

China, Laos, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba are the only remaining communist states in the world arena. China has the second largest economy in the world; Laos has one of the fastest growing economies in the world; and Vietnam experienced rapid growth after it switched from a centralized command economy to a mixed economy. Washington has full diplomatic relations with all three. In the meantime, North Korea and Cuba remain determined to protect their political systems and continue to have centralized economies. Washington has been negotiating with Pyongyang without demanding that it replace its political structure, while it continues to pressure Havana to open Cuba's political system. The difference in approach is easy to understand. North Korea can inflict severe costs on the United States and its closest allies, while Cuba's military power, though substantial, is not backed by nuclear weapons. Moreover, the Korean immigrant community in the United States is markedly less powerful than the Cuban immigrant community.

Hence the question: Why not allow Cuba to conduct an experiment similar to the one carried out by China, Vietnam, and Laos? Maybe Cuba's communist regime will continue to retain its power, or maybe it will undergo the political and economic transformations experienced by several former Eastern European communist countries. Yes, some of them are becoming more authoritarian, but that development should forewarn Washington and Miami that throughout history democracies have evolved slowly; that the external imposition of a democracy has typically failed because the target countries lacked a culture that valued democracy; and that even democracies with a solid constitutional structure have often stumbled. The decline of democratic principles in the United States over the past decades should alert Washington that it perhaps lacks the moral bearing to demand that other states create a political system that the United States itself has failed to form.

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BRAZIL

Kenneth P. Serbin. *From Revolution to Power in Brazil: How Radical Leftists Embraced Capitalism and Struggled with Leadership*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019. Pages xx, 439. \$60.00 cloth.
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To begin with a trope: Old leftists do not die; they join the establishments of political and economic power. Serbin's interesting historical account validates such a trope in impeccable detail. Although it was certainly true of the evolution of Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (excepting someone like José Revueltas) and helped solidify its 70 years of continuous presidential power, it has also been true in nations as diverse as Argentina,

Peru, Chile, and now, apparently, Colombia. But Brazil is a particularly stunning case because of the enormous extent to which the revolutionary left held sway over Brazil's political imaginary and the way in which the American-led coup against its politics in 1964 defined a whole process of authoritarian repression and neofascist dictatorships that were loosely defined by the so-called transnational Operation Condor.

Without ignoring the brutality of repression in Argentina and the extensive cultural response to it, Brazil stands out. In addition to being the bellwether, the Brazil process dragged on the most interminably (until 1985, almost a whole generation) and produced probably the most complex array of cultural responses. One might well consider Lúcia Murat's fictional film *A memória que me contam* (2013) of overarching significance here. If the kidnapping of US Ambassador Charles Burke Elbrick by leftist guerrillas in Rio de Janeiro, on September 4, 1969, was a particularly startling manifestation of revolutionary operations in Brazil, Murat's film shows how, almost 50 years later, Elbrick's captors are decent middle-class citizens. Her film enters into dialogue with Bruno Barreto's 1997 *O que é isso, companheiro?* on the kidnapping, based in turn on the 1979 personal memoir of Fernando Gabeira, one of the kidnapers. Herself a revolutionary participant imprisoned and tortured during the dictatorship, Murat at one point has the main character tell her gay son, whom she comes upon in the arms of another man, "See, you can have that because of the sacrifices *we* made."

I focus on this narrative cluster because it refers to the event with which Serbin inaugurates his study, with a first chapter entitled "The Surprise of the Century," accompanied by the following characterization: "Brazilian guerrillas' most spectacular operation, the Elbrick abduction marked the high point of their attempt to topple the dictatorship and move toward a socialist regime" (49). Why this did not happen and how the US-backed armed forces, with unrelenting brutality, broke the back of such operations and triumphed with a reaffirmation of long-standing social hierarchies and capitalism (in many cases, in its most lethal versions) has been told in some detail under the umbrella of the essentially effective "return to democracy." Serbin tells it here from the point of view of key survivors of the ALN (Ação de Liberação Nacional), the ideologically diverse group that was, along with the more doctrinaire MR-8 (Movimento Revolucionário 8 de Outubro), responsible for Elbrick's kidnapping. Serbin quotes Paulo Yanucchi, one of these key figures: "Was the dictatorship overthrown? . . . No, it wasn't. What happened was that there was a political process, a controlled transition in which they won the confrontation with the Left. They destroyed us. And, paradoxically, we won out in the long run" (11-12).

What has not been told before is the particular case of Brazil and its various social and political structures, most noticeably an adamant conviction on the part of those who came to power after 1985 that an official accounting of tyranny was not going to take place, as it had in Argentina in 1983. This may not have been the only or the most determining factor, but it was part of a national consciousness in which the past was to

be systematically forgotten and the country would move forward with an agenda that was not driven by an overwhelming memory of the 1964-85 era. One story that might be told is how that allowed for the agents of extremist repression to become vibrant actors in recent Brazilian history (including the rather minor actor Jair Bolsonaro, who is now president), and even to speak of the need to return to the policies and practices of the dictatorship. A former, deeply involved leftist guerrilla, Dilma Rousseff, was able to become president as a consequence of the story that Serbin chooses to focus on. The collapse of her presidency and the considerable damage done to the leadership of her mentor, former President Lula da Silva, by charges of ordinary nonrevolutionary corruption underscore the complications of the left's participation within a system that it once worked so hard to destroy.

Yet, Serbin ends on a strikingly positive note: the view that the effective charges against even politically mythic figures like Lula and, indirectly, Dilma, demonstrate that the reinforcement of democratic institutions, toward which they evolved following the 1979 amnesty that re-legitimated them as Brazilian citizens, has been, after all, a lasting contribution. Serbin's account, then, is essentially redemptive: not only does he argue eloquently for not calling the ALN a terrorist group, preferring insistently to focus on their broad revolutionary principles, but he also essentially reinforces Yanucchi's avowal that in the end the Left was the winner.

Professional historical studies such as Serbin's usually enjoy prompt translation into Portuguese: Brazil is always keenly interested in foreign views on its social history. However, Serbin's redemptive view toward the Left is hardly integral to the prevailing political discourse in the Bolsonaro era, at least from the presidential bully pulpit. The reception of Serbin's book in Portuguese may have something to say about the author's argument that Bolsonaro's election had more to do with a public repudiation of gross corruption than it did any ideological rejection of the Left.

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CHILE

Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile. By Marian E. Schlotterbeck. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. Pp. 248. \$34.95 paper. doi:10.1017/tam.2020.30

Marian Schlotterbeck's book presents a nuanced narrative of the experience of members of the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) at the grassroots level and the tensions that beset their relations with the national leadership of the movement in the years of its greatest influence in Chilean politics and society. By exposing the memories of MIR