benefited from the constitutional limits established by the Court to protect the individual rights of citizens, and they managed to deploy the *amparo* against the implementation of state labour laws regulating the boards. In response, the emergent organised labour movement brought considerable political pressure to bear on the Court, forcing it to expand the federal government's administrative discretion and thus allow the boards to render binding decisions. Moreover, by the time that a federal labour law was enacted in 1931, a constitutional amendment had reduced the overall scope of the *amparo*.

If in labour matters the early Supreme Court insisted on respecting the division of powers upheld by article 16, chapter 4 shows that this was not the case with regard to the executive-led land reform, where the National Agrarian Commission acted as a tribunal and the president pronounced binding sentences (a violation of article 16 that this book might have explored further). In fact, until at least 1922 the Supreme Court actively supported the executive branch in its efforts to implement land reform. And yet, as James shows, the Court did retain the power of judicial oversight, through which it protected the right of landowners to use *amparos* to denounce illegal proceedings at a time when the national government was systematically violating agrarian legislation during the implementation of land reform. As in the case of labour, James shows that 'the Court was not subjectively committed to a defence of the current property regime', even though 'its constitutional jurisprudence meant that ultimately its judicial decisions favoured those who were' (p. 100).

With the resurgence of research on the legal history of Latin America, particularly a growing interest in the role of the judiciary (in part prompted by current reforms in many countries' court systems), books such as the one reviewed here are engaging in a long-needed dialogue between social scientists and historians, on the one hand, and well-established traditions of legal scholarship, on the other. This dialogue allows scholars like James to explore important social rights without having to disregard matters such as due process, the rule of law, the balance of power among the three branches of government, and, for Mexico, the question of limiting or expanding the scope of the *amparo* suit guaranteeing individual rights.

Associate Fellow, Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London HELGA BAITENMANN

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 47 (2015). doi:10.1017/S0022216X1500019X

Thomas Miller Klubock, *La Frontera: Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Frontier Territory* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. ix + 385, $99.95, $27.95 pb; £65.00, £17.99 pb.

La Frontera: Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Southern Frontier uses social and environmental history, from a 'bottom-up' analytical framework, to understand the origins of Chile's forestry boom and the recent conflicts between Mapuche communities and forestry companies. But the first historical actor in this monograph is the forest. Land that is now covered with vast Monterey pine plantations had been, since the mid-nineteenth century, forested by an 'impenetrable' (p. 46) intermingling of trees, including araucaria pine, beech and larch, providing cover for a dense undergrowth of wild bamboo and vines.

Klubock organises his analysis of how regimented pine came to replace native forest chronologically, beginning in the 1850s with the Chilean state's conquest and colonisation of this region. In this period, about two-thirds of the region's defeated Mapuche communities were pushed onto *reducciones*, with offered neither sufficient land nor secure tenure; the remaining third received no land at all. Most of the land was 'unoccupied', or showing no indication of human 'improvements', and claimed by the state. This classification provided an incentive to clear, fence and farm the forests in order to establish property rights. Thus a cycle emerged of burning native forests, exhausting the soil through wheat cultivation, then letting the native grasses and bamboo return for livestock grazing. When the soil was exhausted, the cycle began again, leaving behind *de facto* deserts. Meanwhile, the Chilean state planned to populate this 'empty' land. For decades, as the state sought, and failed, to settle, first foreign immigrants and later Chileans, land ownership became concentrated in a few hands. Land speculation, fraud, unclear property titles, land concentration and 'empty' land that was already inhabited all thwarted large-scale settlement plans.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the area was characterised by concentrated landholding, unclear property boundaries, conflicts over land and limited state authority. Deforestation, causing erosion and desiccated watersheds, also characterised the territory. Confronted with an ecological crisis, landowners and the state reached a compromise: landowners could continue to destroy native forests on their land, which would be replaced by state-subsidised plantations of non-native species, while the state regulated logging and access to public forests. This compromise benefited large landowners while ignoring smallholding campesinos, who lost access to native forest resources, and left the hopes of the landless labourers for a plot of their own unmet, feeding into social unrest during the 1920s and 1930s. Social conflict, in turn, contributed to the spread of pine plantations on private estates. Landowners preferred a crop which required a small labour force and was seen as so safe an investment that Chile's pine trees functioned as pension provision. These pine plantations were also supported by international development programmes; thus, by the 1960s, an alliance of private interests, with the state and international organisations had created the 'largest stretch of tree plantations in Latin America' (p. 144), increasingly oriented towards paper and pulp production.

At the same time, on and off over the mid-twentieth century, various reformist governments were concerned about landlessness, foresters' working conditions, unemployment and 'rebellious campesinos'. From the late 1930s until 1973, the nascent social welfare state, increasing rights for forestry workers and multiple agrarian reform programmes began to address the 'social problem' on the frontier (p. 147). Salvador Allende's government returned usurped lands to Mapuche communities and significantly accelerated expropriations, partially responding to land invasions. According to Klubock: 'Campesinos who invaded forestry estates in the Andes cordillera contended that land reform constituted the only way to ensure that forests were no longer mined and then abandoned, like the workers themselves' (pp. 212–13).

The 1973 coup represented a partial rupture with these policies, leading to 'the complete restructuring of the forestry sector' and reversing the land reform gains, while maintaining the state's subsidies and promotion of private forestry, 'especially tree plantations and export-oriented forestry' (p. 241). Building on his careful analysis of the earlier periods, Klubock concludes that the success of the forestry sector in the late 1970s and 1980s was not an example of Chile's free-market model working, but resulted from decades of state investment and state policy. Another challenge to viewing the forestry sector as a free-market 'miracle' came from the resurgent labour movement which, from the 1980s, linked, and criticised, 'the spread of plantations, the destruction of native forests, and social changes in the countryside since 1973' (p. 267). These tensions continued after the end of the dictatorship, because the Concertación governments largely maintained Pinochet's free-market ethos. Moreover, from the 1990s, Mapuche communities 'mounted an increasingly militant challenge to the pine plantation economy' (p. 278), resulting in some recuperation of land, even as the Concertación governments often responded with repression and 'did nothing to challenge the pattern of deep inequality in land and labor relations in southern Chile' (p. 297).

Klubock's source base for this nuanced and detailed monograph includes diverse archival materials, many of which had not previously been used by historians, as well as oral histories of forestry workers, labour activists and indigenous communities. Using this array of empirical sources, Klubock deftly weaves a history which brings together over a century of government policy; human interactions with each other and their environment; the native forest and its ghostly devastation; and scientific ideas of land management. Klubock's arguments about the frontier, moreover, are crucial to understanding Chilean history more widely. From the perspective of the frontier, where land was seized through violence and ruled by violence and colonial privilege, the Pinochet dictatorship appears less of an aberration. This is an excellent study, addressing an extremely complex history, to which a review of this length cannot do justice. *La Frontera* pioneers a new approach to social and environmental history and will be a reference in point for years to come.

University of Aberdeen PATIENCE A. SCHELL

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 47 (2015). doi:10.1017/S0022216X15000206

Daniela Spenser, *Stumbling Its Way through Mexico: The Early Years of the Communist International* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), pp. 224, $34.00, hb.

Daniela Spenser's latest book is a welcome translation of her 2009 work *Los primeros tropiezos de la internacional comunista en México*. It augments her considerable body of work on the relationship between Soviet Russia and Mexico throughout what we may now call with some confidence the 'Long Cold War'. Spenser here focuses on its first decade, tracking the initial contacts between agents of the Communist International and the victors of the Mexican Revolution. Spenser highlights not only the mismatch in perceptions between the two sides but also the complex and variable nature of their diplomatic and ideological ties.

In its initial phase, the Russian Revolution was a great inspiration to the more radical among Mexico's political leaders and thinkers. Spenser notes that both Emiliano Zapata and Ricardo Flores Magón were captivated by their Russian contemporaries: 'both the agrarista and the anarchist had identified with the Bolshevik Revolution as an emancipatory movement fighting for justice that represented the collective dream of the disinherited' (p. 36). However, this fascination soon soured, and Spenser's narrative is ultimately one of misunderstanding and divergence. It is a truism in both the historiography and political rhetoric of post-1917 Mexico that a Soviet-style revolution was unnecessary because Mexico had already undergone its own equivalent. Spenser's thesis is subtly different, and more convincing: rather than the *fact* of the Mexican Revolution having preceded its Russian 'counterpart', it was instead the