THE STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND REVOLUTIONS:

Building Political Legitimacy in Twentieth-Century Latin America

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THE TIME OF FREEDOM: CAMPESINO WORKERS IN GUATEMALA'S OCTOBER REVOLUTION. By Cindy Forster. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001. Pp. v+287. $34.95 cloth.)

CÁRDENAS COMPROMISED: THE FAILURE OF REFORM IN POSTREVOLUTIONARY YUCATÁN. By Ben Fallaw. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. Pp. vii+222. $64.95 cloth, $19.95 paper.)

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION, 1910–1940. By Michael J. Gonzales. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002. Pp. vii+307. $21.95 paper.)

IN THE SHADOW OF THE STATE: INTELLECTUALS AND THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY SPANISH AMERICA. By Nicola Miller. (London: Verso, 1999. Pp. vii+342. $20.00 paper.)

MEXICO IN THE 1940S: MODERNITY, POLITICS AND CORRUPTION. By Stephen R. Niblo. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999. Pp. vii+408. $65.00 cloth, $22.95 paper.)

REVOLUTION IN THE STREET: WOMEN, WORKERS, AND URBAN PROTEST IN VERACRUZ, 1870–1927. By Andrew Grant Wood. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001. Pp. ix+239. $65.00 cloth, $21.95 paper.)

For the past few years, Latin American historiography has seen an explosion of interesting work focusing on state-formation and the relationship of civil society to the state. In an attempt to provide a more complete historical understanding of political authority, scholars have reevaluated the role of governments, ruling elites, and the lower classes. Many of the new monographs draw on Antonio Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and the constructing of consent to be ruled by all social classes. The six books in this review question the relationship between civil society and the state by looking at Latin American revolutions during the early to mid-twentieth

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century. This collection of books draws most heavily on case studies from the Mexican Revolution, but also includes the Guatemalan Revolution and most broadly, revolutionary and reform movements in Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Cuba. The authors collectively offer a complex vision of political legitimacy that is constructed among the lower classes, the ruling elites, and the national bourgeoisie. This essay focuses on two main themes prevalent in each of the works: 1) the power of the national state to dominate political and social ideology, and 2) the power of the lower classes to challenge state control. For purposes of clarity, the books will be discussed based on the chronological order of their topics. By offering careful investigations of the relationship between a variety of social classes and the state, these books show the process of state formation and offer new insights into the development and limitations of state power.

THE STATE AND INTELLECTUALS: CREATING CONSENT TO RULE

One of the fundamental questions addressed by state-formation scholars concerns how governments construct consent to rule. Nicola Miller investigates the connections between intellectuals and national governments, drawing primarily from case studies of Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Cuba. She divides intellectuals into two categories. Local intellectuals (similar to Gramsci's organic intellectuals) often developed radical programs that interpreted the needs of the lower classes. However, local intellectuals lacked power to implement these radical visions at the national level. More powerful intellectuals tended to be tightly entwined with the machinery of government power and rarely developed independent critiques of the ruling apparatus (32). Miller argues that the powerful intellectuals interpreted and enforced the ruling elites' vision of the nation for the masses, especially when Latin American countries implemented national educational systems in the twentieth century. From the pre-revolutionary to post-revolutionary era in Mexico (the 1870s through the 1940s), the Secretary of Public Education implemented a policy of national education that included "modernizing" the indigenous peoples and developing the image of racial unity. In Argentina during the Peronist era of the 1940s, national education emphasized a romanticized view of the Argentine "folk" that was designed to highlight nationalism. The state disciplined intellectuals who strayed from the official messages. In the strongly nationalist, anti-U.S. climate prevalent in the region, dissidents were discredited as pro-U.S. imperialists or faced more blatant repression by the government. In the exchanges between the intellectuals and the state, Miller emphasizes that the state controls the interactions.

Miller's work raises important questions about the roles of intellectuals and their connections to the state. Underlying her analysis is an

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assumption that intellectuals need to be independent critics of state power. However, most intellectuals have positions as employees of the state, which makes it virtually impossible for them to fulfill this role. While national governments do have tremendous power, the assertion that intellectuals are "accessories" and not advisors to the state seems too strong (245). In some revolutionary periods, the intellectuals and the state share similar goals. The socialist education project of the Lázaro Cárdenas government in Mexico did have some popular support, particularly when the teachers worked in communities that sought land or labor reform. Cuba's literacy program also reflected popular interests in education. Both of these cases had significant ideological components that supported the revolutionary state, and these cases can be read as an example of state power. However, they can also be read as situations where education policy reflected the concerns of the popular classes to gain access to literacy, labor, and land reform.

Miller posits that intellectuals need to keep their distance as cultural critics in order to effectively challenge state power. She shows how the various states co-opted intellectuals to support the policies of a particular regime. However, while intellectual activists have also played an important role in challenging and denouncing state power, more research needs to be done on the roles of intellectuals in a variety of nations to understand the positions of activist intellectuals. Perhaps a study of the Nicaraguan revolution, in which intellectuals played an important role within the Sandinista movement, could broaden our understanding of the connections between the people, the national state, and the intellectuals.

Miller's work concentrates on the relationship between the intellectuals and the state. Future historians can build on her analysis by examining the links between intellectuals and the popular classes. While Miller clearly explains the interactions between the state and intellectuals, a discussion of how lower classes received and responded to the message of national unity and obedience to the state would improve our understanding of the relationship between the state, intellectuals, and the lower classes.

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION: STATE DOMINATION?

Like Miller, Michael J. Gonzales also explores the issue of how states have established legitimacy. His work offers an outstanding synthesis of the Mexican Revolution that is valuable to both undergraduate students and specialists. In a concise, highly readable analysis of the revolution, Gonzales explores the tension between lower-class demands for social justice and the emerging state's desire for social and political stability. Gonzales shows how the modernization policies of President

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Porfirio Díaz eroded the paternalistic relationships that kept Mexico stable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Without paternalism to mediate social relations, tensions within the nation quickly rose and the legitimacy of the Porfirian state collapsed.

When the Mexican Revolution erupted, it became a struggle between those who advocated profound social change (such as peasant leaders Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa) and those who embraced political reforms but valued the existing class hierarchy (Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregón). Gonzales uses the framework of stability versus social change in order to trace the conflicts and negotiations between the elites and the various factions of the popular classes over the nature of the emerging revolutionary Mexican state. While he sees the success of Venustiano Carranza as a victory for those who favored social stability, he also argues that the rural and urban poor successfully pressured elites to write a constitution that provided the basis for social reforms. The triumph of those who favored social stability continued under Obregón in the 1920s, with the national government's emphasis on "modernizing" the nation at the expense of implementing fundamental rural change. The administration of Cárdenas marked a shift back to the dominance of the reformers. Cárdenas's reform policies tied the workers and *campesinos* to the emerging Mexican state. By implementing a "progressive agenda that favored agrarian reform, socialistic education, and economic nationalism," Cárdenas became an "icon of the Mexican left" (223). And in recognizing the material needs of campesinos and workers and attempting some social change, Cárdenas ultimately created more social stability.

While Gonzales's book does not offer radically new interpretations of the Mexican Revolution, it does present the struggles of the revolution in an engaging and coherent manner. Gonzales argues that the revolution fundamentally changed popular culture because it tied people to the state and gave people a sense of Mexican identity. For many Mexicans, this new identity as a citizen replaced previous identities based on village or patronage networks. The merging of social reform with state control created national acceptance for the rhetoric and ideals of social justice. This not only allowed the state to assert its power over the citizens, it also gave the lower classes a tool that they could use to influence the policies of the post-revolutionary Mexican state.

Andrew Grant Wood illustrates the power of the popular classes to shape the post-revolutionary Mexican state. Wood interrogates the links between revolutionary ideals, popular political attitudes, and activism in Veracruz. Among the urban poor in Veracruz, the Mexican Revolution acquired popular political support by emphasizing nationalism and social justice. Wood shows that for the urban poor in Veracruz, reform was a product of both government policies and working-class demands

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for social change. His case study of the tenants' movement clearly supports Gonzales's broader argument about a balance of power between the state and the popular classes within the revolution.

The book traces the social networks of working-class neighborhoods in the Porfiriato and shows how these relationships became the basis for future political organizing. By tracing the importance of social networks, Wood argues that for the Veracruz tenants, organization did not come from the state, but instead was a grassroots response to the difficult economic and health conditions. Women became key players in the neighborhood organizations and prostitutes initiated the rent strikes of 1922 after their frustration with high rents and discriminatory health legislation (75–6). Prostitutes' success at changing from being labeled "contaminants" to being labeled "activists" demonstrates one of the gains that the tenants made in their struggles for affordable housing. Although Wood does an excellent job at highlighting the role of women in the rent strikes, he implicitly raises the question of how gender played into the state's interaction with the popular classes and how gender affected grass-roots organizing.

In spite of the effectiveness of the tenant strikes, the deterioration of worker solidarity and the use of violence by some strikers allowed the post-revolutionary state to use overt repression to break the strikes. Wood deftly illustrates the limits of tenant empowerment by highlighting the ways the government and the elites tried to divide the members of the tenant unions. Economic divisions between union leaders and the rank and file became the source of internal grievances that the state highlighted. Other workers wanted to compromise with government representatives and believed that they had gained possible benefits from remaining in the union. In spite of these divisions, the workers did gain concessions from the national state that enabled them to remain in affordable housing.

Wood moves away from the broad overviews that necessarily accompany more synthetic works and shows how a regional study can help illuminate the connections between the popular classes and the state. Wood concludes that reform was imposed from the state and demanded by the tenants, but he carefully documents that process of negotiation. In doing so, he shows how the post-revolutionary Mexican state became both a reflection of popular aspirations and elite power. Revolutionary rhetoric was more than just words. It empowered the lower classes to challenge the ruling elites by giving the workers an effective tool to fight the policies that made their living conditions intolerable.

Ben Fallaw's study of the Yucatan during the administration of reformist President Cárdenas explores questions of state dominance versus campesino resistance, but arrives at very distinct conclusions from

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Gonzales and Wood. Fallaw investigates the impact of *Cardenismo* for ordinary people in the Yucatán. As social reforms became increasingly expensive and as the successes of reforms in the Yucatán dwindled, Cárdenas had to choose between maintaining his existing social programs and moving resources elsewhere. Fallaw argues that Cárdenas abandoned his commitment to revolutionary reforms when he compromised with elites in order to maintain his power in the state. Without a strong, independent base of support in the rural or urban lower classes, Cárdenas could not justify the continuation of extensive agrarian reform policies. For Fallaw, the working poor lost their ability to force the implementation of revolutionary reforms because Cárdenas chose political stability over social revolution.

The political weakness of Yucatán's lower classes, their tendency to ally with patrons instead of class allies, and the inability of the Cárdenas government to foster the development of civil society meant that reforms tended to be "top down" and tied to local and regional political bosses. Fallaw does an excellent job at tracing the various political alliances that ran through the Yucatán. Unlike the Veracruz tenants, the rural laborers on the henequen plantations had strong patron-client links with powerbrokers within Yucatecan society. *Camarillas* (local and regional political networks) meant that vertical alliances dominated the interests of the rural poor and made it difficult for labor leaders and leftists within Yucatecan society to form horizontal, class-based alliances. Without the support of the lower classes in the Yucatán, Cardenas became reluctant to cast his lot fully with the rural and urban poor and eventually he abandoned most of the government-sponsored reforms.

Like Wood, Fallaw recognizes that the popular classes gained some power from the revolution. However, the two authors differ in their interpretation of that power. Wood views the gains of the lower classes during the revolution as offering a minimal level of social justice that gave the post-revolutionary state true legitimacy. In contrast, Fallaw sees the concessions as an attempt of the federal government to divide and conquer the rural poor. Once political legitimacy had been obtained, inertia made the lower classes reluctant to engage in political activism to challenge the status quo. Fallaw further argues that the revolution failed to remove the landed elites from power in the Yucatán. Although people could gain space for popular protests, without breaking the power of the regional camarillas the rural poor could not really transform the agrarian sector and gain economic freedom. Instead, the local and regional power structures remained in place and the revolutionary rhetoric masked the lack of true revolutionary gains.

Fallaw's work raises important questions about the ability of the federal government to challenge regional elites and impose national revolutionary programs. His emphasis on interaction between the various

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groups within the power structure implies that members of the lower classes who did not have connections to a camarilla had few options to participate politically. Although the author's focus on the camarillas and political power struggles is enlightening, it points to the need for future researchers to investigate the perceptions of ordinary rural workers and peasants of the emerging agrarian reform or the possibilities of independent political activism. What did the campesinos think about the Mexican Revolution in the Yucatán, and how did these ideas differ from the leaders of their camarillas and labor unions? By exploring the alliance between the state and the lower classes, historians may be able to see more clearly the successes and failures of working-class power in the region.

As the Yucatecan case highlights, the federal government had mixed goals for the revolution that ultimately limited its success. Stephen Niblo expands the analysis of the revolution into the 1940s and provides one of the first broad works on Mexico in that decade. Niblo argues that the Mexican Revolution collapsed in the 1940s in part because the vision of modern Mexico held by the ruling elites made it impossible to sustain revolutionary reforms. After Cárdenas's populist presidency (1934–40), many historians describe Manuel Avila Camacho (1940–46) as the conservative president who ended the revolution. Niblo challenges this interpretation by showing that at the time Avila Camacho was actually the moderate candidate. Cárdenas specifically chose Avila Camacho in an attempt to balance the interests of the leftist reformers with the strong reactionary movement from the conservatives. While Avila Camacho emphasized political centralization, weakened the agrarian reform policies, and authorized repression of radical labor activists, he also relied upon strong revolutionary rhetoric to rationalize his policies. The administration also justified the repression and harsh treatment of political dissidents based on Mexico's participation in World War II. During the war, the working classes accepted the president's suspension or removal of revolutionary programs as a part of the national war effort, which enabled the administration to maintain its legitimacy among all different social classes.

Niblo places the allied victory in World War II and the presidential election/selection of 1946 as the end of the Mexican Revolution. The rise of Miguel Alemán (1946–52) signified the victory of the business elites who sought to unravel the reforms of the revolution. Alemán also favored political centralization and tolerated widespread corruption, both of which undermined the ties between ordinary people and the state. Niblo argues that rapid expansion of corruption under presidents Avila Camacho and Alemán "reinforced patterns of submission and dominance" in Mexican society by legitimating the existing hierarchical power structure (253). Corruption also damaged effective labor- and

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rural-organizing efforts. Niblo outlines two examples: the corruption within the National Ejido Bank, which undermined the success of the revolutionary ejido programs; and the corruption of labor leaders, who were essentially "bought off" by members of the ruling elite. Those leaders who could not be corrupted were laid off or driven out of the unions. Niblo demonstrates how corruption weakened state legitimacy in post-revolutionary Mexico by concentrating power into the hands of a few members of the ruling classes.

Niblo's second major contribution concerns his discussion of the Mexican media and how the weakness of the media made it difficult to challenge the level of corruption tolerated by the government. Niblo argues that the debate over public policy shifted from the traditional discussions along patron-client networks to the realm of the media, mostly through radio, but also through film. The connections between the various media, business, and political players limited the willingness of journalists to present a vigorous challenge to public policy. Although this analysis is interesting, historians need to investigate further how these media ties played out at the local level in order to further assess their impact. Niblo's argument that public debate shifted to the media seems less likely, especially in an area such as the Yucatán, where a strengthened system of camarilla politics emerged following the failure of the Cárdenas experiment.

THE GUATEMALAN REVOLUTION AND THE PROBLEMS OF LIMITED LEGITIMACY

The challenges of constructing political legitimacy that became a central part of the Mexican revolution also became a key issue in the Guatemalan Revolution of 1944–54. The dominant interpretation of the Guatemalan Revolution—their "Ten Years of Spring"—argues that the urban working classes and the national bourgeoisie supported some revolutionary reforms, but that the revolutionary experiment was cut short by the Guatemalan elites. When land reform became a major provision of the revolution in 1952, the elites, using the rhetoric of anti-communism, forged an alliance with the U.S. government to support a CIA-sponsored coup that ousted leftist president Jacobo Arbenz. (Piero Gleijeses's *Shattered Hope* and Stephen Kinzer and Stephen Schlesinger's *Bitter Fruit* both have variations on this theme[1]). Cindy Forster

1. Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) describes how the October Revolution lost support among the Guatemalan reformers; and Stephen Kinzer and Stephen Schlesinger's *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Boston, MA: Harvard University, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 1999) details the U.S. government's involvement in the coup that ousted Jacobo Arbenz's administration.

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challenges this interpretation of the Guatemalan Revolution. She argues that the Guatemalan campesinos played a much larger role in supporting the revolutionary governments, and in many cases, the rural poor forced the implementation of agrarian reform in their areas. Campesinos developed a definition of freedom tied to a living wage, reasonable work-loads, and based on a demand for justice. In order to show the depth of campesino support, Forster compares two distinct regions: the banana enclave of Tiquisate, where the United Fruit Company centered its operations, and in the coffee-growing region of San Marcos. By comparing these two regions, she shows that workers shaped the Guatemalan revolution to meet their own needs. At times, campesinos pushed the revolutionary state for radical reform beyond what the state was willing to implement.

Forster attributes the collapse of the Guatemalan revolution not only to U.S.-anticommunist fanaticism in the 1950s, but also to a broader lack of support among some pro-revolutionary groups over the nature of the agrarian reform. The campesinos welcomed the land reform, but the local and national elites who had favored the political reforms of the Juan José Arévalo government balked at supporting the radical changes under Arbenz (197). Instead, the elites claimed that the revolution led to moral decay and incited racial tensions in order to undermine the revolutionary program. Once the 1954 military coup succeeded, the planter elites unleashed tremendous repression against labor activists, especially in the Tiquisate region. Many of the unionized banana workers faced tremendous persecution, especially when the military rounded up and massacred the most vocal of the activists (205). The use of the military overwhelmed the workers and prevented them from effectively defending either themselves or the revolution.

In spite of the eventual defeat of the workers, Forster clearly shows that the lower classes played a crucial role in creating and sustaining the Guatemalan revolution. Like Wood's description of neighborhood networks that helped create the basis for the Veracruz tenants union, Forster's monograph explores social networks that helped create the foundation for rural unions that advocated for reforms on the plantations. For Forster, the persistence of indigenous identity in communities became the basis for rural activism (147). Ethnic identity remained stronger than class identity for many of the campesinos, and Forster offers an insightful discussion of the multiple sources of social networks that supported the rural poor in their struggle against the elites.

Forster also pays attention to the delicate balance that the revolutionary governments maintained in order to simply remain in power. President Arévalo felt especially restricted from enacting radical reforms because of his concern that it would provoke a counter-coup. The revolutionary government also needed to ensure the financial stability of

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the country. For Guatemala, President Arévalo made several concessions to planters by requiring workers to honor labor contracts in order to maintain coffee production (154). In order to prevent spontaneous worker activism, Arévalo tried to contain campesino dissent through official government channels. The Guatemalan revolutionary state had a significantly weaker hold on state power than the Mexican revolutionaries. The limited power of the working classes and the relative weakness of the revolutionary elites blocked the implementation of radical reforms in Guatemala for the first several years of the revolution.

Forster concludes that revolutionary success occurred only when the local peasants and workers embraced it—it was not a top-down imposition on passive campesinos. She uses oral history as a way to get at the local version of events, and in the process greatly expands our understanding of social networks and the role of women in the October Revolution. The Guatemalan Revolution, like the Mexican Revolution, had some successes because campesinos forged (at least temporarily) a working definition of social justice that empowered them to challenge the authority of the planter class (216). The unraveling of the revolution began with the expansion of local grievances. Workers at local plantations who had grievances against landlords were denounced as communist sympathizers, which often led to severe repression. As the landed elites became increasingly concerned about the threat of agrarian reform, they used national and international fears of communism to their advantage. The failure of the revolution to sustain the revolutionary reforms, especially after the failure of the agrarian reform and the military coup, led to a tremendous backlash against the campesinos that resulted in civil war for most of the second half of the twentieth century.

CONCLUSIONS

The six authors offer significant contributions to our understanding of the relationship between civil society and revolutionary states. Methodologically, the studies are solidly researched, if at times fairly predictable in their emphasis on class analysis. Although women are often mentioned as participants in historical events, few of these historians have analyzed the state's use of gender as an expression of power. Forster's work attempts to break the reliance on class analysis; her goal to "use the interplay of local struggles and national legislation to . . . reveal the extent of lower-class unity, rather that the lines of fracture according to race, gender, or municipal identity" is effective (6). Although oral histories can be problematic, her inclusion of oral histories provides a unique insight into the multiple identities of the popular classes and shows how these identities provided the social networks that helped workers to become politically active.

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How much power did Latin American states possess to assert hegemonic control over citizens in the early to mid-twentieth century? Three of the authors (Miller, Fallaw, and Niblo) argue that the state, even a weak state that is emerging in the aftermath of revolution, can impose its values and programs onto a public eager for state guidance and the familiarity of national solidarity. Gonzales emphasizes the balance between state goals and the ability of the popular classes to negotiate for social reforms. Wood and Forster focus on the power of the lower classes to challenge state control. While neither of these two authors would claim that the lower classes have "won" the revolutionary struggle, they reject the idea that workers and campesinos simply respond to the demands of the state.

Why is it important for historians to understand the power relationships between the state and civil society? None of the authors reviewed in this essay claims that workers and peasants have made significant economic or political gains from their respective revolutions, yet in Mexico, the population has generally supported the state. Gonzales and Wood discuss the value of revolutionary rhetoric at connecting people to the state. By sharing common ideals of revolutionary social justice, the Mexican political system seems to have provided a way for civil society to express their grievances and work for some moderate changes. The system is not perfect: the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968, the Zapatista uprising, and the persistence of corruption all are evidence that significant problems remain within the political system. In contrast, Guatemala has experienced over thirty years of devastating civil war in the aftermath of its failed revolution. Civil society, made up of groups as diverse as indigenous campesinos and the urban middle class, has struggled to develop a shared vision of political participation and social reform. By analyzing the negotiations between the state and civil society over issues such as political expression and social justice, the authors of these works grapple with fundamental issues of citizenship, state power, and social responsibility.

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