

power massively intervened in traditional life. The organization and establishment of party structures in the countryside was rendered difficult in every country because the communists were unpopular among the peasants. Land distribution increased the popularity of the party, but collectivization ultimately turned peasants against the ruling political elite. In the Hungarian case, the bitterness and anger of both workers and peasants led to open and armed resistance and the 1956 Revolution. High Stalinism was eventually replaced with a new course, in which collectivization was accompanied by a policy of appeasement and the peasants' renouncement of open resistance. Rural mentality oscillated between traditionalism, materialism, and the renouncement of collective action. Continued study of the social and political behaviour of worker-peasants would therefore contribute to our understanding of the changes in the political mobilization of the peasantry. It is to be hoped that the large-scale research and publication experiment of *Countryside and Communism* will continue in Eastern Europe.

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SEMÁN, ERNESTO. *Ambassadors of the Working Class. Argentina's International Labor Activists & Cold War Democracy in the Americas*. Duke University Press, Durham (NC) 2017. xiii, 314 pp. Ill. \$94.95. (Paper: \$26.95).

A few weeks after taking office in 1946, President Juan Perón created the Worker Attaché Programme. This new position of worker attaché within the Argentine Foreign Service was designed to promote Peronism as a path for the expansion of working-class social and political rights throughout the world. More specifically, these worker attachés were to confront US labour diplomats to win influence over the region's labour movement.

Selected by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the future officials were rank-and-file union members from across the country, mostly from leftist (anarchist, socialist, or communist) backgrounds. The programme was dismantled following the 1955 military coup that ousted the Peronists from power for eighteen years. During the period it endured, the two-month training course initially envisaged became one of two years. By 1949, around a hundred activists had been sent to embassies worldwide, while a similar number fulfilled related tasks at the Foreign Ministry in Buenos Aires, the CGT, or at their own unions. Approximately 500 workers – among them very few women – received their diplomas as official worker attachés. Although borrowing from previous foreign experiences and local ideas, this programme was unique in assigning such a high proportion of blue-collar workers to diplomatic duties, and it was the first government-led effort in Argentina to professionalize its foreign service. While the working-class origin of the worker attachés was exasperating for the traditional elitist Argentinian diplomatic corps, the attachés' mission to spread Perón's gospel of social revolution brought outright anxiety abroad.

The author draws on diplomatic dispatches and reports (many of them found uncatalogued at various Argentine embassies), personal papers and memoirs treasured by relatives,

interviews, newspapers, and union magazines to tell the stories of these labour activists. The book is beautifully written, full of vivid details and anecdotes located in the larger plot. Thus, the attachés' experiences open a window to the sudden and continuous changes happening in Argentina, and their new diplomatic position offers the best proof of the transformations they had to show the world. The study offers a hitherto missing element of the Peronist decade, with a transnational perspective that adds to studies of a political movement that has generally been examined at a national or local level. It is not only the excellent description of the international and regional context; it is also how Semán reveals the explicit will of Perón and his attachés in wanting to project their ideas beyond national borders which makes this a truly transnational history of Peronism. In connection with other recent historiographical perspectives that give agency to the South in Cold War vicissitudes,<sup>1</sup> Ernesto Semán offers a "panoramic view of such confrontation from below" (p. 22).

The author's aim lies not in providing a detailed study of the programme itself, which judging by its results could best be evaluated as a failure, given the difficulties encountered in countries such as the US or the Soviet Union, and the fact that its main goal, the creation of a regional labour movement inspired by Perón, never materialized. Instead, he travels with the attachés into aspects of Peronism less reflected upon and, at the same time, looks at some poorly explored dynamics of the Cold War in the Americas.

In relation to the latter, Semán locates the relevance of organized labour in defining democracy in the postwar period. At a time when the United States was debating the role of trade unions and curtailing the labour rights secured during the Roosevelt years, Peronism was giving workers a central place in society. Moreover, it did so by taking from the New Deal's legacies in Latin America. This heritage, Semán argues, is one of the most crucial, yet least studied, sources in the configuration of Peronist identity (p. 52). Thus, in the eyes of US policymakers and trade unionists – for whom workers' benefits challenged liberal democracy – Peronism, with its combination of social citizenship, nationalism, and class-based rhetoric, became a disturbing player; a "totalitarian" example (of state intervention in the economy and union influence on politics), not only to be avoided at home, but also to be prevented from spreading in the Latin American region.

Turning his focus to internal aspects of the movement, Semán uses the attachés experiment to argue against the image of Peronism as a monolithic structure. One facet of this discussion refers to the underestimation of the importance of ideological debates inside Peronism, another to the tensions in the relationship between the leader and the masses. Both were closely connected to the issue of forging workers' identity.

Exchanges within the framework of the first training course serve to illustrate Perón's concern (he even attended some classes) that a common language was necessary for the competing ideologies that constituted the movement. A more or less coherent worldview, synthesized as the Third Position, was the outcome of debates between labour activists coming from leftist traditions, and right-wing intellectuals chosen by Perón to train future attachés. This group consisted of conservative nationalists, Catholic *Integralistas*, and Spanish Falangist professors, combined with Perón's own ideological stamp, inspired by the Church's social doctrine. Semán invests more effort in describing the set of ideas of this

1. G. Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, IL, 2004); G.M. Joseph and D. Spenser (eds), *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC, 2008).

group of trainers than he does in exploring the students' visions, although the students were the ones who rearranged the content and meaning of those teachings by providing their own and particular images of Peronism abroad. As the author tells us, their actions as attachés were often defined more by their previous leftist connections or ideas of what Peronism was – or ought to be – than by the contradictory mandates coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or from Perón. Precisely for this reason, it would have been interesting to consider more closely the background of the worker attachés and to have more insights into the effective interplay that took place during their lessons.

The book powerfully shows the tensions between an increasingly conservative leader and the actions of worker attachés, although they never questioned Perón publicly. In between subordination and rebellion, the attachés' practices showed a great deal of autonomy, Semán argues. They bonded with progressive groups and labour organizations throughout the region and displayed a "populist language that linked social justice to national dignity as a tenet of democratic politics" (p. 136). Along this route, they produced a particular form of Peronism, more revulsive than that of their leader – especially in later years when Perón no longer restrained his sturdy anti-communism and clearly endorsed the new wave of social control and military containment in the region. Attachés expressed a radicalized anti-Americanism that did not follow the timing of Perón, who after 1948 became increasingly willing to subscribe to the United States' Cold War agenda. But it was through the attachés that Latin and North Americans moulded their view of Peronism. Clear examples of this, carefully narrated by Semán, are the support given to political refugees in different countries, and the relationship with Colombian leader Jorge Gaitán or revolutionary movements in Bolivia and Guatemala.

While numerous studies have recently drawn our attention to the complex relationship between workers and Perón, the value of Semán's research is that it disembowels Peronism in the jaws of the state apparatus. Surprisingly, Semán disregards the trend, picking up from Louise Doyon's pioneering study, which recaptures the struggles of an undisciplined, still Peronist labour base during this first decade of Peronism.<sup>2</sup> Building on these studies, Semán could have nurtured his analysis on how worker attachés formed their political identity and on how, as he convincingly states, "Peronism was also the product of its activists, who shaped Peronism through the particular ways in which they interpreted and spread the ideas of Perón" (p. 139).

In Semán's argument, the actions of worker attachés abroad backed domestic transformations and the fashioning of Argentine working-class identity – understood as "the construction of a shared subjectivity" (p. 7), since they were, as apostles of the Peronist revolution beyond national borders, in a unique position to contribute to the Peronist project in their homeland. Located in opposition to both the United States' and the Soviet Union's domestic realities invigorated Argentina's Third Position as an alternative vision for advancing social citizenship and economic nationalism. But built mostly out of official exchanges between the attachés and other diplomatic members, or Perón and Evita themselves, we lack a perspective on the horizontal weaving of the attaches' making. What were the settings of their formal or informal dialogues and interactions, besides meetings at the initial training course? Going deeper into these relationships – especially those not institutionally mediated – would have

2. L. Doyon, *Perón y los trabajadores. Los orígenes del sindicalismo peronista, 1943–1955* (Buenos Aires, 2006). This book is based on Doyon's Ph.D. dissertation "Organised Labor and Perón: A Study in the Conflictual Dynamics of the Peronist Movement" (University of Toronto, 1978).

made it possible to comprehend how such shared subjectivity came to be. We know of the popularity of the worker attachés because of the coverage they received in union magazines and newspapers. But was this circulation of images and opinions enough to sculpt an identity among Argentine workers? Further insight into how the relationship of these now governmental functionaries with their former trade unions and with workers at home developed, and what were its channels, modes, and frequency, could help us to better understand the role of these distant labour activists in the forging of a collective class identity.

Despite these critical comments, this is a book that will undoubtedly interest those working on diplomatic relations and foreign policies during the Cold War; the transnational projection of Latin American populisms; international labour organizations and the forging of working-class identities; and those who wonder how all these different spheres intertwined with each other.

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