

Clearly written and based on solid research, the book offers many insights while at the same time leaving some areas open to question. For example, the influence of the New Deal in Argentina in the 1930s and 1940s was far more widespread than presented in the text, crossing political and ideological boundaries from conservatives groups to Radicals and Socialists. For that reason, while it shaped the emerging Peronist identity (pp. 52–3), it also appeared in the ideas and platform of the anti-Peronist Democratic Union in 1945–6. There is no clear explanation regarding why the worker attachés programme was expanded in 1949–52 if Perón was precisely at that time attempting to curb its ideas and influence (ch. 6), and the explanation of Peronism's influence on George Kennan's famous 'Long Telegram' is tenuous as presented (pp. 62–3).

These criticisms notwithstanding, Ernesto Semán's book is an example of the possibilities offered by a truly transnational historical approach, informed by careful research and relevant theoretical frameworks. It opens interesting comparative perspectives with other movements and countries in Latin America, and it should be of interest to scholars and students of Peronism and the Cold World in Latin America.

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Luiz Bernardo Pericás, *Caio Prado Júnior: Uma biografia política* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2016), pp. 484, £15.50, pb

Caio Prado Júnior (CPJ) is one of the most intriguing and relevant figures of Brazilian Marxism. A lifetime member of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB), he was also the author of *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo* (1942), a solid critique of the PCB's historical diagnosis of Latin America as a feudal region and an explicit attempt to erode the theoretical underpinning of the party's national front politics.

The book (the first biography to draw on his personal archive) begins with an attempt to add CPJ to the 'great names' of Latin American Marxism and frame him as the Mariátegui of Brazil. Chapter 1 describes Caio's personal history, his early political engagement with the Partido Democrático during the 1930s, and his quick political radicalisation and affiliation to the PCB. Chapter 2 discusses (rather disjointedly) Caio's reading, his intellectual correspondents and the reception of his works. This addresses Nelson Coutinho's accusation (repeated by others) that CPJ 'did not understand Marxism well' and rarely referenced Gramsci and Lenin (p. 49): the evidence presented includes a description of Caio's key intellectual influences (including Lukács), his reading of Marx, his disdain of Gramsci and his hostility towards Althusser. Chapters 3 and 4 turn to CPJ's first visit to the Soviet Union and his activities as a member of the PCB, particularly as a vice-president of the Aliança Nacional Libertadora (National Alliance for Freedom), a role that landed him in prison between 1935 and 1937 and later exile in Paris.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on CPJ's intellectual production. Chapter 5 devotes only one page to his most important book, *Formação*, without discussing the political tensions it generated by becoming the first critique of the 'feudal diagnosis' in Brazil. The publication of *História econômica do Brasil* (1945) and his 'new fighting trenches' (p. 113), i.e. his editorial work and publishing at Editora Brasiliense, take up most of the rest of this chapter, which ends with his election to the state legislature in 1947 and second short imprisonment. Chapter 6 revolves also around a similar

intertwining of political activity and publishing, in this case during his obscure ‘philosophical period’ (two books on the dialectical method and two on economic policy, whose reception was lukewarm). The chapter also describes the launch of the *Revista Brasiliense* (a landmark in Left debate that enjoyed the PCB’s support and the constraints this imposed), the debates it featured (such as on Juscelino Kubischek or João Goulart, on the agrarian question or the reception of Celso Furtado) and its closure in 1964. The pluralism of the journal (which the author is keen to emphasise) should not be overstated: a piece by Michael Löwy, for instance, appeared with a note highlighting that ‘its conclusions do not follow the orientation of the journal’ (p. 163).

The next two chapters return to the chronological narrative of Caio’s life: his second visit to the USSR, a visit to Cuba and the publication of a second book on the Soviet Union supporting the idea of ‘peaceful coexistence’ (published just before the PCB’s Maoist split); the coup of 1964, another short period in prison, the international campaign of support, and his relatively quick release.

Chapter 9 returns to CPJ’s political activity, most notably a private protest to the Soviet embassy over the invasion of Prague in 1968 in what Luiz Bernardo Pericás understands was a rupture with the party, and a discussion of *A revolução brasileira* (1966) and its immediate reception. Pericás suggests that the book repeated the criticism of PCB but was also a statement against a Maoist people’s war and armed struggle more broadly. This issue comes back in the final two chapters, during the authoritarian turn of the dictatorship after 1968, when CPJ returned from exile in Chile and was imprisoned again after the publication of an interview in a student magazine. The book ends with CPJ’s last public speech following his release – at a seminar on agrarian structure at the University of Campinas in 1977 (p. 266) – and his retreat into private life during the progression of Alzheimer’s till his death in 1990.

The book is very well documented and rests upon a detailed archival examination of CPJ’s private letters and writings, his library and other available information (e.g. declassified police records). The presentation of this material is, however, most of the time unnecessarily extensive: are descriptions of the route and means of transport of his visit to the USSR, his address during his exile in Paris, his library card number at the Bibliothèque Nationale and its due date relevant? This stems from the author’s attempt to write a ‘definitive’ biography (the 120 pages of endnotes provide further excessive detail), but results in two key flaws.

First, the project is self-defined as ‘a political biography’ in an attempt to ‘rescue’ and underline events less frequently recognised when talking about CPJ as an ‘interpreter of Brazil’. The descriptions of his public speeches, his stints in prison and exile, etc. are underpinned by the idea that these activities are ‘more political’ than his key books, his theoretical and historiographical contributions and intellectual polemics. In attempting to overcome the lack of visibility of the everyday activist, Pericás loses sight of the militantly engaged intellectual.

At the same time, in describing the PCB militant, Pericás downplays the critic of the PCB. Maybe unwillingly, the book emphasises the Caio Prado who contributed financially to the PCB and to Soviet propaganda by writing *USSR: A New World* (1934) and *The World of Socialism* (1962), thus understating Caio Prado’s fierce criticisms of the political strategy of the PCB, its diagnosis of feudalism, the party’s reading of the agrarian question, the role of the rural proletariat, the possibility of an alliance with the national bourgeoisie, the impossibility of capitalist development in Brazil, etc. For instance, the book mentions the interview for *Revisão* (the University of São

Paulo's student magazine) that landed him in jail after 1968 but misses the fact that in that interview CPJ frames the PCB as 'opportunistic' and 'tailist', doubts that 'a peaceful way [to socialism] is possible' and asserts that 'the existence of armed struggle depends on the local circumstances [...] if there were 30 or 50 thousand workers ready to take up arms and take power our task would consist of finding those arms' (*Revisão* (1967), reprinted in *Problemas del Desarrollo*, 1: 4 (1970), pp. 163–70).

The two (related) questions that go unanswered are why the intellectual who wrote one of the first and most elaborate critiques of the feudal thesis in Latin America (alongside Sergio Bagú's *Economía de la sociedad colonial*, 1949) was a disciplined member of the PCB for most of his life, and why was he never expelled? Pericás is probably better positioned than anyone to answer these questions but he fails to do so.

Given the complicated life and work of CPJ, a full-length biography with new archival material is very welcome. It seems Pericás decided to do a 'counterbalancing act' by presenting the readers with aspects of CPJ's life that are less well known. However, the book falls short of its intention to become the 'definitive' biography of CPJ, merely reproducing parts of CPJ's archive and leaving key questions unanswered.

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Randal Sheppard, *A Persistent Revolution: History, Nationalism, and Politics in Mexico since 1968* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), pp. xiv + 374, £59.95, hb

The Mexican Revolution has a long history of near-death experiences. Across the reign of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) politicians, dissidents and intellectuals reported its demise; yet the reports were exaggerated, and the revolution was resuscitated (in thought and word, at least) by new personnel and policies. Mexican governments continued claiming revolutionary credentials well after the last president with any genuinely revolutionary pretensions, Luis Echeverría, had left office. It is this period, the last quarter of the twentieth century, that concerns Randal Sheppard, whose book argues that revolutionary nationalism established 'cognitive boundaries' (pp. 11, 134, 256 et passim) within which rulers and ruled negotiated the exercise of power and the material benefits that came with it. The PRI's fall was agonisingly slow, in short, because hegemony operated in favour of political stability not just in the 1930s, but until close to the very end. It was the mythology of the 'persistent revolution' – perhaps more than violence, strategically pacifying resource distribution, television, fear of the unknown, a lack of options, election rigging or the institutional genius of *no reelección* – which kept a rotten show on the road, in the teeth of poor reviews, a deserting cast and increasingly loud and unimpressed audiences.

Working on this assumption, *A Persistent Revolution* approaches Mexico's history since 1968 with a focus on nationalism and politics rather than economic or social history. The structure mixes incident analysis with overview, prefacing each chapter with a 'snapshot' of a major event or moment, the whole amounting to a chronological structure that balances conjunctures and historical explanation. Thus an introduction to narratives of Mexican history from independence to 1982 is prefaced by the central place of Tlatelolco commemorations in those narratives; the presidential *Informe* of 1982 sets the scene for the austere 'revolutionary realism' of Miguel de