

# Old Doctrines and New Classes

R. A. HUMPHREYS, Ed.: *Tradition and Revolt in Latin America and Other Essays*.  
New York, Columbia University Press, 1969.

LUIS E. AGUILAR, Ed.: *Marxism in Latin America*.  
New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1968.

LUIS MERCIER VEGA: *Roads to Power in Latin America*.  
New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1969.

**Reviewed by Karl M. Schmitt**

DESPITE THE APPARENT commonality of subject matter suggested by their titles, these works range from historical observations of mixed merit to incisive analyses of contemporary Latin American social and political phenomena. The first is a collection of previously published historical articles and essays by the “dean” of Latin American historians in Great Britain; the second is a collection of documentary materials on communism and socialism from the late 19th century to the present, with an introduction by the editor; and the third is a series of essays or, perhaps more accurately, an extended essay on social relationships in contemporary Latin America and their implications for politics and government.

For those primarily interested in power relationships, ideology, and the “revolution” in Latin America today, the Humphreys collection has little to offer. The scholarly core of the work consists of four articles on British commerce and Anglo-American rivalries, largely in the Caribbean, during the 19th century. These are solidly researched and well-written pieces on some little-known aspects (at least in the United States) of British interest in Latin America. The rest, however, contribute little to historical scholarship, although they include two charming essays on early historians of Latin America—the Scotsman William Robertson and the American William Prescott. The primary reason for the republication of these essays, apparently, was the desire of the Institute of Latin American

Studies of Columbia University to pay homage to this distinguished British historian. It has done so handsomely.

OF MUCH GREATER contemporary interest is Mr. Aguilar’s collection of Marxist writings from and about Latin America from the 1890’s to the late 1960’s. For the most part, they consist of speeches and essays authored by Communist party members or documents of party conferences (including some emanating from Fidel Castro’s Cuban Communist Party), but they also include some writings by independent Marxists and Socialists. The editor has divided his 36 selections into six sections, all but the last of which cover well-defined chronological periods such as the Popular Front era and the aftermath of Castro’s Cuban revolution. The last section Aguilar has dubbed “Criticism and Self-Criticism.” Although a certain repetitive sameness runs through many of the pieces, particularly those from groups that took their directions faithfully from the Soviet Union, the chronological treatment serves to bring into focus the interesting shifts in the posture of Latin American Communists. Even more interesting and important, perhaps, are the writings of Marxist deviationists—Jose Carlos Mariategui of Peru, Anibal Ponce of Argentina, and Jose Revueltas of Mexico.

The editor’s introduction is indispensable for the purpose of tying these various selections to-

gether and giving continuity to the volume. This reviewer would take serious exception to Aguilar only on his statement that "up to 1945 . . . the basic and virtually exclusive nucleus of Marxism in Latin America was formed by the Communist Parties." This may be true in the organizational sense, but it ignores the whole range of Marxist thought that influenced Mexican political, social, and economic development during the 1920's and 1930's. It also ignores the strong currents of Marxist ideology that inspired the early Apristas of Peru, as well as the Marxist ideas that permeated intellectual life almost everywhere in Latin America, particularly in the universities. Castro himself came out of an intellectual environment in which Marxist terminology was common currency. This underscores the fact that a complete history of Marxism in Latin America remains to be written, but Mr. Aguilar's collection represents an excellent beginning, and it is to be hoped that he will continue his fruitful research in this field.

MERCIER VEGA'S WORK is something else again—at times maddening, but always stimulating and thought-provoking. The author, a Frenchman whose mother was Chilean, brings a different perspective and a certain freshness of critique that would probably be hard for a "norteamericano" to achieve. His criticisms of Latin American societies are sharp and biting. He has no illusions whatever about the present elites in Latin America, be they landholders, the new industrialists, or members of that amorphous social grouping called the middle class or the middle strata. But neither does he expect the Left, whether old-line Communists or new-style guerrilla and urban revolutionaries, to carry out the basic changes in Latin American society that he deems necessary. Rather he places his hopes in what he calls "the new political class"—the managers, technical experts, and organizers.

In part, this is an act of faith, but in part it is also an act of rational judgment in that Mercier Vega sees Latin America producing more of these types of persons than the present socioeconomic structures can absorb. When the crisis of these *tecnicos* becomes severe enough, he believes, they will become motivated to pursue power in order to change society so as to accommodate their interests. To examine this thesis adequately would require more space than is available in this review. Suffice it to say that the reviewer has serious reservations concerning this prediction.

To consider some other aspects of the book, Mercier Vega starts out from a discussion of the term "class" as applied to Latin America. Not only does he attack the term "middle class" (as many US writers have already done), but he also questions the validity of the concepts of "working class," "peasantry," and "capitalists" in their European or North American sense. He rightly observes that in Latin America these groups (including even the real peasantry) are small and lack a conscious sense of group identity or coherence. Therefore, he argues, Latin American societies should be viewed not in terms of clearly-defined classes or interest groups, but rather in terms of patrons and clients, with various groups of patrons struggling to control the state. He goes on to say:

**Latin American societies are made up of disunited castes, clans, and classes. They are conglomerates, not communities; the strata that enter into their composition have their origins at different periods of time; they have not been eliminated or fused by evolution, they are juxtaposed. Hence the need for a personal arbiter, be he president, *caudillo* or dictator. Hence, also, the difficulty of finding a system of rules and laws that would be . . . respected by the population as a whole.**

Concerned with the problem of breaking up this traditional structure (which he sees as impeding economic growth and healthy social relations), the author next addresses himself to the ideological foundations of the groups that advocate change. He argues that these foundations, though basically imported, have undergone substantial modification in Latin America, and that the proponents of change, whether Marxists, Christian Democrats, or Fascists, all subscribe to a common set of principles: (1) rejection of the traditional forms of Latin American society, expressing itself in "anti-feudal, anti-oligarchic, or anti-imperialist slogans"; (2) the need to create a nation; (3) a decisive role for the state in social and economic terms; (4) the need for the emergence of a new social class capable of accomplishing the tasks of reconstruction; and (5) the achievement of power by this new class with the support of mass movements.

While he seems to sympathize with these aspirations, the author has little but contempt for the groups that mouth the slogans. Except for some segments of the Christian Democrats, he exhibits a deep and bitter cynicism toward the parties presently aspiring to power, believing that for the most part they have no intention of changing the basic social pattern of patron and client. In fact, he argues that the existing political organizations con-

tinue to operate according to that pattern: students, after graduation, fight their way into the system to become patrons themselves; and even organized labor struggles to defend a system that guarantees it a modicum of benefits and privileges.

One of the author's most interesting chapters is one that discusses particular problems in selected countries, but it also illustrates the most frustrating

aspect of the book, which is the insufficiency of evidence provided to support the author's generalizations. One suspects that Mercier Vega is basically correct in his analysis of Latin American society, even if one cannot accept all of the solutions he proposes and the predictions he makes. However, the author has yet to supply adequate hard data to substantiate his positions.

## The Obstacles to Reform

JAMES PETRAS: *Politics and Social Forces in Chilean Development*.  
Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969.

CLAUDIO VELIZ, Ed.: *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*.  
London, Oxford University Press, 1966.

CARL LEIDEN and KARL M. SCHMITT: *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World*.  
Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1968.

### Reviewed by Arpad J. von Lazar

TALKING ABOUT THE precarious nature of social and political stability in the countries of the less developed world is like incanting a Tibetan prayer: it ought to, and even might, have an effect on the faithful, but, alas, it may also be only an elaboration of the obvious! Social science literature must by now be saturated with studies of economic backwardness, social stagnation, and political decay in the countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The present three volumes demonstrate that economic development may, and probably should, cure these ills, *if* (and only if) the political and social system also manages to keep pace with change.

Both the Veliz volume and Professor Petras' excellent Chilean case study recognize that Latin American political systems generally include only a portion of the populace; that political participation is marginal at best for the vast masses of urban and rural poor, that income distribution is not equitable; and, above all, that efforts at solving these problems have been only partially, if at all, successful.

Professor Petras' presentation shows a rather clear-cut ideological bias, though this may actually be to the good. The neo-Marxian tone helps to place the discussion of reform management in its "natural garb"—it is like reading a well-written work by a Chilean deeply concerned about his country's posture in the developmental process. If this is the price to be paid for getting a highly "relevant" internal view of Chilean development, we should be willing to accept the ideological coloring.

The Petras work is at its best in dealing with the problems of rural social mobilization and the role of the bureaucracy in national politics. Chile's agrarian reform, which has been praised as one of the most fundamental of such programs in Latin American, receives a realistic and extremely perceptive treatment here. Agrarian reform is really meaningless unless supplemented by social changes and reforms designed to bring the *campesino* out of his state of social isolation, political serfdom, and cultural deprivation. And as any good Jesuit or Leninist would contend, the organizational