

RECENT REFERENCE WORKS ON
LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS:
A Neglected Area

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LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN CONTEMPORARY RECORD, VOLUME 1, 1981-1982. Edited by JACK W. HOPKINS. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983. Pp. 892. \$149.50.)

POLITICAL DISSENT: AN INTERNATIONAL GUIDE TO DISSIDENT, EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY, GUERRILLA, AND ILLEGAL POLITICAL MOVEMENTS. By HENRY W. DEGENHARDT. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983. A Keesing's Reference Publication. Pp. 592. \$90.00.)

POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE AMERICAS: CANADA, LATIN AMERICA, AND THE WEST INDIES. Edited by ROBERT J. ALEXANDER. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982. Pp. 864 in two volumes. Set \$65.00.)

THE LATIN AMERICAN POLITICAL DICTIONARY. By ERNEST E. ROSSI and JACK C. PLANO. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 1980. Pp. 261. Cloth \$19.75, paper \$9.75.)

WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND PARTIES. Edited by GEORGE E. DELURY. (New York: Facts on File, 1983. Pp. 1296 in two volumes. Set \$120.00.)

Depending on one's sense of adventure, one of the more challenging or frustrating aspects of the study of Latin American politics is the shortage of systematic reference materials. At a time when the quantity and sophistication of knowledge of Latin American politics are increasing rapidly, scholars are hampered by the lack of ready access to information about all or most Latin American nations arranged in comparable form. Cross-national research and theory building are severely limited by this problem, as are the efforts of Latin Americanists or students simply interested in keeping up with subjects and nations outside their special focus. The works reviewed in this essay are intended as steps toward filling that need.

Two highly complementary works on political parties are Robert Alexander's *Political Parties of the Americas* and George Delury's *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties*. Both works are arranged by country. The contributors to Alexander's book followed similar formats

but were obviously allowed considerable leeway in determining content. This flexibility allows room to emphasize what is unique about individual countries, but it reduces the basis for comparisons. Each country entry begins with a general essay emphasizing political history, followed by a brief bibliography and a listing of all significant parties—past and present. Discussions of individual parties range from a short paragraph to several pages. The strength of *Political Parties of the Americas* is the historical focus of the discussion. Delury's book, on the other hand, provides a more systematic analysis of the parties and party systems at a given moment—around 1982. Taken together, the two books provide a considerable range of information. The entries in Delury's compilation cover the system of government, the electoral system, the party system, individual parties, other political forces, and national prospects. Discussions of the significant parties generally have sections on history, organization, policy, membership and constituency, financing, leadership, and prospects.

The more rigid format of the *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties* allows more direct comparison and also points up the lack of information on a variety of key points. As Delury points out, "Over most of the world, party financing, the life's blood of politics, is as much of a mystery to political scientists as the circulatory system was to the medical profession in the sixteenth century" (p. xvi). Of the twenty Latin American nations discussed, no financial information was presented for nine, and the information available for the remainder was generally sparse. "Reasonably reliable" party membership figures were also difficult to obtain. The occasional omission of entire parties by one or the other of the works also underscores the difficulty of the undertaking. Both works are atheoretical. Neither editor systematically reviewed the literature on parties and party systems, nor did either require the contributors to present a theoretical perspective. For the purposes of comparative analysis, an advantage of both works is the broad range of nations covered. Alexander treats all of the nations and territories of the Western Hemisphere except the United States, and Delury covers 169 nations and eight dependent territories throughout the world.

Both sets are designed as reference works and they function well as such. The country chapters could also be of value as supplementary reading for undergraduate courses. Both works provide devices to assist the researcher. *Political Parties of the Americas* offers a chronology of key national and party dates, a genealogy of the relationships between parties (splits, name changes, and similar information), and a listing of parties by ideological and interest-group type. The *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties* provides a list of acronyms, and both works have detailed indexes.

Complementing Alexander's and Delury's focus on the generally legal political parties is Henry Degenhardt's *Political Dissent*, a discussion by country of the major "political opposition outside the legal structure of the state" (p. xi). This work covers both violent and nonviolent opposition, including revolutionary groups, human rights activists, and religious dissent. Dissenting groups who have come to power, such as the Sandinistas, are excluded. Unfortunately, however, the definition of dissenting groups is sufficiently vague that the informed reader may not consider the list for a given country complete. Nevertheless, the coverage is extensive and informative. *Political Dissent* covers the world, with thirty-two entries for Latin America and the Caribbean. For each nation, there is a brief discussion of the political situation, with emphasis on internal security matters, followed by information on each dissenting group. To the degree that data are available, the entry for each movement covers leadership, history, objectives, activities, and ideas. The information is drawn from *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*. Degenhardt's work also contains a brief bibliography and detailed indexes by subject (including organizations) and by names of persons. One is struck even more by the lack of information on dissenting groups than by what is not known about parties. Far more is known about the public acts of dissenting groups than about their leadership, objectives, and ideas.

Given the low level of coverage of Latin America in the media, it is difficult for most U.S. Latin Americanists to stay adequately informed about current events outside their own focus of attention. Over the years, several works have attempted to fill that gap with annual updates on countries and topics. Most have found it difficult to sustain the effort, however. A notable exception, although one limited in its focus and orientation, is the *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs*.¹ Jack Hopkins's *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* is an ambitious attempt to fill the contemporary information gap with regular editions providing country reports on all nations and major territories of the region, topical essays, current documents, quantitative data, and selected book abstracts. Volume 1 was published in 1983, and Volumes 2 and 3 are in process.

For both students and professionals seeking current information on countries or issues, Hopkins's *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* should be of value. Most of the articles are written in a readable, sometimes folksy style and emphasize current information over theoretical perspective. The country studies, with some variation, follow a common format—political, defense and security, foreign, economic, and social affairs. The choice of current issues for essays was obviously somewhat arbitrary but does cover both general concerns (such as the inter-American system and business outlook) and specific

issues (such as external debt, Mexican–U.S. border and immigration problems, and Mexican oil). The inclusion of quantitative data and documents will be helpful for general reference, but the value of the volume as a reference work would be enhanced by an indication of the basis for including data and documents. Also, the data need some explanation of their reliability and degree of comparability across nations. This work, like those of Alexander and Delury, consciously avoids theory. To the degree that a common perspective exists, all three works generally reflect an implicit pluralistic, North American orientation, a consequence in part of the fact that the authors writing on Latin America are primarily North American academics, with the exception of a few Latin Americans who live in the United States.

Ernest Rossi and Jack Plano's *The Latin American Political Dictionary* successfully combines the functions of both a reference work and a supplementary text. It provides one-page discussions of terms, giving definitions and significance. The entries are arranged in subject matter chapters that match the organization of many books in the field—for example, historical perspective, political culture and ideology, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces, political parties and pressure groups, the military, U.S.–Latin American relations, and so on. Those seeking specific terms or subjects will find a detailed index and a guide listing terms relevant to specific countries. The chapter on economic modernization and political development should be particularly valuable as supplementary reading for introductory Latin American courses because of the range of contemporary development concepts covered and the clarity of explanation. Although one hesitates to criticize the book the authors did not write, reference to the key writers or works on the concepts discussed in this chapter would be a very useful addition for students, as would consideration of earlier views of change. For those areas with which this author is familiar, the definitions appear accurate, although there are always items over which one might quibble. For example, was Colombia's Gaitán "left wing" or populist (p. 81), and did the Monroe Doctrine actually provide "basic guidelines for United States foreign policy," particularly in the nineteenth century (p. 231)?

All of the works reviewed here will be of value to professionals, students, and the interested public. Examining them, however, drives home forcefully the lack of systematic compilation of information on Latin American politics. One would hope that the editors will consider these works as only a first step and that they and others will go on to fill the gaps in these works and produce additional volumes covering the full range of Latin American politics, including theory building.

NOTE

1. The *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs* is published annually by the Hoover Institution Press at Stanford University.