

# PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNISM IN BRAZIL

*ANARCHISTS AND COMMUNISTS IN BRAZIL, 1900–1935.* By JOHN W. F. DULLES. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. Pp. 603. \$12.50)

*THE BRAZILIAN COMMUNIST PARTY: CONFLICT AND INTEGRATION, 1922–1972.* By RONALD H. CHILCOTE. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. Pp. 361. \$15.00)

These two studies of Brazilian communism support the proposition that the whole may sometimes be greater than the sum of its parts. Taken separately, each is a work of scholarship that can stand on its own merits. Each in its own way is an authoritative statement on the origins and evolution of communism in Brazil. But taken together, the two volumes reinforce each other to offer a much broader panorama than either author could have intended, giving the reader a coherent account of leftist political dissent and violence in twentieth-century Brazil. More significantly, the two works in conjunction raise fundamental questions about the role of revolution and reform in Brazil and point the need for more research into the functions of accommodation and protest in Brazilian politics.

It would be difficult to find two less similar works on communism in a Latin American country. They do, indeed, share a common central theme, overlap chronologically, and present no major contradictions of fact. Both, moreover, are based heavily on documentary evidence—chiefly the Brazilian radical press—and on the testimony of participants in the events described. Beyond this point, however, the two books bear little resemblance to one another, for the authors' perspectives, interests, and assumptions differ at every turn. Dulles, the historian, approaches anarchist and communist organizations through their leaders, whose activities are recounted in the unfolding context of local, national, and international events. Chilcote, the social scientist, takes a more clinical view, examining the communist party as an institution to be compared in structure and behavior with other political parties.

*Anarchists and Communists in Brazil, 1900–1935* is largely concerned with rival efforts to politicize the urban labor movement. It opens with a fine synthesis of the social and political background to 1917. Two-thirds of the text are then devoted to the next fifteen years, during which communism emerged to displace anarchism as the leading radical doctrine in Brazilian politics. A brief epilogue carries the narrative through the abortive revolts of November 1935 that shattered the political left for a decade. As the title implies, this study focusses to a large extent on individuals. Here are no dialectics, no faceless masses responding to inexorable forces, no Marxian inevitabilities shaping the course of human events. Rather, Dulles has written a humanistic chronicle of the words and deeds of individuals responding to immediate circumstances and to each other. The story is related episodically in a series of cameos that allow the reader, as it were, to rub shoulders with anarchists, communists, socialists,

syndicalists, populists, trotskysts, and military rebels alike; to visit party meetings, editorial offices, street rallies, picket lines, jail cells, and prison camps; and, to feel the reasons for protest against the status quo, to hear the polemics over mutually exclusive panaceas for the ills afflicting Brazilian society, and to sense the animosities, idiosyncracies, and puritanism of the leftist crusaders. Not all those who would reshape Brazilian society were motivated exclusively by political ideology. Some combined politicking with causes that had little to do with the preachments of Marx or Bakunin, lashing out against the evils of tobacco, gambling, and alcohol with the fervor of a Carrie Nation. Zealous radicals such as free thinker Everardo Dias, writers Laura and Octavio Brandão, and José Oiticica, the vegetarian who detested the rabble he sought to uplift, often appeared at least as determined to save the masses from their own vices as to prepare them for the struggle against capitalism. Although they argued bitterly over the kind of regime to be installed after the revolution, the Brazilian leftists of the 1920s and 1930s did agree that capitalism must be destroyed by and for the benefit of the proletariat. Thus, anarchists, communists, and other radicals competed for leadership of the wage earning class, chiefly in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In recreating their saga, largely from their own press and recollections, Dulles presents the most complete account yet available in English of the early history of trade unionism in Brazil.

In contrast to Dulles' opulently detailed narrative, which presumes no prior knowledge of the subject on the part of the reader, Chilcote's study is succinct, interpretative, and designed primarily for specialists. It may be read with profit by experts in such fields as international communism, social revolutions, and comparative politics as well as by students of recent Brazilian history and politics. In order to follow all the author's tightly reasoned analysis, however, the reader should be familiar not only with the Brazilian political scene since 1945, but also with current scholarship on the workings of political parties, communist and noncommunist. *The Brazilian Communist Party* is first of all a study of a political organization by a political scientist who writes in the style of the discipline. It deals with a Brazilian topic, but its methodology could have been applied equally well to any of the nonruling communist parties of Asia, Africa, or Spanish America. The author seeks to determine whether, or to what extent, the communist party in Brazil fits the model of political parties constructed by Triska, Michels, and others. At the same time, this monograph is an analysis of a radical movement by a radical scholar who accepts Marxist frames of reference as self-evident. Chilcote adopts a detached, critical stance, providing valuable insights by probing into areas affecting the internal functioning of the party, such as the impact of the charismatic leadership of Luiz Carlos Prestes, intraparty debates over the advantages and disadvantages of cooperating with bourgeois parties, and why "democratic centralism" has not been a truly democratic process in the Brazilian party. He does not consider the related question of the effectiveness of democratic centralism in other communist parties, nor does he question the basic assumptions of the Brazilian party about the proper behavior of the working class or its own eventual and indispensable role as the vanguard of the proletarian revolution in Brazil. Although he considers the chang-

ing circumstances of the international communist movement that affected communism in Brazil, he deals with the history of the party primarily in the national political context.

The reader may also gain the impression that this study was undertaken to explain the failure of the Brazilian communists to exploit opportunities available to them in the mid-1940s and early 1960s, or to anticipate the anticommunist revolution of 1964 with its disastrous consequences for the party. Chilcote examines the perplexing dichotomy between the revolutionary rhetoric and the normally moderate posture of the communist party, and seeks to explain why it has consistently failed to become bolder and more radical when it was gaining in membership and prestige. His review of the communist record in Brazil leaves no doubt that when the party has acted as if it were just another populist, reformist party it has grown in size, has entrenched itself in the labor movement, and has been reasonably successful in placing its members in public office or in influential positions in the regime. He also shows, conversely, that each time the party has attempted to act in a revolutionary manner, as a challenge to the existing order, it has lost its popular following and has been drastically repressed. He stops short of stating that the communist party, as a political organism, places self-preservation before doctrine or ideology and has learned to adopt the tactics best suited to its survival. Such a conclusion would be tantamount to saying that the communist party in Brazil is no longer a revolutionary organization.

A substantial number of disgruntled communist leaders felt no compunction in drawing this conclusion when they split with the orthodox party in the 1960s and sought to launch the revolution by guerilla warfare. Chilcote has performed a service to students of Brazilian politics by identifying the various ultra-left splinter groups active in the cities and rural areas of Brazil between 1968 and 1972. All but one had been exterminated before his monograph appeared, and that one has since acknowledged the failure of its guerilla campaign. Meanwhile, the nucleus of the parent party survives underground as a potential subject for further study at a later date.

These two well-written studies illustrate the great difficulty in maintaining perspective when focussing on extremist movements in Brazil. Engrossed in the details of radical activities, author and reader alike may be tempted to forget that the Brazilian anarchists were always a minuscule group, and that throughout most of its existence the communist party exerted minimal influence on the national scene. At its maximum size, in 1945–46, the communist party could not attract as much as 10 percent of the vote in national elections. Usually its following was numerically insignificant. Despite the party's claims, moreover, it was never able to shape popular opinion or to direct the course of political events. Programs and goals pursued by the party at the behest of the international movement have not been well received unless they coincided with aspirations of the Brazilian people recognized by all political parties. The most successful communist propaganda campaigns have been on behalf of popular causes already espoused by major parties. Thus, over the years anarchism has disappeared completely and the communist party and its splinter groups have operated only on the fringes of Brazilian politics.

This, as Chilcote points out, is the normal state of communist parties out of power in the Western hemisphere and in much of the rest of the world. For decades, regardless of current party line or fortunes, the practical leaders of the Brazilian communist movement have realized their quest for power could not succeed unless they obtained substantial military support. Both authors give due attention to the party's efforts to recruit members from the armed forces, and both stress the political importance of the unsuccessful communist-led revolt within the army in 1935. Dulles, of course, stops his account at that point, but Chilcote briefly traces party-military relations through the Goulart regime of the early 1960s. A closer study of this subject could cast more light on the unrelenting military hostility that has proved an insurmountable barrier to communist aspirations. It could show that the armed forces have not consistently opposed political dissidence *per se*; rather, that they have participated or concurred in every drastic political change in Brazil, and that in each case military intervention was rationalized, at least in part, as necessary to preserve the armed forces. Examination of the annual pronouncements at the ceremonies commemorating the victims of the 1935 revolt would clearly reveal that Brazil's military leaders viewed that revolt as mutiny within the ranks and as a communist challenge to the very principles of discipline and hierarchy on which the armed services are based. Communism thereafter was regarded by the military high command and the bulk of the officer corps as a corrosive influence threatening to destroy the army itself. Hence, the Brazilian armed forces remained unalterably resistant to the communist party as a threat to the integrity of the military institution. As long as the generation of 1935 continued in control of the Brazilian military establishment, the communist party could not realistically anticipate a situation in which it might share or seize political power.

There is a great deal of material in these two books to be drawn upon by other scholars interested in comparative study of communist parties, radical movements, political violence, and related themes in two or more countries. Chilcote and Dulles also have provided valuable contributions for comparative study of Brazilian institutions and practices in the twentieth century. One likely topic could be the response to political dissidence and armed protest by different incumbent regimes. Dulles' description of the conditions of political prisoners in the 1920s, and Chilcote's comments about their counterparts in the 1930s and the 1970s, suggest that there has been more continuity than change in the handling of political dissidents by the political authorities of Brazil over the past three-quarters of a century. Investigation of this topic might reveal that persistent political conservatism has been the major obstacle faced by the radical movements discussed in these two fine studies.

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