

POPULISM IN SOUTH AMERICA

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BEYOND POPULISM. By CANDIDO MENDES. (Albany: State University of New York, 1977. Pp. 112. \$10.00.)

THE LEGACY OF POPULISM IN BOLIVIA: FROM THE MNR TO MILITARY RULE. By CHRISTOPHER MITCHELL. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977. \$16.95.)

EL MITO DEL POPULISMO EN EL ECUADOR: ANÁLISIS DE LOS FUNDAMENTOS SOCIO-ECONÓMICOS DEL SURGIMIENTO DEL "VELASQUISMO": 1895-1934. By RAFAEL QUINTERO L. (Quito: FLASCO, 1980.)

GAITÁN OF COLOMBIA: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY. By RICHARD E. SHARPLESS. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978. Pp. 229. \$11.95.)

POPULISM IN PERU: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MASSES AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL CONTROL. By STEVE STEIN. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980. Pp. 296. \$21.50.)

During the last decade most observers concluded that populism had run its course in Latin America. Therefore scholars began an autopsy on the carcass. After electrifying politics in the hemisphere from the 1920s into the 1960s, populists found themselves frustrated, scorned, banned, exiled, and even buried. In the 1970s, such venerable figures as Juan Domingo Perón, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, and José María Velasco Ibarra passed away. Now that hopes are rising for redemocratization in the 1980s, politicians, pundits, and social scientists are again looking back at previous populist movements to see if there are any possibilities for a resurgence.

A diagnosis of the health and potential recovery of Latin American populism partly depends on how the patient is defined. This elastic term has principally referred to three interrelated political patterns. First, it has been applied to a flamboyant style of political mobilization in which a magnetic, paternalistic leader rallies the subordinated classes behind nationalistic banners. Second, populism has described a heterogeneous social coalition aimed primarily at the working classes but including and led by significant sectors from the middle or even upper strata. Third, this label has been attached to reformist policies promoting national integration and "development." These programs normally expand state activism to incorporate the middle and working classes in a process of accelerated industrialization through mild redistributive mea-

tures. This review will evaluate first the literature emphasizing mobilization, then social coalitions, and finally programs and consequences.

Most studies of Latin American populism have concluded that personalistic leadership was more essential to a movement's dynamism than were class solidarity, ideological purity, or detailed programs. Steve Stein's study of the emergence of mass politics in the 1930s in Peru excels as the best "culturalist" treatment of populism in print. Unlike "structuralists," Stein does not see populism as primarily an outgrowth of changing capitalist conditions and class alignments. Without ignoring economic and social forces, he views populism as mainly a byproduct of a patrimonial political culture inherited from the Ibero-American past. Thus the paternalistic, clientelistic bond between charismatic leaders and dependent followers becomes the central theme.

Of all the books under review, Stein's stands out as the best grounded in existing social science literature on populism. He systematically explores the concepts of mass mobilization, political culture, and charisma as they unfolded in the social and economic context of Peru. He points out that Latin American populism has been distinguished by its polyclass composition and urban concentration. In Stein's final analysis, twentieth-century *populismo* replaced nineteenth-century *caudillismo*. It served as a safety valve to accommodate potentially revolutionary pressures from the working classes without engaging in structural transformations or ejecting established elites.

He applies these provocative arguments to the origins of electoral populism in the 1931 presidential contest between Luis M. Sánchez Cerro from the military and Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre from the APRA. To set the stage for that confrontation the author presents two highly informative chapters on social and political developments from 1903 to 1931. Then he dwells on the background and sudden growth of the two competing movements, their construction of class alliances, and their campaign tactics and symbols. Haya mainly represented the middle class and organized labor, while Sánchez Cerro drew upon the more numerous artisans and lumpenproletariat to defeat him.

Stein captures the tone and psychology of these campaigns from an extraordinary array of original sources. These include insightful interviews with participants, newspapers, pamphlets, photographs, and even folk songs. He also makes skillful use of census and electoral data. This stimulating, smoothly written monograph will appeal not only to Peruvianists but also to a broad range of Latin Americanists.

In the rich historical content of the book, a few improvements could be made. Since most of the evidence comes from Lima, scrutiny of crucial groups outside the capital city—especially the sugar workers and the northern provinces—is skimpy. Although Stein sets forth an illuminating breakdown of 1931 voters in and around Lima, more attention to

regional electoral trends would also be welcome. The commendable emphasis on populist mobilizations and coalitions leaves programs and ideologies somewhat neglected. For example, Stein does not elaborate on his claim that both Haya and Sánchez Cerro had corporatist visions.

This important book's strongest contribution to building any descriptive "model" of populism lies in its powerful analysis of leadership orientations and political values. That emphasis, however, risks exaggerating the explanatory vitality of patron-client relationships and attitudes. Stein leaves no doubt that Haya and Sánchez Cerro offered their constituents a paternalistic approach. Despite the author's painstaking research, it remains intrinsically harder to establish that the masses passively preferred such a fatherly figure. In the main, such working-class inclinations must be imputed from their widespread but seldom articulated support for such a *patrón*. But that preference might be better explained by quite objective working-class calculations of their viable political alternatives, regardless of cultural traditions. Deeper analysis of the socioeconomic makeup and interests of populist followers might diminish the significance of cultural variables.

Stein correctly revises the older romantic notions of heroic populist paladins leading the charge for social change. He argues persuasively that their moderate reforms mainly serve to restore social control. At the same time, his Peruvian study underscores the ambiguities of populism. Although nonrevolutionary, movements like APRA can nonetheless be perceived as sufficiently dangerous by the upper class and the armed forces to elicit decades of exclusion from full participation. Populist parties can become increasingly conservative over time, as witnessed in Peru, Mexico, and Venezuela. Guerrilla spinoffs from APRA and its brethren in the 1960s, however, also showed that they can provide seedbeds for more radical alternatives.

Richard Sharpless's biography of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán also deals primarily with the galvanizing leadership facet of populism. In contrast to Stein's social science approach, our second historian weaves a traditional narrative account. Although skimming some theories about populism in the introduction and conclusion, the author furnishes no intricate or consistent conceptualization. The briefly mentioned traits of populist movements—such as multiclass composition—are taken as givens rather than as hypotheses to be tested in the case of *gaitanismo*. The notion of populism as a paternalistic response to the urban crises of dependent development is stated but not explored. Although agreeing with Stein about the opportunism of populists, Sharpless is more impressed with his subject's dedication to social justice for the poor. He therefore interprets the movement as a threat to elite political hegemony rather than as a device for defusing mass discontent.

This sympathetic biography joins the slim ranks of solid studies

on eminent Latin American politicians. Many others, like Haya, Perón, Betancourt, and Castro, cry for similar detailed coverage. In a fluid style, Sharpless traces his man's career from birth in 1898 to assassination in 1948. The author displays admirable sensitivity to the formation of an upwardly mobile mestizo scorned by the upper class. This led to quintessential populist vacillation between challenging the aristocracy on behalf of the destitute and compromising with the elites on behalf of his own ambitions. Paralleling other populists, Gaitán borrowed socialist ideas and fascist campaign techniques from Europe. Sharpless's perceptive exposition of Gaitán's thinking, however, may exaggerate the leader's socialist inclinations, especially by the 1940s. Where Gaitán departed most from the standard populist profile was in his dedication to *campesinos* and agrarian reform in the early 1930s. Indeed, his fascinating transformation from emphasizing a rural to an urban base merits even further elucidation by the biographer.

One of the book's virtues is its foundation on rare primary sources and interviews. Its shortcomings stem from shallow investigation into the social composition, tensions, and programs of gaitanismo. Which segments of the lower classes did the movement appeal to and why? Although Gaitán claimed to speak for the downtrodden, a thorough dissection of the 1946 electoral returns might reveal surprises about his sources of support.

The abbreviated conclusion confuses the differences between socialism and populism, class conscious and multiclass movements, and Fidel Castro and Jorge Gaitán. For example, Sharpless claims that populism's achilles heel is its inability to cope with the military, but that does not account for the Colombian case. The author's deserved praise for Gaitán's efforts overshadows any explanations for his profound failures. Was this leader too moderate or too radical, too committed to national integration or too wedded to class conflict? Did deep-seated constraints in Colombian society and politics somehow doom his movement?

Stein and Sharpless imply that the paternalistic dynamic between leaders and followers is the key to Latin American populism. If so, then it remains unclear why such movements waxed after World War I and waned by the late sixties. Perhaps the current lull is mainly explained by a cycle of conservative repression. Maybe a generation of populists, which emerged in the interwar years, has simply spent its energies. Another explanation might be that the political culture and consciousness of many Latin Americans has changed from the twenties to the seventies, rendering the masses less susceptible to the charms of populists. Or it could be that charismatic mobilization was never really the essential variable. An alternative hypothesis would suggest that the essence of populism was its adaptation to certain external and internal socioeconomic pressures widespread during the first half of the twen-

tieth century but no longer prevailing in the more advanced countries. It required a certain level of foreign stimuli, economic growth, industrialization, labor specialization, urbanization, education, and social articulation for populism to take hold. From this perspective, intensive studies of class relations at varying levels of capitalist development in different countries become necessary to unveil the real logic behind political changes.

Rafael Quintero is most concerned with the socioeconomic setting, causes, content, and coalitions underlying so-called populist movements. He rejects most of the existing social science hypotheses about populism. Instead, Quintero adopts a sociological approach rooted in political economy and imbedded in the particular historical configurations of Ecuador. His complex and sometimes strained class analysis tackles the toughest structural questions about political change. As a result, his excellent conceptualization and research have produced a pathbreaking work.

Previously, Ecuadorean analysts argued that José María Velasco Ibarra began urban populism there in the 1930s during his first of five successful presidential campaigns. They reached that conclusion by importing populist constructs from other Latin American countries, by assuming that political phenomena in the sixties could be traced back to the thirties, and by believing the candidate's own bombast about owning the loyalty of the masses. By burrowing into the actual historical record, Quintero demolishes those interpretations. In the process, he calls into question the entire utility of the populist framework. Just as Latin Americans pioneered the theorizing about populism, so now they are in the forefront of refining or moving beyond that mode of analysis.

After laying out his critical approach, Quintero plunges into a lengthy, dense, but rewarding history of Ecuadorean capitalist development from the Liberal Revolution of 1895 to the takeover of Velasco Ibarra in 1934. This thorough economic and social mapping fills a huge gap in that nation's historiography. It shows that structural conditions were not conducive to the eruption of urban populism there in the 1930s. Instead, the historical foundations of the landowners' political supremacy remained sturdy enough to allow them to dominate *velasquismo*.

Like Stein, Quintero follows his discussion of the socioeconomic context with a penetrating analysis of suffrage regulations and practices to make possible a microscopic examination of electoral change at the start of the 1930s. Restrictions imposed on mass participation by the Ecuadorean ruling class not only kept most workers from mounting their own movements, they also prevented most laborers from voting for populists or anyone, regardless of political culture. Rather than enfranchising illiterates, the wily leaders of the landowners, clergy, and conservatives made Ecuador the first Latin American country to extend

the ballot to women in 1929. They did so to add more rightist voters to the rolls. As Quintero's exemplary electoral surgery shows, those same elite groups—not the urban masses—handed Velasco Ibarra his victory in 1933. Moreover, most of his votes came from the traditionalist *sierra*, not from the more modern *costa* as other authors have assumed. His triumph constituted a reaction against the commercial-banking bourgeoisie of Guayaquil. In short, peeling back the populist label to look at the social undergrowth reveals virtually no populism at all.

This significant book would be even better if the author could forge stronger links between his class analysis and the political reflections of those interests. The transition and integration between the first half on socioeconomic contours and the second half on political-electoral events could be much smoother. After dipping into the eighteenth century for historical background, Quintero jumps from the early 1920s to the early 1930s. Greater attention to the intervening crises from the decline of cacao through the July Revolution of 1925 into the Great Depression would clarify the political twists during 1932–33. If Quintero would tell us more about the programs and substantive policies of Velasco Ibarra and his opponents, that would also add weight to the contention that they represented identifiable social sectors. Some scholar as probing as Quintero should build upon his benchmark to discover if and how Velasco Ibarra later switched his base to the urbanized coast. An opportunistic chameleon, he may have come closer to presumed populist patterns in later years as economic and electoral power shifted further to Guayaquil. Despite some thick prose and repetition, this book repays careful reading. Not only a must for Ecuadoreans, it also alerts all Latin Americanists to be wary of cross-national generalizations.

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, urban growth in the wealthier countries of Latin America began generating the necessary mobilizable masses and socioeconomic issues for populism to catch fire. From the 1920s through the 1940s, populists reflected and fueled those urban pressures. They offered tandem welfare measures and protected industrial expansion. Into the 1950s in many countries, this accommodationist strategy was tenable. It did not require frontal assaults on domestic capitalists, latifundia, or the vital foreign sector. Conceptually, this approach differed from conservative strategies that explicitly favored accumulation by the capitalist elites at the expense of the working class. It also diverged from revolutionary programs that attempted to replace the bourgeoisie with the workers and peasants.

The irony of populism was that the very processes of partial urbanization and industrialization to which that political phenomenon initially responded and then helped promote later inhibited its continuation. Import-substituting industrialization began running into bottlenecks in many countries. By the 1950s and 1960s, the proliferation of urban dwell-

lers and politically relevant actors that had given birth to populism began outstripping the fragile and dependent economy's capacity for absorption. Inflation ran rampant. Added to the demands raised earlier by labor and reformers were expectations from rural-urban migrants and peasants. In most of the hemisphere, populists were outflanked. Space for maneuver in the political arena shrank. In those countries with soaring levels of social and political mobilization but sparse resources, the cruel arithmetic of a zero-sum game seemed to be squeezing the possibilities for consensus or compromise. Partly for that reason, the armed forces outlawed populism in most of Latin America by the 1970s.

Thinner than the others, the last two books grapple with the disappointing consequences of populism. Christopher Mitchell implicitly defines a populist party as multiclass and reformist. According to his basic thesis, its inherent contradictions tend to lead to failure and to replacement by the military. This is because the middle-class elements in the coalition turn conservative after their own moderate objectives have been realized; then they opt for armed repression of their erstwhile working-class allies.

Perhaps because the MNR ended in betrayal of its own reform program, whereas Gaitán ended in martyrdom, Mitchell is far more negative than Sharpless toward populism. Focusing on populists in office and their resultant record naturally leads to gloomier conclusions than does focusing on their dramatic ascent. Like many similar coalitions, once in power the MNR found it extremely difficult to reconcile conflicting class interests in an economy of scarcity. The attempt to juggle divergent groups led to inflation, to preference for the middle over the working classes, and ultimately to dictatorship by the armed services.

Mitchell develops his argument through a useful narrative of Bolivian politics from the 1930s into the 1970s. This description is carefully constructed from primary and secondary sources. Especially interesting information appears on party structure and the role therein of the middle sectors, workers, and peasants. The author clearly delineates shifting presidential strategies by administrations from 1952 through 1976. Similar to other populist experiences, the MNR exhibited a striking capacity to outbid more leftist alternatives, an organizational inability to sustain its polyclass coalition, an ideological weakness in implementing its program, and a tendency to conservatize under the influence of the United States and domestic elites.

Mitchell's class analysis is cogent in broad strokes but less convincing when applied to particular situations. The composition and attitudes of the middle class need sharper definition and more arduous examination. For example, Hugo Banzer's strongest supporters and opponents both came from the middle strata. Therefore a deeper probe into segments of classes and their multiple alliances seems required to

determine the constellation of interests being served at different times. In a country that had more presidents in 1978–79 than all its neighbors combined, opportunism may explain more than class conflict does about individual changes in government. To understand why presumably equally conservative middle classes can tolerate the PRI in Mexico and the AD in Venezuela but not the MNR in Bolivia probably demands further emphasis on the ingrained poverty that limits conceivable class coalitions and programs in that latter country.

Without more rigorous conceptualization of social classes and populism, it proves very difficult to establish predictable variables and relevant typologies. Consequently the last chapter's brief attempt to place the Bolivian experience in a comparative framework is sketchy and tenuous. The fuzziness of populism as an analytical category endures, partly because it refers to an inherently untidy syndrome.

Critics like Stein and Mitchell are correct that populists, contrary to liberal hopes, have failed as vigorous champions of social transformations. They have neither lived up to their own promises nor carried through the desperately needed structural changes. Nevertheless, Latin Americanists may have imposed excessive standards of dedicated leadership, mass participation, class coherence, ideological consistency, and programmatic deliverance on reform movements in the hemisphere. Glancing at Europe or the United States would hardly convince a neutral observer that personalistic politicians, contradictory class combinations, patchwork ideologies, and programmatic deficiencies are unusual. Populism is scarcely a disease confined to Latin America.

Without claiming that populism offers any durable solutions to the severe problems of dependence and deprivation, it must be asked what have been and are the desirable and viable alternatives. Multiple possibilities exist, but two are most commonly mentioned. To oversimplify, there is little persuasive evidence that, in the absence of populism, socialist governments would have leaped to power. Neither is there any convincing case that bureaucratic-authoritarian corporatist regimes have been more effective in securing political participation, social justice, or economic development.

Candido Mendes outlines the wretched state of political life in the Southern Cone after the populists were swept away. This reminds us that the alternative to reform turned out to be reaction rather than revolution, at least to date. Like many writers in the 1970s, he contends that changing structural conditions rendered populist policies less sustainable. The author basically defines populism as a democratic program for development that stresses simultaneous import-substituting industrialization and welfare benefits for the urban middle and working classes. It became an anachronism when the new neocapitalist stage of promoting and diversifying exports allegedly proved more propitious for elitist rule

by military and civilian technocrats. Mendes fears that such authoritarian systems and new violent forms of conflict are becoming institutionalized.

This book is explicitly an abstract sociological essay rather than a meaty monograph. Most of the chapters scan novel forms of political control and challenge in postpopulist Brazil and Argentina, emphasizing confrontations between security forces and guerrilla bands. The most original sections speculate on the sociopolitical functions of escapades such as skyjackings and bank robberies by the otherwise impotent opposition to conservative dictatorships. Mendes shows middle-class intellectuals scaling the ramparts of dissent as they had previously manned the barricades for populism. Since the closing down of democratic openings, it has proved far more difficult to mobilize mass discontent effectively. Mendes's hypotheses about populism, developmental models, and their suitability and consequences, however, remain vague.

Today in Latin America, populism is under attack not only as a political vehicle but also as a social science concept. It has fallen into disrepute as a formula for action because of its past failures and its current repression. It has been called into question as a research construct because it seems too imprecise and too culturally and nationally bound to serve comparative studies.

Populism seems likely to survive as an analytical category with greater vigor the more it can address socioeconomic or structural features and variables. This will enhance its cross-cultural relevance. Inserting political history more deeply into social and economic history offers the best hope of erecting a foundation for improved conceptualization and comparisons. As the books here indicate, more in-depth case studies bridging sociology and history—especially like those by Quintero and Stein—are needed before more elegant generalizations.

Although unlikely, classic populism might be resurrected as a political option if improving economic conditions cleared more room for experimentation. If and when democracy returns to Latin America in myriad forms, populist reincarnations might be most conceivable in the less-developed countries and regions. The ingenuity of Latin American politicians in devising temporary solutions to the crises of underdevelopment and in breathing new life into ostensibly moribund institutions and approaches should never be underestimated. At the same time, many Latin Americans are groping for new political models or combinations. They are seeking fresh strategies, leaders, coalitions, and programs because populism is apparently bankrupt, bureaucratic authoritarianism is repugnant, and socialism is still blocked by awesome domestic and foreign vested interests. To speculate further about the dubious future of populism, however, requires a more thorough comprehension of its past.

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