

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.

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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

lingering unfulfilled *potential* of the Mexican uprising which gave it longevity and resilience.

Stumbling Its Way through Mexico opens with two contextualising chapters, the first on Soviet Russia and international communism (or, rather, communist internationalism), and the second painting a vivid picture of Mexico (and particularly radical and/or labour organisations and thinkers) in the early twentieth century. It is through this pincer manoeuvre that Spenser achieves her multi-layered analysis, asking how agents of one set of interacting contexts (the Soviet, the Russian, the international communist) encountered those of another (the Mexican, the anarcho-syndicalist, the post-Revolutionary). Spenser convincingly argues that the Mexican political context was sufficiently ingrained' and different enough from that of Russia, to resist the overtures of the under-informed Bolsheviks. The depiction here of revolutionary Mexico is a fascinating contribution to that literature in its own right, focusing on the gaggle of international radicals, pacifists, anarchists, communists, anti-colonialists, who met, organised and fervently discussed global politics during Carranza's presidency.

The third chapter foregrounds the individuals who 'stumbled' through Mexico in this period. It is a crucial reconstruction of a phase (and mentality) in communist history so often overlooked: one of discovery, relative open-mindedness, and of collegiality. This should not come as a surprise, yet the legacy of Stalinism and the puzzling inertia of monolithic conceptions of communism tend to obscure many such heterodoxies. Spenser reminds us after all that the Comintern did not begin as the international arm of the CPSU; it only became so, effectively, in the late 1920s.

The tragedy of the tale revolves around the encounter between international communists and Mexican revolutionaries (covered in chapter 4) and consequent problems (chapters 5 and 6), ultimately including the breakdown of relations between the fledgling Mexican Communist Party and the governing elite in the late 1920s. This caused a rift between the governments of Mexico and the USSR which never fully healed, and certainly prevented the sort of revolutionary fraternity which both had considered possible in the early 1920s.

While the Bolshevik agents and their contacts back in the USSR might have misread the potential for (and logical route to) communism in Mexico, they did give some strong insights into the nature of the Mexican Revolution. Charles Phillips, arriving in Mexico in 1918, noted that the revolution 'postulated the good life for the millions, and the masses responded'. Despite the overthrow of the old regime, the '(largely Indian) peons, miners and city workers were still savagely exploited, but every general and politician had to pay lip-service to their latent power' (pp. 66–7). Contemporary historians struggle to summarise the Mexican Revolution so well.

The importance of ethnicity and its interplay with socio-economic status was not lost on Phillips; in a private meeting, Lenin agreed with him that 'the Indians ... should be [the] number-one objective in the countryside' (p. 71). Given the decades of argument engendered by the Lenin-Roy theses on potential communist allies in 'backward and colonial nations', Lenin's position here is noteworthy. Indeed, Spenser's portrayal of these early agents of international communism suggests a good deal of heterodoxy, giving important context to the *mariateguista* variant of Marxism (often notable in Latin America as the path *not* taken).

Between *The Impossible Triangle* (1999), *In from the Cold* (2008, ed. with Gilbert Joseph) and this volume, Daniela Spenser has provided a loose trilogy telling the story of the Long Cold War at all structural layers: from the travels (and indeed travails) of

individual agents of Bolshevism to the intergovernmental tussles of the 1930s and the hemispheric interventions and influences of the United States. For historians of twentieth-century Mexico this volume has important explanatory value, but it should reach a wider audience for its depiction of a tentative, sometimes bumbling, and above all *uncertain* international communism; it is a welcome corrective to the troubling return of monolithic conceptions thereof.

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Nichole Sanders, *Gender and Welfare in Mexico: The Consolidation of a Postrevolutionary State* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), pp. viii + 171, \$64.95, \$34.95 pb.

Gender and Welfare in Mexico explores three aspects of Mexican efforts to develop a welfare state from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. First, it investigates how, despite its nationalist overtones, the creation of welfare programmes was the product of a transnational dialogue and reform movement. Second, it examines the gendered nature of these programmes by addressing their assumptions and describing the roles they prescribed to women as proponents, agents, and targets of reform. Finally, it inserts the careers of female welfare workers into a broader account of the importance of a burgeoning middle class in Mexican politics. Though she does not set out to do so explicitly, along the way Nichole Sanders also sheds light on ways the state promoted economic growth.

Sanders demonstrates that a confluence of international and national factors shaped the establishment of social assistance programmes for mothers and children in Mexico. Catholic charitable practices dating from the late nineteenth century combined with inter-war neo-Lamarckian eugenics and mid-twentieth-century ideologies about the state's role in generating social harmony. These practices and ideas provided the framework for the Mexican government's response to industrialisation, urbanisation and economic dislocation. Based on materials from the archive of the Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia, the proceedings of international congresses on child and maternal welfare, newspapers and periodicals, and UNAM theses written by welfare workers, Sanders produces a compelling narrative of the centrality of women, both as mothers and middle-class professionals, to attempts to transform and modernise Mexico's social relations.

Chapter 1 examines the participation of Mexican reformers in the Seventh and Eighth Pan-American Child Congresses, held in Mexico City in 1935 and in Washington, DC in 1942 respectively. The discussions on how to bring about progress to the hemisphere are mired in prejudices. The poor were considered culturally inferior denizens who needed to be racially uplifted and integrated into society by the scientific methods of welfare professionals. The job of turning children from poor families into good citizens and docile workers fell on women. As poor wives and mothers, women had to learn how to create healthy, clean home environments for their worker-husbands and children. As female middle-class social assistance practitioners they had to design and implement programmes to train mothers and children and, when necessary, monitor and intervene in the domestic lives of the poor. These were appropriate gender roles because women were natural caregivers. The debates also highlight the period's growing role of the state in social and economic transformation. The poor