



Introduction

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Introduction

Recent worldwide political shifts, including the demise of the Soviet Union, the breakup of the Eastern bloc, and setbacks in revolutionary movements in the Third World, have had a marked effect on class conflict in Latin America. These radical changes have also provoked a political and theoretical debate among Marxists and leftists about the possibilities for social transformation in Latin America. This issue of *Latin American Perspectives* contributes to an understanding of this new conjuncture, continuing the theoretical debate while keeping in focus the material conditions in Latin America today, where workers and peasants continue their struggles in a contracting economy in which their meager standard of living steadily declines.

Dave Broad develops a picture of the international class struggle in the aftermath of the Sandinistas' electoral defeat and discusses revolutionary prospects in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The U.S. government strengthened its position as the world's policeman during the 1991 Gulf War, and the former Soviet Union and China, both attempting to integrate their economies into the world capitalist system, no longer serve as counter-balances to U.S. influence in the Third World. Conditions of extreme misery continue unabated, and the debt crisis remains unresolved. The revolutionary movements that swept Central America during the last decade have not led to the socialist conclusion expected some years ago. Broad points out, however, that the rhetorical "triumph of capitalism" offers no solution to the basic problems of the masses in Latin America. While traditional visions of socialist transformation have been discredited among intellectuals and activists throughout the continent, the problems of militarism, environmental destruction, and increasing impoverishment of the majority continue to require a search for a radical alternative to capitalist "barbarism."

Luis Serra critically examines the Nicaraguan attempt to create a democratic political system in a peripheral country facing civil war and imperialist aggression. One of the key elements in the struggle for national independence was the role of the peasantry. The absence of mechanisms for political participation in the marginal classes meant that discontent was expressed through banditry and violence that later became a base of contra reaction. The U.S.-backed war in Nicaragua divided the peasantry, drained the country's resources, and channeled energy into the military instead of pro-

jects for social transformation. In addition, the contra war put tremendous strain on attempts to develop a democratic and participatory system in Nicaragua. Serra contends that the influence of the Soviet model, applied in the context of scarce human resources and the lack of democratic traditions, led to a bureaucratization of the liberation movement. Although the Sandinistas out of power enjoy a significant popular base of support, the international correlation of forces favors the neoliberal program of the Chamorro government.

While Latin Americanists are attempting to adjust their theoretical and political analyses to address the shifts in the international arena, the sharp class contradictions of the continent and abject poverty continue unabated. Mario Fandino explores land titling in Honduras and its effect on peasant differentiation, a theoretical and political question that Serra points out was a serious shortcoming of the Sandinistas' agrarian policy. Their failure to recognize the stratification of the Nicaraguan peasantry led them to adopt programs that alienated key sectors of the rural workers and the peasantry. The current titling program in Honduran agriculture continues to make the semiproletariat a fundamental landholding stratum. While the titling program has been presented as an attempt to provide a "farmer road to the development of capitalism in Honduras," its effectiveness seems to be limited to a small elite in the small-farm sector.

Margaretta DeMar explores the limits of external economic policy and its effects on hunger in the Caribbean. DeMar contends that while international institutions constrain the policy choices of Third World states, those institutions themselves are similarly constrained by the distribution of power among their member states. Her conclusion is that new policy directions will have only limited and extremely gradual effects on the nutritional standards of the impoverished masses in the Caribbean.

Similarly, Michael Allen's book review, "Rethinking Political Economy and Praxis in the Caribbean," appraises three works that develop theoretical, economic, and social analyses of the Caribbean while detailing the problems and aspirations of the poor and powerless in the periphery of the world economy. Allen aptly links this debate to the international political and economic changes that have occurred in the past three years.

Also in this issue, Carlos Vilas responds to an earlier article by James Petras ("The Metamorphosis of Latin America's Intellectuals," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 2), and Petras counters with a rejoinder, in an important debate about the effect of foreign funding on the conduct of research in Latin American think-tanks. The shifts in the international political conjuncture, coupled with the deep economic crisis throughout Latin America, have created, according to Petras, a drift to the right among Latin

American intellectuals who have been co-opted through foreign and domestic government funding opportunities. While Vilas agrees with Petras on several key points, he contends that new research in Latin America is on the whole balanced—that Petras errs in lumping all intellectuals together and that changes in intellectual focus reflect real changes in the continent.

Another debate linked to the issue of connecting theory with social changes has arisen over James Scott's important work on "everyday forms of resistance" by peasants throughout the world. Matthew Gutmann argues that Scott focuses on hidden resistance, obscuring the existence and importance of overt peasant rebellion. Given the dramatic changes in the revolutionary movement in Central America—with the Sandinistas' electoral loss and the turn to a negotiated settlement in El Salvador—it is particularly important that we reevaluate the forms of resistance, both overt and covert, available to peasants and workers. The polemic develops in this issue with Gutmann's critique of Scott, Scott's rebuttal, and a rejoinder by Gutmann.

The political and theoretical crisis provoked by current radical shifts in the international arena challenges Latin America scholars to develop alternative analyses. As these contributors attest, international changes call forth new responses, while groups in Latin America continue the struggle against old problems of poverty and oppression.

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