

## Book Reviews

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Marc Becker, *Twentieth-Century Latin American Revolutions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp. viii + 261, £19.95, pb

Latin America is in a certain sense the continent of generals and *guerrilleros*, rebellions and revolutions. But in Latin American politics the use of the term ‘revolution’ is inflated. The nineteenth-century wars of independence were ‘revolutions’. Rebellions and revolts of the twentieth century were self-declared ‘revolutions’. Army officers too have a preference for ‘revolutions’. There is a Salvadorean Monument to the Revolution built in memory of the Juventud Militar (Military Youth) who ousted a military dictator in 1948. But after the years of bitter civil war in the 1980s and 1990s it is almost forgotten who ousted whom. The generals of the right-wing Brazilian dictatorship between 1964 and 1985 referred to their ‘revolution’. The left-wing Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces led by General Velasco Alvarado in Peru (1968–75) was a ‘revolution from above’. And so on and so forth.

Marc Becker’s comprehensive one-volume book is about those ‘twentieth-century left-wing revolutions’ of Latin America whose importance can, on no account, can be considered as overstated. Although he does not specifically clarify his use of the term ‘revolution’, he makes clear why he presents ‘seven case studies of revolutionary movements in twentieth-century Latin America’, complemented by a chapter on ill-fated guerrilla movements and the Pink Tide governments at the dawn of the twenty-first century (pp. 3–4). The studies are preceded by an outstanding introductory chapter about conceptual elements, the leftist tradition and ideological currents in the region, the significance of Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, and a clarifying list of issues and themes to which the volume returns in subsequent chapters.

All case studies follow the same pattern: a historical setting, the brief biography of one of the principal actors, an excerpt from a leading document, paragraphs about the evolution of events, aftermath, and interpretation. They are concluded by a summary, discussion questions, references for further reading, and recommended films. Becker’s well-chosen heroes are Emiliano Zapata (Mexico), Jacobo Arbenz (Guatemala), Juan Lechín (Bolivia), Fidel Castro (Cuba), Salvador Allende (Chile), Carlos Fonseca (Nicaragua) and Hugo Chávez (Venezuela). Che Guevara is portrayed in the chapter on guerrilla warfare.

This volume is a student textbook and its comparative perspective makes it easy reading. The analytical pattern is not always completely followed. Some introductory sketches are very short, other are perfect. In some cases, the chapter ends somewhat abruptly. But there is always space for important actors, the role of women, the policy of and sometimes direct interventions by the United States, the actions of internal adversaries, and the character of the revolutionary programme.

Generally, the role of the Communist Party (PC) in the case study at hand is also analysed. I have some doubts, however, about the Communists’ real influence. In Colombia, Uruguay, El Salvador and Uruguay the influence of the Communist

Party and especially of the Communist Youth is undeniable. But on page 101 Becker writes: '[...] in Guatemala, Arbenz needed communist support to counter right-wing opposition to his government. In fact, had he relied more heavily on the communists, he may have been able to withstand both domestic and US opposition and maintain himself in office.' This is perhaps arguable. The Guatemalan PC had only a handful of members and its long-term revolutionary strategy has been on the whole timid. In Cuba and Nicaragua, the only two cases where armed guerrilla movements have been successful, the Moscow-aligned PCs were averse to taking up arms, as Becker also mentions.

The chapter about guerrilla warfare is somewhat unbalanced. The significance of Che Guevara is indisputable and his portrait here as the principal actor is certainly justified. But in the chapter much emphasis is put on the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC), the Salvadorean Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN) and the Peruvian Shining Path. Neither the Peronist Montoneros nor the Guevarist-Trotskyist Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army, ERP) of Argentina is mentioned. The Colombian Guevarist *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army, ELN) receives only scarce attention, the Guatemalan Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) headed by Guevara's friend Ramírez de León is hardly referred to, and nor is the fact that the Sandinista recruits in Nicaragua declared their loyalty 'before Fatherland, history, and Che Guevara'.

These two critical observations are only minor comments by a reviewer who is evidently enthusiastic about this book. Becker's style and argumentation are always fair. He shows a firm grasp of the complicated and half-controlled evolution of revolutionary processes. He systematically maintains throughout all his case studies a convincing analysis and completes the book with a short but nuanced overview of the Pink Tide governments. It is an ideal textbook to use in the classroom. I am also sure that a more general public will appreciate this wide-ranging comparative study, filling a hiatus in an academic tradition where single case studies or monographs are more common.

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Raanan Rein, Stefan Rinke and Nadia Zysman (eds.), *The New Ethnic Studies in Latin America* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. xii + 203, €72.00; \$83.00, hb

This edited volume features case studies that collectively invite new angles for interpreting the history and nature of Jewish Latin America. Chapters range temporally from nineteenth-century international migration booms to the imagined worlds of today's *telenovelas*. The book is based on a collaborative workshop organised by the Free University of Berlin and Tel Aviv University in 2015 – a gathering that surely generated fascinating discussion. The editors' introduction affirms several refreshing trends that are steadily gaining momentum in the broader field of diaspora studies; that is, Rein, Rinke and Zysman challenge historiographical constructions of ethnicity built on presumptions of irreducible difference rather than on dynamism and mutability. They also advocate for discussing Jewish–Latin American history in comparative and inter-ethnic context – a proposition that led to the inclusion of four chapters that feature research on non-Jewish Middle Eastern populations in Argentina and Chile.