

COMMENTARY

The Great Debt of Ibero-America To the German-Jewish Renaissance: A Communication from Mexico

Among the historical accomplishments of Alexander von Humboldt, should be considered that of being the precursor of the independence movements of the American countries that he visited on his famous Botanical Expedition at the end of the Eighteenth and beginning of the Nineteenth centuries. Considering the influence of the ideas which he spread, one cannot deny him a role in all the independence movements.

In the recent weeks and months, we have published the results of the organization's "rescue" of the German-Jewish Renaissance and its contribution to keeping alive the thinking of the Renaissance of the Fifteenth to Sixteenth centuries.¹

One of the key figures of the Jewish Renaissance is Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), who defended the optimism of Leibniz against Voltaire and materialism. With his work in philosophy and theology, he laid the foundation upon which Judaism was incorporated into the modern world, breaking with the medievalism of the ghetto, and uplifting the cultural level of the Jews.

Reviewing the chronology of the life

of Humboldt, which appears in the book *Ensayo sobre el Reino de la Nueva España* (Treatise on the Kingdom of New Spain), it came out that it was the House of Mendelssohn and Friedlander which financed him. In 1799, Alexander von Humboldt met with the Spanish banker Simon de Arragora, who made good on the "unlimited credit" which the German banking house had put at his disposal. Humboldt said that Arragora was "one of the most distinguished men" of his time in Spain.

The same House of Mendelssohn financed the voyage to Spain (1800) of Wilhelm von Humboldt, a voyage which is made known in the book *Cuatro Ensayos sobre España y América* (Four Essays on Spain and America). I think that the works of Schiller on Spain form part of the same project, don't you?

Education of the Humboldts

As is known, the Humboldt brothers, at the age of 16, took classes in Hebrew from the same Moses Mendelssohn, through whom they maintained relations to this formidable intellectual circle from an early age. At this age, the brothers also constructed the second

The research memorandum presented here was drafted in 1999 by Carlos Cota Meza, as a "Public Note" to members of the International Caucus of Labor Committees, the organization founded by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., in 1971, of which the author was a leading member in Mexico. Cota Meza died at age 48 on March 21, 2002, after a long illness. We invite continued research into the subject initiated here; as its author understood, such research will open, in the appropriate historical setting, many of the critical issues of the culture of Spain and Ibero-America otherwise addressed in this issue of Fidelio by "The Joy of Reading 'Don Quixote,'" [SEE page 56]. The memo was translated from the Spanish by Laurence Hecht in July 2003; subheads have been added.

lightning rod built in Germany, following the "instructions" of Benjamin Franklin.

Another of the tutors of Alexander and Wilhelm was Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746-1812), writer of children's books, and translator into German, in story-form, of the *Cartas de Relación de Hernán Cortés* (Journals of Hernando Cortes).

Another Spaniard key to the realization of the Botanical Expedition, was the Minister of State, Mariano Luis de Urquijo (1768-1817), a somewhat complicated political figure. Humboldt eventually criticized him, although he was the one who granted the famous passports.

It is said that the Urquijo family was the representative of the Rothschild Bank in Spain. The second Marquis of Urquijo (1843-1914) was involved in the construction of the first railroads, shipyards, steel mills,



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The Granger Collection



Moses Mendelssohn (center), flanked by the young Humboldt brothers: Alexander (left) and Wilhelm (right).

and electrical plants. The Urquijo Bank apparently was in existence until 1948.

Research Leads

For purposes of investigation of the history of Spain and Ibero-America in this period, we would have to suppose that the scientific, political, and cultural circle which received Humboldt in Madrid and other cities, minimally was related to or influenced by the Jewish intellectual circle. The presbyter Cavanilles, Casimiro Ortega, Francisco Zea, Hipólito Ruiz, Juan Bautista Muñoz, the Abbé Pouret, José Espinoza Tello, Felipe Bauzá, and Clavijo, the last the object of powerful criticism from Goethe.

Insofar as history is not chronological, a good choice of date for the begin-

ning of the Botanical Expedition could be when Humboldt and Bonpland saw the Southern Cross for the first time, at which moment Alexander recited from memory the verses from Dante's *Commedia* which refer to that constellation.

I refer to this, because one of the things that comes out in the chronology of the Humboldt voyage, is that in each of the cities, he engaged in "typical German cultural evenings" (Havana, Caracas, Bogota, Lima, and Mexico City, among others), that of Mexico being "without equal for New Spain." I think that this is important, and would be more so if we could know what was done at such "cultural events."

In the PLAN [Andean Labor

Party—Ed.] Conference in Bogota in December 1982, I made a presentation on the Botanical Expedition, entitled "Science vs. Environmentalism: The First Botanical Expedition," where I found a relationship between the investigations of Humboldt, and Leibniz's *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*. I send this to you separately. It would appear that "debt" is not only monetary . . .

—Carlos Cota Meza

1. See *Fidelio*, Summer 1999 (Vol. VIII, No. 2). Among the several symposium contributions in that issue, David Shavin's "Philosophical Vignettes from the Political Life of Moses Mendelssohn," includes reference to the Mendelssohn circle and the Humbolt brothers.—Ed.

Going Native in Siberia

The intent of *The Shaman's Coat* is partly summarized on the very last page, in which author Anna Reid writes:

"It has been fashionable for a while to think of all national identities as invented, to stress the artificiality of treasured national symbols and inaccuracy of not-so-ancient national myths. But the native Siberians are an example of the opposite phenomenon; of how hard it is to disinvent nationalities, of how they persist in the face of governments' best efforts at their destruction. To stretch a metaphor, the shaman bowing in front of the Russian flying-doctor is not donning his coat again, because although he hid it under a suit and tie for a while, he never really took it off."

Reid's emphasis here is revealed by the fact that she is a graduate of the London School of Economics, and participated in "bringing Russia into the marketplace," or the world of free trade. As any review of the literature of the London School of Economics reveals, the looting of natural resources becomes more achievable if a population is divid-

ed into "mini-states," "native rights" movements, or other such methods of community control.

Moreover, given that the Eurasian Land-Bridge as proposed by Lyndon LaRouche intersects this geographic region, an informed reader might ask if the agenda behind Reid's book is to argue that the habits and cultures of the so-called "peoples" of the region must be preserved, over and above the economic development which would lead to the ability of the human beings who inhabit the area to prosper. That is, as has been seen in the case of Brazil's Amazon region, is the intended use of this volume, the fostering of indigenous movements opposed to Siberia's economic development?

Cultural Relativism

Certainly, *The Shaman's Coat* leaves no doubt that the ideology of cultural relativism is alive and well at the London School of Economics. It is this ideology, the theory that so-called "less-developed peoples"—with emphasis on the term "peoples" as opposed to "men," as in "all men (and women) are created equal"—



The Shaman's Coat:
A Native History of Siberia
by Anna Reid
Walker & Company, New York,
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226 pages, hardcover, \$25.00

guides Reid's quaint account of her travels into Far Eastern Siberia, allegedly in search of shamans, gifted healers, and magicians whose powers allegedly outfoxed even Stalin's police. This is Reid's second such book; her first was *Borderland*—the Nineteenth-century Russian imperialist name for Ukraine.