virtue, intelligence and strength. This physical, moral and intellectual inequality must be corrected by laws, so that the individual may enjoy political and social equality; thus by education and other opportunities an individual may gain the equality denied him by nature. It was Bolívar's opinion that 'the fundamental basis of our political system turns directly and exclusively upon the establishment and practice of equality in Venezuela'.²⁵ And he explicitly denied that this was inspired by France or North America, where in his opinion equality had not been a political dogma. The logic of his own principles led him to conclude that the greater the social inequality, the greater the need for legal equality. Among the practical steps which he envisaged was the extension of free public education to all the people and particular reforms

for those sectors who were especially disadvantaged, such as the landless and the slaves.

Liberty and equality, these were the essential objectives. But how could they be realised without sacrificing security, property and stability, those other rights by which society protected the persons and possessions of its citizens? In principle Bolívar was a democrat and he believed that government should be responsible to the people: 'only the majority is sovereign; he who takes the place of the people is a tyrant and his power is usurpation'.²⁶ But Bolívar was not so idealist as to imagine that America was ready for pure democracy, or that the law could instantly annul inequalities of nature and society. 'Complete liberty and absolute democracy are but reefs upon which all republican hopes have foundered'.²⁷ He spent his whole political career developing his principles and applying them to American conditions in his own version of the age of revolution.

4

The Cartagena Manifesto, the first major statement of Bolívar's ideas, analysed the failings of the First Republic and probed its political assumptions.²⁸ He poured scorn on the adoption of a constitution so ill-adapted to the character of the people. Popular elections, he maintained, allowed the ignorant and ambitious to have their say and placed government in the hands of inept and immoral men who introduced the spirit of faction. Elections gave birth to parties, parties caused divisions, and divisions 'led us back into slavery'.²⁹ People so young, so innocent of representative government and of education, could not be immediately transformed into democracies; their system of government could not advance beyond social realities. He insisted on unity and centralisation; a 'terrible power' was needed to defeat the royalists, and constitutional susceptibilities were irrelevant until peace and happiness were restored. This was the beginning of his permanent opposition to federalism, which he regarded as weak and complex, when America needed strength and unity.

Six years later, with further campaigns behind him and the liberation of Venezuela and New Granada still to be completed, he called a national congress which met at Angostura on 15 February 1819, and to which he presented a plan of a constitution.³⁰ His Angostura Address described an ideal democratic republic in the exact mould of the age of revolution:

Venezuela, on breaking with Spain, has recovered her independence, her freedom, her equality, and her national sovereignty. By establishing a democratic republic, she has abolished monarchy, distinction, nobility, prerogatives, and privileges. She has declared for the rights of man and freedom of action, thought, speech, and the press.³¹

These 'eminently liberal acts', as he called them, were possible because only in democracy was absolute liberty assured. But was this practicable? Democracy, he admitted, does not necessarily guarantee power, prosperity and permanence of a state. The federal system in particular makes for weak and divided government. It may be appropriate for the people of North America, who were raised on liberty and political virtues, but 'it has never for a moment entered my mind to compare the position and character of two states as dissimilar as the Anglo-American and the Spanish American. It would be more difficult to apply to Venezuela the political system of the United States than it would be to apply to Spain that of England'.

Laws, remarked Montesquieu, should be suited to the people for whom they are made. Rousseau maintained even more explicitly that constitutions must take account of national character. Bolívar was no less insistent: constitutions must conform to the environment, character,

history and resources of the people. 'This is the code we must consult, not the code of Washington'. So Bolívar still sought something corresponding to Spanish American reality, not a North American imitation. Spanish American reality was revealed in two aspects. The starting point was the socio-racial structure. Speaking of Venezuela, he observed: 'The diversity of social origin will require an infinitely firm hand and great tactfulness in order to manage this heterogeneous society, whose complex mechanism is easily impaired, separated, and disintegrated by the slightest controversy'. Secondly, the legislators would have to have regard for political experience and capacity. While Greece, Rome, France, England and North America all have something to teach in matters of law and government, yet he reminded them that the excellence of a government lies not in its theories or its forms, but in its being suited to the nature and character of the nation for which it is instituted. Basically he was a pragmatist: 'Do not adopt the best system of government, but the one that is most likely to succeed'.³²

Rather than build upon French or North American models, Bolívar recommended British experience, though cautioning against slavish imitation and any adoption of monarchy. With these qualifications, the British constitution seemed to be the one most likely to bring about 'the greatest possible good' for those who adopted it. It recognised popular sovereignty, division and balance of powers, civil liberty, freedom of conscience and of the press, and he recommended it as 'the most worthy to serve as a model for those who desired to enjoy the rights of man and all political happiness compatible with our fragile nature'. He began with a legislature modelled on the British Parliament, with two chambers, one a house of elected representatives, the other a hereditary senate. The latter, he thought, would remain independent of popular and government pressures, and would protect the people against themselves. The senators would not be an aristocracy or a body of privilege, but an élite of virtue and wisdom produced not by electoral chance but by an enlightened education, specially designed for this vocation. Like the House of Lords in England, the Venezuelan senate would be 'a bulwark of liberty'. Yet the legislature, distinguished though it was, should not usurp power which properly belonged to the executive. Bolívar's executive, though elected, was powerful and centralised, virtually a king with the name of president. Again he looked to the British model, a strong executive at the head of government and the armed forces, but accountable to parliament which had legislative functions and financial control. 'A perfect model for a kingdom, for an aristocracy, or for a democracy'. Give Venezuela such an executive power in the person of the president chosen by the people or their representatives, he advised, and you will have taken a great step towards national happiness. Add to this an independent judiciary and happiness would be complete, or almost complete, for Bolívar had a further proposal.

To these three classical powers, Bolívar added a fourth of his own design, the *poder moral*, which would be responsible for training people in public spirit and political virtue. This idea was badly conceived and met

with no response from his contemporaries, but it was typical of his search for a political education for his people, which he regarded as so important that it needed an institution to promote it. Was not the whole Angostura project anti-democratic? On the subject of the British constitution Bolívar parted company from the *philosophes*, among whom there was a strong bias against English politics for their corruption and unrepresentativeness, and from Rousseau too, who criticised the English system of government because parliament was independent of its constituents. The hereditary senate, one of the most controversial of all Bolívar's ideas, was an attempt to set a restraint on absolute democracy, which could be as tyrannical as any despot, but this transplanting of the English House of Lords to America – breaking his own 'American reality' principle – would simply have confirmed and prolonged the seigniorial social structure of Venezuela. The Congress of Angostura adopted a constitution embodying many of Bolívar's ideas, though not the hereditary senate or the moral power. But the new constitution was pure theory, for the war had still to be won.

Once the liberation of New Granada and Venezuela was complete, a congress was held in Cúcuta in 1821 to endow the new state of Colombia with a constitution. This created a strongly centralist state, a greater Colombia, comprising Venezuela, New Granada and Quito, the latter still to be liberated, united under a single government with its capital in Bogotá. It was a conservative constitution, favouring the president over the legislature, and restricting the franchise to literates who had real property valued at a hundred pesos. But it was not without liberal content and it guaranteed the classical freedoms. Indeed Bolívar came to believe that it guaranteed too much freedom.

After the liberation of Upper Peru, Bolívar was asked to draw up a constitution for Bolivia. In the last years of his life he was haunted by America's need for strong government, and it was in this frame of mind that, in 1826, he drafted the Bolivian constitution. His lifelong search for a balance between tyranny and anarchy now moved unerringly towards authority. As O'Leary explained, 'He sought a system capable of controlling revolutions, not theories which might foment them; the fatal spirit of ill-conceived democracy which had already produced so many evils in America had to be curbed if its effects were to be avoided'.³³

The new constitution preserved division of powers – legislative, executive, and judicial – and to these he added an elective power, by which groups of citizens in each province chose an elector, and the electing body then chose representatives and nominated mayors and justices. The legislative power was divided into three bodies – tribunes, senators and censors, all elected. The tribunes initiated finance and major policy issues; the senators were guardians of law and ecclesiastical patronage; and the censors were responsible for the preservation of civil liberties, culture and the constitution – a revival of his previous notion of a 'moral power'.

The president was appointed by the legislature for life and had the right to appoint his successor; this Bolívar regarded as 'the most sublime inspiration of republican ideas', the president being 'the sun which, fixed in its orbit, imparts life to the universe'.³⁴ The president appointed the vice president, who held the office of prime minister and would, in the absence of the president, succeed the latter in office. Thus 'elections would be avoided, which are the greatest scourge of republics and produce only anarchy'. This was the measure of his disillusion seven years after 1819 when, at Angostura, he had declared: 'The continuation of authority in the same individual has frequently meant the end of democratic governments. Repeated elections are essential in proper systems of government'.

The rest of the constitution was not devoid of liberal details. It provided for civil rights – liberty, equality, security and property – and for a strong, independent judicial power. It abolished social privileges and it declared the slaves free. Bolívar himself claimed that the constitutional limitations on the president were 'the closest ever known', restricted as he was by his ministers, who in turn were responsible to the censors and scrutinised by the legislators. But this constitution was branded by its executive power, by the life president with right to choose his successor. It was this which outraged many Americans, conservatives as well as liberals. But Bolívar regarded this constitution as 'the ark of the covenant, an alliance between Europe and America, between soldier and civilian, between democracy and aristocracy, between imperialism and republicanism'.³⁵ And he claimed that 'in it are combined all the advantages of federalism, all the strength of centralised government, all the stability of monarchical regimes'.³⁶ Indeed the life-term presidency was a source of particular pride and he considered it superior to hereditary monarchy, for the president appointed his successor (the vice-president), who was thus a ruler by merit and not by hereditary right. According to O'Leary, far from endangering freedom, the Bolivian Constitution was a great defence and guarantor of freedom, freedom from anarchy and revolution. This could be seen in the address accompanying the Constitution: 'the one who wrote it fought for the cause of liberty from his study with extraordinary eloquence, after having been its most renowned champion on the field of battle'.³⁷

The Bolivian Constitution should also be judged in terms of function. Bolívar never saw liberty as an end in itself. For him there was always a further question, freedom for what? He did not regard the role of government as purely passive, defending rights, preserving privileges, exercising patronage. Government existed to maximise human happiness, and its function was to make policy as well as to satisfy interests. An active government had to be strong and free from constraints. New countries had a special need of strong government as an effective instrument of reform.

5

Bolívar conceived the American revolution as more than a struggle for political independence. He saw it also as a great social movement, which would improve as well as liberate, and would respond to the radical as well as the liberal demands of the age. Bolivarian reformism operated within the existing structure of society and did not attempt to advance beyond what was politically possible. But for the beneficiaries it promised significant change.

The Constitution of 1811 was egalitarian in the sense that it abolished all *fueros* and all legal expressions of socio-racial discrimination. It confirmed the suppression of the slave trade, but it preserved slavery. This was a political as well as a moral weakness. The defeats of 1812 and 1814 were due in part to the ability of the royalists to rally slaves and pardos (mulattos) against the republicans, whom they identified with the slave-owning creole landowners. Bolívar quickly saw the need of fusing the creole, pardo and slave rebellions into one great movement. He considered himself free of racial prejudice and one who fought for liberty and equality. This was the essence of independence: 'Legal equality is indispensable where physical inequality prevails'. The revolution would correct the imbalance imposed by nature and colonialism: previously 'the whites, by virtue of talent, merit and fortune, monopolised everything. The pardos, degraded to the most humiliating condition, had nothing.... But the revolution has granted them every privilege, every right, every advantage'.³⁸ So Bolívar denounced and executed the pardo General Manuel Piar for inciting race war at a time when equality was already being granted to the coloured people. The measured programme of reform under creole control was threatened by total subversion of the existing order, which, in the absence of ideas, experience and organisation among the pardos, could only lead to anarchy. While it was essential to widen the basis of the revolution, this did not involve destroying the existing leadership: 'Who are the authors of the revolution? Are they not whites, the wealthy, the aristocracy and even the militia chiefs? What principles have these caudillos of the revolution proclaimed? The decrees of the republic are eternal monuments of justice and liberalism...liberty even for the slaves who were previously the property of the same leaders'.³⁹ But the problem of race was not so easily resolved.

Bolívar was an abolitionist, but he was not the first in Venezuela. The republican conspiracy of Manuel Gual and José María España in 1797 proposed that 'slavery be immediately abolished as contrary to humanity', though it linked abolition with service in the revolutionary militia and with employment by the old master. The support of the Enlightenment was purely theoretical. From Montesquieu onwards the *philosophes* denounced slavery as useless and uneconomical as well as evil, but they did not make a crusade of abolition. No doubt Bolívar was also aware of contemporary movements in England and France, inspired as they were by humanitarian

ideals and religious convictions. But the prime inspiration for his anti-slavery initiative seems to have been his own innate sense of justice. He regarded it as 'madness that a revolution for liberty should try to maintain slavery'.⁴⁰ His own instincts were reinforced by events. The Haitian President Pétion's practical assistance drew from him a commitment to abolition, while his growing need for troops from a broader social base led him to tie emancipation to conscription. Decrees of 2 June and 21 June 1816 proclaimed the freedom of the slaves on condition that they joined the republican forces.⁴¹ The response was negative. He liberated his own slaves, first on condition of military service in 1814, when about fifteen accepted, then unconditionally in 1821 when over a hundred profited.⁴² Few hacendados followed his example, and the slaves themselves were hardly more enthusiastic. The Liberator believed that 'the slaves have lost even the desire to be free', but the truth was that the slaves did not wish to exchange one form of servitude for another and were not interested in fighting the creoles' war. Bolívar continued to argue that the creole rulers and property-owners must accept the implications of the revolution, that the example of freedom was 'insistent and compelling', and that the republicans 'must triumph by the road of revolution and no other'.⁴³ But the delegates at Angostura were afraid to unleash the slaves into free society, and after 1819 proprietors brought an end to wartime manumission, small though this had been. Yet the problem would not go away, and Bolívar realised that it was impossible to return to pre-war conditions, that it could no longer be a question of resisting slave expectations but of controlling and directing them.

The post-war Congress of Cúcuta passed a complex law of manumission (21 July 1821), allowing for liberation of adult slaves; but it lacked teeth and depended for its operation on compensation financed from taxes, including death duties, levied on property owners.⁴⁴ The Cúcuta law also provided for the freeing of all children subsequently born to slaves, on condition that each child worked for his mother's owner until the age of eighteen. Thus liberation was thwarted by fear of economic and social consequences, and the law was weighted in favour of proprietors. O'Leary remarks that the laws of 1821 'did not satisfy Bolívar, who at all times pleaded for the absolute and unconditional abolition of slavery'.⁴⁵ In practical terms he alone could not overcome the obstacles to abolition. His decree of 28 June 1827 reorganised the administration of the law but did not basically improve things. Some observers believed that in 1827 he agreed with Venezuela's rulers not to press for abolition.⁴⁶ But Bolívar's last word on slavery is to be found not in a decree but in a constitution, that constitution which he regarded as Spanish America's last hope for peace and stability. The Bolivian Constitution declared the slaves free, and although the proprietors contrived to evade his intentions, Bolívar's plea for absolute and unconditional abolition was uncompromising. Slavery, he declared, was the negation of all law, a violation of human dignity and of the sacred doctrine of equality, and an outrage to reason as well as to justice.⁴⁷ Bolívar's kinship with the age of revolution was unbroken.

6

The Indians of Colombia and Peru, unlike the Negroes and pardos, were not at the centre of Bolívar's preoccupations, but he was affected by their condition and determined to improve it. His Indian policy conformed closely to the principles of contemporary liberalism, designed as it was to individualise community land. Whether this policy was directly beholden to 'French Revolutionary and Benthamite doctrines' is less certain.⁴⁸ There was an element of improvisation in Bolívar's Indian policy which is difficult to reconcile with particular doctrines. At its most extreme the white liberal view of the Indians was that they should be hispanicised and if possible legislated out of existence by declaring them free of tribute and giving them private property in land. The Congress of Cúcuta issued a law (11 October 1821) abolishing the tribute and all unpaid labour services, and making the Indians subject to the same taxes as other citizens. Application of the law was delayed in Ecuador, for tribute from the Indian majority was regarded by Bolívar as too important for the war effort in Peru to be relinquished. The vital issue, however, was not tribute but land.

The object was to make the Indian an independent individualist, instead of a protected peasant. Bolívar decreed (20 May 1820) the restoration of *resguardo* land in Cundinamarca to the Indians and its distribution to individual families; Indians were not to be employed without a formal wage.⁴⁹ In the following months he received a series of complaints from Indians that, far from benefiting from the decree, they were defrauded of their rightful property and banished to marginal lands. Bolívar confirmed his previous orders and hoped for the best. The law of 11 October 1821 ordered the liquidation of the *resguardo* system; it declared the Indians 'restored' to their rights, and assigned *resguardo* land hitherto held in common to individual families in full ownership; this was to be done within five years. It was hoped that the Indians would become good property owners, agriculturalists and tax-payers. But the state did not have the means or the will to supply the infrastructure of agrarian reform, and it succeeded only in disrupting Indian community work and organisation which had depended on communal ownership, and soon the *resguardos* came to be irretrievably alienated.

Bolívar sought to use his power in Peru from 1823 to inject further social and agrarian content into the revolution. His object here, as in Colombia, was to abolish the system of community landholding and to distribute the land to the Indians in individual ownership. There was a previous model for such legislation in a scheme inspired by the Spanish Cortes of 1812 and formulated by Viceroy Abascal in 1814.⁵⁰ The plan was not put into effect, but it was evidently drawn from the same common stock of liberal thinking which animated Bolívar ten years later.

His decree of 8 April 1824, issued in Trujillo, was intended primarily to promote agricultural production and raise revenue, but it also had social implications. The decree ordered that all state lands be offered for sale at one-third of the price of their real value. These were not to include lands in the possession of Indians, who were to be declared proprietors, with right to sell or alienate their lands in any way they wished; the Indian community lands were to be distributed among the landless occupants, especially to families, who were to be entitled to full legal ownership of their portions; and he insisted that no Indian should remain without land.⁵¹ But this attempt to turn the Indian peasantry into independent farmers was frustrated by landlords, caciques and officials, and in the following year at Cuzco Bolívar was obliged to issue a further decree (4 July 1825), reaffirming and clarifying the first.⁵² This restored Indian land confiscated after the rebellion of 1814, ordered the distribution of community lands, regulated the method of distribution to include irrigation rights, and declared that the right freely to alienate their lands should not be exercised until after 1850, presumably in the belief that by then the Indians would have made sufficient progress to enable them to defend their interests. Bolívar supplemented these decrees with other measures designed to free the Indians from longstanding discrimination and in particular from labour services.⁵³ He also abolished the hated tribute, but this was not uniformly observed, opponents arguing, with some insincerity, that the Indians lost by fiscal equality.

The Indian decrees of Bolívar were limited in scope and misguided in intent. As the great haciendas already occupied most of the best land in Peru, these measures simply made the Indians more vulnerable, for to give them land without capital, equipment and protection was to invite them to become indebted to more powerful landowners, to surrender their land in payment, and to end up in debt peonage. And as the communities crumbled, the haciendas were waiting to sweep up the fragments of Indian society: the new policy gave them an added supply of cheap labour, while the colonial labour and tenancy forms, perpetuated by the republican regime, guaranteed its subordination. Bolívar's policy was not informed by deep understanding of Indian problems, only by ardent liberal ideals and passionate sympathy. 'The poor Indians are truly in a state of lamentable depression. I intend to help them all I can, first as a matter of humanity, second because it is their right, and finally because doing good costs nothing and is worth much'.⁵⁴ But doing good was not enough, or not well defined, and the humanitarianism of the age of revolution was not in itself beneficial to Andean communities.

7

The economic thought of Bolívar favoured development within a new liberal framework, but his policy was frustrated by post-war conditions and by powerful interest groups. A stagnant agriculture and inadequate revenue were his major difficulties. These were the same problems with which the Physiocrats were concerned in the previous century. According to them, agriculture was the only economic activity which produced a net revenue, and so they favoured the promotion of a capitalist agriculture in place of small-scale farming. This involved the abolition of restrictions on the internal movement and export of agricultural products which depressed prices. It also meant the suppression of feudal privileges and reform of taxation, so that cultivators were not squeezed of their economic surplus and therefore disinclined to invest. The second source of economic liberalism was Adam Smith, who argued that existing restrictions resulted in the wrong distribution of resources, that is, away from agriculture. He therefore advocated free trade and a general programme of economic liberalism to remove restrictions on labour and land. A more immediate impetus to Bolívar's economic ideas was given by his own observation of the colonial economy and his opposition to the Spanish monopoly.

Do you wish to know what our future was? We were mere consumers, confined to the cultivation of indigo, grain, coffee, sugar, cacao and cotton; raising cattle on the empty plains; hunting wild game in the wilderness; mining in the earth to produce gold for the insatiable greed of Spain.⁵⁵

Experience and enlightenment coincided to produce in Bolívar a belief in agricultural development, free trade, and the benefits of foreign investment. He was satisfied with a primary export role for Spanish America and was not unduly concerned for the survival of artisan industries or the achievement of economic self-sufficiency. But he was not a slave to economic liberalism and was never doctrinaire. He envisaged a larger and more positive role for the state than classical liberalism allowed, and to this extent he showed his awareness of the particular problems of underdevelopment. In the case of Colombia these were aggravated by a decade of destruction.

War and revolution added further burdens to an already feeble economy. Drift of labour, loss of animals, flight of capital, all reduced Venezuela and New Granada to new levels of depression and added to the problems of planners. Republican legislation guaranteed freedom of agriculture, industry and commerce without monopoly restrictions, and the government confined itself to providing the conditions in which private enterprise could operate. This was the theory. In practice *laissez-faire* had to be modified. Agriculture needed protection and encouragement. Bolívar urged Congress to prohibit the export of livestock in order to build

up the national herds. He also wanted to free agriculture of the heavy duties imposed by the colonial regime, and he decreed the removal of tithes and export taxes. The Congress of Cúcuta (1821) abolished internal customs barriers, the alcabala, and entails. But the fiscal system tended to revert to its colonial state, as more taxes were restored to finance the war effort and the post-war administration. The alcabala was revived in 1826, and its reduction from 5 to 4 per cent in 1828 was regarded as a concession designed to make Venezuelan exports more competitive.⁵⁶ The alcohol estanco, abolished in 1826, was re-established in 1828; and the colonial tobacco monopoly continued as a major revenue until its abolition in 1850.

It was clear to Bolívar that the surplus from agriculture, above all in the export sector, was not being reinvested in production. The tobacco revenue in particular was used as an all-purpose fund to meet an endless series of expenses. Bolívar was concerned that none of the profits of tobacco were being ploughed back into production. As his finance minister Rafael Revenga observed: 'far from thriving, the revenue will suffer if, instead of the income being used to promote production, as the Liberator has so often and urgently ordered, it is diverted to expenditure elsewhere'.⁵⁷

In the absence of domestic accumulation, Bolívar looked abroad, and he made it known that foreign capital, entrepreneurs, and immigrants were welcome in the new republics. Few of these, however, were attracted to agriculture, and capital tended to concentrate in abortive mining projects. Bolívar had liberal ideas on immigration, and there were many colonisation and land company schemes in New Granada and Venezuela, but these foundered on the greed of entrepreneurs, who sought quick profits, and the reluctance of European immigrants to come as labourers.⁵⁸ Immigration policy contained glaring contradictions, not all of Bolívar's making. There was already a mass of landless peasants and llaneros in Colombia, but the state failed to implement adequately Bolívar's cherished scheme of land distribution. The landowning class, on the other hand, or some of it, received the further advantage of agricultural loans from the government.

Independence ended the Spanish colonial monopoly, but foreign trade continued to be subject to restrictions, and there was nothing approaching true free trade. The tariff of 1826 imposed duties ranging from 7½ per cent to 36 per cent on most imports; this was primarily a revenue tariff but it also had a protective content to satisfy national economic interests; and state monopolies were protected by prohibition of the import of foreign tobacco and salt. There were also some export duties for revenue purposes, though the country's export trade was hardly flourishing enough to sustain them. Colombia's production pattern remained the same; the principal items were coffee, cacao, tobacco, dyewoods and hides, with sugar and cotton on a smaller scale. The agriculturalists of northern New Granada, like those of coastal Venezuela, demanded and received

protection for their plantation products. But the weaker wheat producers of the interior were not so protected against United States flour. And all agricultural production suffered from lack of investment capital, shortage of labour, poor communications and low prices on the international market. Bolívar soon realised that the economic problems of independence were more intractable than the military ones.

The manufacturing sector was even more vulnerable than agriculture and could offer little resistance to British competition. Industries such as textiles could not compete with the flood of cheaper foreign goods, and Colombian industry now entered a period of crisis. The result was a further expansion of imports, while exports were confined to a moderate output of gold and silver from New Granada and a small trade in plantation products, chiefly cacao, tobacco and coffee. The trade gap was bridged by illegal export of precious metals and by foreign borrowings, the latter procured in adverse conditions, badly employed, and unreliably serviced. This eventually led to a limitation of imports by natural process.

In these conditions there was some reaction against the early optimism of free trade opinion towards ideas of protection and state intervention, as could be seen in the thought of Juan García del Río and José Rafael Revenga, though protection in itself could do little for Colombia without the growth of consumers and the development of labour, capital and skill. Revenga, the economist most closely associated with Bolívar, attributed the decadence of industry in Venezuela to

the excessive import of many articles which were previously produced by poor families here.... Foreign soap, for example, has destroyed the various soap factories which we formerly had in the interior. And now we even take candles from abroad, retailed at eight per real, and the few that are still made in this country actually import their wicks from abroad.... It is notorious that the more we rely on foreign interests to supply our needs, the more we diminish our national independence; and our reliance now even extends to daily and vital needs.⁵⁹

Revenga appreciated that Venezuela was not in a position to industrialise: 'Our country is essentially agricultural; it will develop mining before manufactures; but it must strive to diminish its present dependence on foreign powers'.⁶⁰ Bolívar was not unaware of the protectionist argument, coming as it did from Páez in Venezuela, manufacturers in New Granada, and the textile industry of Ecuador. To some extent he responded. The tendency of his tariff policy was towards higher duties, though these had a revenue as well as a protectionist purpose. And in 1829 he prohibited the import of certain foreign textiles.

In the thought of Bolívar, however, there was little sign of that nationalist reaction to foreign penetration which later generations felt. While he rejected the Spanish economic monopoly, he welcomed foreigners who

subscribed to open trade, who brought much needed manufactured goods and entrepreneurial skills, and who acquired an interest in preserving independence. Bolívar wanted yet feared British protection, sought yet avoided dependency. With a British alliance the new republics could survive; without it they would perish. By accepting British dominance, he argued, they could then grow strong and break free from it. 'We must bind ourselves body and soul to the English, to preserve at least the form of a legal and civil government, for to be governed by the Holy Alliance would mean a rule by conquerors and a military government'.⁶¹ His language became even more deferential. 'Politically', he wrote, 'alliance with Great Britain would be a greater victory than Ayacucho, and if we procure it you may be certain that our future happiness is assured. The advantages that will result for Colombia, if we ally ourselves with that mistress of the universe, are incalculable'.⁶² It made sense, of course, for a young and weak state to acquire a protector – and a liberal protector – against the Holy Alliance, especially as Britain itself had no political pretensions in Spanish America. But while it was expressed in political terms, dependence could also have an economic application.

Bolívar was prepared to invite a greater British economic presence in Latin America than later generations would find acceptable.

Here [Peru], I have sold the mines for two and a half million pesos, and I expect to obtain far more from other sources. I have suggested to the Peruvian government that it sell in England all its mines, lands, properties and other government assets to cover the national debt, which is at least 20 million pesos.⁶³

British participation in the post-independence economies was considered essential and beneficial to both sides. The alternative, in Bolívar's view, was isolation and stagnation. This is not to say that he was complacent. He certainly saw the flaws in the Venezuelan economy and deplored the incipient trend towards monoculture. He believed that it was necessary to diversify production and to expand the range of exports. Venezuela depended too much, he argued, on coffee, whose price declined inexorably throughout the 1820s and, in his view, would never improve. 'We must diversify or perish', he concluded.⁶⁴ Bolívar accepted the bias towards primary exports and simply sought to make it yield better results. There was a place for Spanish America in the age of industrial revolution, though it was necessarily a subordinate place, exchanging raw materials for manufactured goods and fulfilling a role conforming to its stage of development.

8

Spanish American independence did not resemble revolutionary movements in Europe. These reflected conditions and claims which were appropriate to themselves but had only limited application to the political, social and economic problems of America. The European Enlightenment and its liberal aftermath were too self-absorbed to offer political ideas or services to colonial peoples. The economic interests of industrial Europe, being those of a metropolis, involved some opportunities for primary producers but also disadvantages; and if industrialisation was a medium of social change in western Europe, it played no such role in early nineteenth-century Spanish America, whose concern was to strengthen the traditional export sector – and with it the landed oligarchy – in order to import manufactures made by others. For these reasons Bolívar, who in many respects had a deep affinity with the age of revolution, could not imitate its intellectual and political leaders even had he wished. ‘Colombia is not France, and I am not Napoleon’, he said.⁶⁵ While the Enlightenment confirmed his attachment to reason and inspired his struggle for liberty and equality, he had to employ his own intellectual resources to fashion a theory of colonial emancipation, and then to find the appropriate limits for liberty and equality, and in that process we can see traces of enlightened absolutism as well as of democratic revolution. Democratic forms in Europe and North America evoked his respect, but he insisted on writing his own constitutions, designed to conform to Spanish American conditions, not to outside models. These conditions, especially in the post-war period, when social heterogeneity, lack of consensus, and absence of political traditions placed liberal constitutions under severe strain and brought the new republics to the edge of anarchy, caused Bolívar, if not to abandon the search for liberty, at least to postpone it in favour of order and security. But Bolivarian absolutism was not an end in itself. The bias towards strong government, in the interests of reform as well as of order, and as a necessary framework for post-colonial development, was a quality rather than a flaw in Bolívar’s policy, and endows him with a modernity beyond the confines of the age of revolution.

NOTES

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3. E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. Europe 1789-1848* (London, 1962), p. 53.
4. Miranda to Gual, 31 December 1799, *Archivo del General Miranda* (24 vols., Caracas, 1929-50), XV, 404.
5. Daniel Florencio O'Leary, *Memorias del General Daniel Florencio O'Leary. Narración* (3 vols., Caracas, 1952), I, 63-4.
6. Jamaica Letter, 6 September 1815, Simón Bolívar, *Escritos del Libertador* (Caracas, 1964-), VIII, 240.
7. Bolívar to Santander, 10 July 1825, Simón Bolívar, *Cartas del Libertador*, ed. Vicente Lecuna (12 vols., Caracas, 1929-59), V, 27.
8. In the Jamaica Letter, for example; see below, p.22.
9. Jamaica letter, 6 September 1815, *Escritos*, VIII, 244.
10. R.A. Humphreys, ed., *The 'Detached Recollections' of General D.F. O'Leary* (London, 1969), p. 28; L. Peru de Lacroix, *Diario de Bucaramanga*, ed. N.E. Navarro (Caracas, 1935), pp. 106-7.
11. O'Leary, *Narración*, I, 53, 63-4.
12. Cartagena Manifesto, 15 December 1812, *Escritos*, IV, 122.
13. Bolívar, Message to the Congress of Bolivia, 25 May 1826, *Obras completas*, III, 769.
14. Testament of Bolívar, 10 December 1830, *Obras completas*, III, 529.
15. Jamaica Letter, 6 September 1815, *Escritos*, VIII, 239.
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