

## Review Article

### CONTRASTS IN LATIN AMERICA

Dr. Bernstein, Professor of History at Brooklyn College, in his contribution to the series "The Modern Nations in Historical Perspective", deals with Venezuela and Colombia in a single, 152-page volume.\* There is a notable gap between the last events discussed in the book and the date of publication. With respect to Venezuela, for example, the presidential-parliamentary election of 1963 was the latest event recorded, and this without an analysis of the voting results. Essentially, there is little information concerning developments after 1960.

For Colombia, the time lag is even more pronounced. There are no references to publications appearing since 1962, and in the text, although the concluding chapter is entitled "These 30 years, 1934-64", there is nothing treated since 1958, with the exception of a single sentence reporting the completion of rail connections between Bogota, the inland plateau capital city, with the Caribbean seaport of Borinquilla. This single passing reference to the first railway crossing the country is perhaps as eloquent a phrase as could be written, symbolic as it is of the gaps in the economic and commercial development of this country. For years, because of gaps in the railroad and highway systems, Colombia has boasted the greatest air-freight tonnage of the continent.

The seventy pages of text and one map devoted to Venezuela begin with a five-page chapter entitled "Venezuela Today." Here the reader is at once confronted with Dr. Bernstein's propensity to generalize and to categorize: although the history of Venezuela is a history of dictatorships and military juntas, the elections of 1945 and 1958 resulted in victories for the left-of-centre Accion Democrática party. Surely it is premature to express the conclusion, based on two elections out of 150 years of national history, that the "Seeds of democracy had taken firm root". Mr. Bernstein's iconoclasm is demonstrated in his comment, again in the chapter on contemporary Venezuela, on "some of the most shocking poverty in all of Latin America". He states categorically (and in the reviewer's judgment quite erroneously) that "None of the major forces in Venezuela—neither the Church, the

\**Venezuela and Colombia*. By Harry Bernstein. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall [Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada], 1964. Pp. viii, 152. \$4.95.

corporations, the political parties, nor the military—has exerted its influence to eradicate these shameful conditions, and the misery, the immorality, and the apathy they breed.”

Observing that the Venezuelan military has fought no wars in the modern era, he adds that “consequently the military function is confined to police work . . . [and] meanwhile, the untapped energy of the officers finds outlet in the political arena.” This remark opens up the entire question of the role of the military in Latin America, i.e. in many countries other than Venezuela—a question that the 1965 Venezuelan regime deemed of such transcendental significance that it refused to attend the Inter-American Conference of Foreign Ministers because of objections to the Branco regime in Brazil. There is more than a bit of irony in this action, inasmuch as it was none other than Venezuela that instigated the calling of the Inter-American conference of 1964 at which the members of the Organization of American States decided to withdraw diplomatic, consular, and economic relations with communist Cuba. Venezuela did not spurn the presence or the votes of military or non-democratic regimes when her items were on the agenda of a conference.

The half of the volume dealing with Venezuela goes on with chapters on early settlement, the change from viceroyalty to nationhood, the lengthy period of the Gomez primacy, and the alternation between civilian and military rulers in the nineteen thirties through the fifties. In recent years the largest sources of revenue, and those which have made the greatest impact upon the whole economy of the country, have been oil and iron ore. These revenues are at the same time the means through which Accion Democrática hopes to implement its programmes for the social and economic progress and development of the nation. These are means which are singularly lacking to many other Latin American governments and political parties of the progressive left. The responsibility of the Venezuelan government for this stewardship of resources, and the results for their countrymen of this stewardship, remain to be demonstrated.

In the second seventy pages of this volume, devoted to Colombia, Dr. Bernstein starts with “Colombia Today”. In this exposition he concentrates on “la violencia”, the reign of rural terror and guerrilla warfare that has plagued the country for nearly two decades. In hopes of putting an end to the century-old feud between the Conservatives and the Liberals, former Presidents Laureano Gomez and Lleras Camargo signed a political pact to last until 1974. By the terms of this agreement, subsequently approved by a plebiscite, the two major parties would alternate in holding the Presidency for four years, with half of the national and provincial legislative seats to go to each party. Furthermore, Cabinet membership was to be divided equally. Whatever merits this unprecedented arrangement might have with respect to the reduced importance of an individual voter’s influence (and interest) in national elections, it has in fact largely directed partisanship in politics

inwardly, producing factionalism and splinter groups within both the Conservative and the Liberal parties. During the alternation period, thus far, there has been some diminution of the bloodletting, but not a cessation. This is a cause of chagrin to responsible political and religious leaders of the country, irrespective of their ideological leanings.

Dr. Bernstein properly points out that educational reform, as well as a conscious effort to control inflationary tendencies, are current issues of preoccupation to the Colombian government. Colombia was for some time used as a "showcase" for the Alliance for Progress, demonstrating specific programmes—and their popularity and success—of United States assistance. With the termination of the Presidencies of John Kennedy and of Lleras Camargo, the "showcase" concept seems to have faded away.

Granted that the volume is inspired by the muse of history, it should not be judged as a sociological tract or as a study of economic geography. But there is room even in the record of a country's history, not only for facts but also for commentary upon the facts. Bernstein successfully treats some of the important recurring problems of race (the Spaniards' conquest of the Indians; the importation of Africans to fill the decimated ranks of Indian peons), of population changes, and of land tenure. Indeed since the publication in 1945 of Dr. Bailey Diffie's classic *Latin American Civilization, Colonial Period*, class structure, racial conflict, systems of land tenure, and measures of taxation have been held to be *de rigueur* for historians who write on Latin America.

The "Introduction" to the Central American countries and their problems is set in the context of the conference of their Presidents with President Kennedy, held in the Spring of 1963 at San José, the capital of Costa Rica. There, according to Dr. Mario Rodriguez,\* advance agents of the Kennedy party had persuaded the Latin American presidents and foreign ministers that this was not a proper occasion for them to air their demands for a commitment from the United States to liquidate the Castro regime in Cuba. The conference was turned, instead, to a reaffirmation of the Alliance for Progress, and to the economic integration of Panama and Central America, "to distract attention from the pesky Cuban question."

From this Introduction, Chapter 1 moves to a consideration of the economic and political realities in each of the countries. That the scholarly research involved in this endeavour is open to question can be illustrated by two examples.

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\**Central America*. By Mario Rodriguez. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall [Scarborough: Prentice-Hall], 1965. Pp. xii, 180. \$4.95.

In discussing the per capita income in 1960 of the various countries, the author concludes that "the area's average is \$208, or one third that of the United States." But the U.S. per capita income in 1960, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Business Economics, was \$2217! The second example is the frequent citation, as source material, of newspaper accounts of the San José meeting, when the official documents, textually accurate and complete, are easily available from Pan American Union and government sources. A minor error is that in a discussion of loans from the Agency for International Development there is no mention of the outright grants made by that institution.

The recounting of the physical realities of Central America becomes a platform from which to launch a polemic in favour of the Central American Common Market, a hopeful signpost to a future path marked out by collaboration and integration as compared to a past of economic nationalism and customs barriers.

After brief summaries of the recent history of the several Central American nations, the volume returns, in Chapter 2, to the colonial period of this area. Then, during early years of independence, occurred oft-repeated ephemeral attempts to attain Central American union. The interplay of military *caudillos*, ambitious local politicians, and the added handicap of aggressive diplomatic agents of the British government who placed numerous obstacles in the way of Isthmian unity, is carefully portrayed. It makes a dismal record for the late decades of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 3, "The New Liberalism, 1871-1914", is notable more for its delineation of the complicated negotiations for canal rights with Nicaraguan officials, and for the period of North American "Big Stick" diplomacy, than for a record of internal developments. Chapter 4, "Legacy of War, 1944-1954", relates the fall of several Central American dictators, and the emergence of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala. The latter, falling prey to communist influences, was the object of intrigues in 1954 still unexplained in full, and was also the subject of an Inter-American Conference held that year in Caracas, which authorized by resolution the "eradication" of communism from the hemisphere.

It is perhaps typical of this book that the last chapter, while explaining the fall of Arbenz from power in Guatemala in 1954 on the penultimate page of the book, abruptly leaps to conclusions comparing the Kennedy and the Johnson policies *vis-à-vis* Latin America, in the 1960s. Of the latter, Rodriguez concludes: "the present policy of the United States will inevitably frustrate and undermine our natural allies throughout Latin America . . . . It would be wiser and more profitable for ourselves to get the Alliance for Progress back on the road which President Kennedy intended."

It is increasingly clear from recent events in Latin America that North American concepts and experiences in responsible representative government—and much less the practice of democratic electorates—simply do not exist in Central

America, in countries of high illiteracy, high illegitimacy, and a generally low standard of living. Costa Rica is an exception.

It is equally clear in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and elsewhere, that outside governments endowed with great leverages of economic assistance and military aid cannot determine the direction and policies of the local government. How much less can foreign journalists or ideologues without practical experience expect to affect the course of those governments? But we frequently see them try.

Arthur P. Whitaker's *Argentina*\* is another in the series of short (184 pages) treatises on individual countries. This one emphasizes the twentieth-century Argentina, although two chapters summarize the nineteenth-century background and origins of the modern Argentine state. The history of that country encompasses a number of issues around which political attention and strife have polarized: to have a federal or a unitary form of government; to centralize and nationalize the functions of government; military versus civilian control; regionalism versus cosmopolitanism. Sometimes these struggles involved the personalities of Presidents, the elements of caudillismo, or personal leadership, as in the regimes of Rosas and of Peron. Sometimes the segments of society characterized as "labour" or "the military" were in peaceful competition, in uneasy alliance, or at swords' points.

Between 1800 and the first World War, Argentina achieved an economic development, based on its cattle-and-grain-rich pampas, fertile and well-watered, which it has not been able to sustain. (Indeed, the bare bones of import statistics show that in 1965 Argentina was importing meat from Uruguay, eggs from Denmark, and other foodstuffs from other areas.) Between the two world wars, industrial growth was added. But, Dr. Whitaker holds, political, social, and cultural development has bogged down, rather than added to previous accomplishments, since 1940. This, he insists, is caused chiefly by the Argentine people themselves, and the remedy too must be found from amongst these people. They have the intelligence, aptitudes, and natural resources that are required—but do they have the will to correct the defects in their body politic?

And who are the Argentine people? Of indigenous Indian blood there are but few remaining descendants. Spanish and Italian immigration has populated the country. For the twenty years from 1880 to 1900, Italians outnumbered Spanish immigrants in a ratio of 3 to 1. Smaller numbers came from Germany, France, Britain. Farming and merchandising were familiar pursuits for first-generation immigrants, but the Italians, especially in recent years, have exercised increasingly wide influence in government, finance, education, and cultural circles. The

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last three Presidents, for example, were named Frondizi, Guido, and Illia. Old-world cultural and historical societies have flourished in Argentina, and on occasion were considered a threat to growing Argentine nationalism. The assimilation of immigrants would seem to have been eased by laws which permitted naturalization after only two years' residence, but for decades the law did not confer the privilege of voting or holding office upon such naturalized citizens.

Inasmuch as Dr. Whitaker has—in addition to his distinguished educational career as an historian at the Universities of Pennsylvania and Princeton—travelled, studied, lived, lectured in, and written about\*\* that proud and sensitive country for several decades, his views are entitled to respect. He summarizes:

Argentina is a maverick. It does not fit into any of the common categories of nations, such as "underdeveloped" or "developed", and "democratic" or "authoritarian", and it does not even run true to any Latin American type. Yet its recent history resembles that of many underdeveloped nations of both hemispheres in a wide variety of ways, and perhaps most of all in the persistence of social ferment and political instability, in the rise of populist nationalism, and in the expansion of the armed forces' rule. In all these respects Argentina was a pioneer, for it entered upon the present cycle a third of a century ago.

This volume follows again the now-familiar pattern. First there is a chapter on contemporary affairs. This is then followed by chapters on the evolution from colony to republic, the immigration flood (thousands from Spain and even more thousands from Italy), the unsuccessful years of Radical-party leadership from 1916-1930, and then military rule for most of the period 1930-1943. The full impact of Juan and Eva Peron is related in subsequent chapters, with sprightly titles such as "Enter the Masses: Peron's Neo-Fascist Nationalism, 1943-1946", "Peronist High Tide, 1946-1949", "Peron Hesitates and Is Lost, 1949-1955", and "A Haunted House, 1955-1963". Electoral returns from 1963 to 1965, as well as the muted violence attendant upon the second Senora Peron's return to Argentina in the fall of 1965, indicate that the charismatic appeal of the dictator has only slightly dimmed with the passage of his years in exile.

Whitaker makes much of the ups and downs and ins and outs of Argentine military men in the Presidency of Argentina, from the first years of independence (1810) to the very recent past. José San Martín, Bernardino Rivadavia, Juan Manuel de Rosas, Bartolomé Mitre, and Domingo Sarmiento shared military reputations as well as Presidential years in the nineteenth century. By 1930, a military coup brought to power General José Uriburu, who was in turn succeeded in office

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\*\*Dr. Whitaker's more important works include *The United States and Argentina*, *Argentine Upheaval: Peron's Fall and the New Regime*, *The Western Hemisphere Idea*, and *Nationalism in Latin America, Past and Present*.



by General Augustin Justo. In 1943 another military coup placed a junta in power, from which eventually emerged Peron as the sole (with Evita Duarte Peron) ruler.

Professor Whitaker makes a number of comparisons between Argentina and Canada. The population is nearly equal; in each about two-thirds of the people live in cities; centres of heavy population lie along the eastern third of the country; both are large-scale exporters of foodstuffs to Europe; both have substantial degrees of industrialization, aided by foreign investments. (He adds, for good measure, that each country, at one time or another, developed anti-United States feelings.) However, by 1959, Canada's per capita income had reached a figure four times as great as that of Argentina. In literacy rate, daily caloric intake, and life-expectancy data, Argentina is close behind the Canadian figures.

Buenos Aires, with a population of four million and with its immediate region containing seven millions (one third of the country's population), has for decades been the second largest city in the Western Hemisphere. It is the political, economic, and cultural capital, and the point of convergence of all rail, shipping, and air transportation. Rosario and Cordoba, the second and third largest cities, are one-tenth and one-twelfth the size of Buenos Aires.

In 1960, Argentina joined the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAF TA), an imitation of Europe's Common Market and at the same time a defensive reaction against it. The Argentine point of view that her export market in Great Britain was a matter of high priority and the fear that European Common Market procedures would give preferred treatment to the agricultural products of member countries and their former dependencies outside Europe, combined to bring rejoicing in Argentina when in 1963 General de Gaulle decreed Britain's exclusion from the Market.

It is too much to assume that each of the authors in the series came separately to the conclusion that he would be most happy to start his own contribution in the form of a short section on contemporary events, and then proceed to return to a chronology from the time of European discovery. It is necessary, accordingly, to assume that the general editor of the series, Robin Winks, imposed this format upon the different authors. In any event, it is a format with which the authors do not contend on an equal basis. As early as the second or third page of the first chapter on the current scene, references are found necessary to earlier precedents or historical background, in explaining the events of today. Then, throughout the chapter, other necessities appear which also depend for their understanding upon a knowledge of the past. All told, to this reviewer, the effect is confusing. The requirement to repeat a number of facts and past developments puts a further strain upon the space limits which appear to have been imposed with the utmost rigour. One would estimate that the consequence, in so far as individual writers are concerned, must be unmeasurable fuming and frustration. But they do fulfill the formula.

While each of the three authors here reviewed shows a natural sympathy toward the peoples and the lands about which he writes, it would appear that Whitaker is the most conversant with his respective area; Bernstein is the most dogmatic in his value judgments, frequently interspersed amongst factual recital or exposition; and Rodriquez is the most unrelenting in his quotation and admiration of the late President Kennedy. In style, Whitaker permits himself the luxury of colourful language; Bernstein's prose is matter-of-fact; Rodriquez' sometimes approaches the lyrical but is heavily committed to the concept that by using Spanish phrases he can obtain meaningful nuances. Whitaker is the most objective and dispassionate, Bernstein the most partisan, Rodriquez the most idealistic. Each is to be admired for the effort to compress.

Prentice-Hall contemplates a series of further publications with especial emphasis on Latin-American history.<sup>1</sup> *Chile, Peru and Ecuador* by W. D. Beatty and *Cuba and the Island Republics* by J. E. Fagg are due soon. Later in the series are *The West Indian Islands* by D. A. G. Waddell, *Brazil* by Richard M. Morse, and *Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay* by Charles Arnade. (*Canada* is scheduled by Frank Underhill and *The United States* by William R. Taylor.) These small volumes may have some advantages over the traditional histories of Latin America. In those earlier voluminous tomes a single author would make a valiant effort to present the history of all Latin-American countries, covering half a millennium. The effort was not always crowned with the laurels of success. Depth of understanding of the highly varied cultures, ethnic factors, and geophysical dissimilarities by present-day historians has been noticeable: hence the benefits that can be anticipated in bringing the records and the interpretations of the records to us as the result of much more concentrated examination. The hemisphere is broad and deep, and with this series the elementary information necessary to an intelligent evaluation of contemporary events can be widely disseminated. The fields of government, economics, and sociology could properly take cognizance of those fresh starts in the direction of specialization by country. It is fortunate that an increasingly significant body of data, enriched and more specific than what was previously available, can now be brought to the public and not remain in Iberian storehouses of documents, reports, and archives.

The Oxford University Press is also engaged in preparing an historical panorama of the Latin-American countries in a series of eight country or regional studies. Relatively short (250 pages), each volume in this series begins with a chapter on the human and physical geography, and then resumes the traditional chronological approach, with chapters on the colonial heritage, the revolutionary period, the agri-

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1. Prentice-Hall of Canada, Scarborough, Ontario, is in charge of the Canadian distribution of these titles, which are planned for issue in paperback and cloth editions at approximately \$2.00 and \$5.00.



cultural economy, the effects of industrialism and of immigration, with a concluding chapter on contemporary events and problems. In addition to this historical series, the Oxford Press has a number of other volumes in its collection of "Latin American Studies", and *A Short Introduction to the Economy of Latin America* by F. Benham and H. A. Holley.

This effusion of the printing presses can produce, it is hoped, more than mere marshalling of previously known facts, and another review of political, economic, sociological, and diplomatic transactions. Out of the competition between these series the advantages to the readers can be substantial if in the fresh imprints there are to be found greater insights and a clear-cut understanding of problems arising from the various forms of factionalism and extremism to which the Latin-American countries have for too long been subject. One can always hope.

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