



Introduction

Author(s): James N. Green

Source: *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Brazil in Transition: Democratization, Privatization, and Working-Class Resistance (Winter, 1994), pp. 3-6

Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2633538>

Accessed: 11-11-2020 16:32 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Sage Publications, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Latin American Perspectives*

Introduction

by
James N. Green

Brazil remains in a constant state of crisis. Since the military turned over the government to civilian rule in 1985, there has been a series of political intrigues, scandals, presidential impeachment proceedings, and turnabouts as dramatic as the rollercoaster course of the economy, with its staggering and chronic inflation. This issue examines aspects of this transition period from the 1970s, when the generals governed with an iron hand, through the 1980s, when the working class moved to center stage, becoming a significant political force, to the 1990s, when defenders of neoliberal policies began trying to restructure Brazilian capitalism through the privatization of state-owned industries.

The issue begins with a look at Brazilian labor, which remains the key opponent to capital's moves to reorganize the nation's economy. Boito approaches working-class resistance to capitalist exploitation through an analysis of the relationship between the Brazilian state and the trade union movement. Did the labor radicalization of the 1980s transform the nature of corporatist unions' dependency on the state? Boito argues that despite the successful transition to democracy, the authoritarian structure developed by Vargas remains in place. Populist ideology still dominates the labor movement with its belief that the state can act as guardian for the unions. This structure and ideology did not impede strikes in the late 1970s and 1980s, but they did retard the organization and accumulation of strength by workers and influence the selection of leadership and the intensity of the labor struggle. Although the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (Central Labor Federation—CUT) and the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' party—PT) have brought together political forces that criticize populism and aspects of union dependency on the state, the authoritarian union structure is still intact. Without a radical change of that structure and the creation of a truly autonomous labor movement, the Brazilian working class runs the risk of losing the potential of effectively challenging the neoliberal policies of civilian rule.

James N. Green is a doctoral student in Latin American history at the University of California, Los Angeles. His work in editing this issue is appreciated.

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 80, Vol. 21 No. 1, Winter 1994 3-6
© 1994 Latin American Perspectives

Antunes presents a case study of working-class resistance to the government's economic plans during the 1980s that confirms Boito's analysis. The strike activity that burst out of the industrial suburbs of São Paulo in May 1978 radically shifted the balance of power in the waning years of military rule. Antunes traces the common forms of labor action, from wildcat work stoppages to general strikes that paralyzed the country, and explains their effect on the government's wage policy. While labor won some victories and developed political muscle through the Workers' party, its gains were mediated by the union structure imposed on it.

As the working-class succeeded students as the most powerful challenge to authoritarian rule in the late 1970s, other social movements also entered the political arena. Feminists, the United Black Movement, and gay and lesbian rights organizations began to appear, raising specific demands regarding gender, race, and sexual orientation. My article analyzes the development of Brazil's first gay liberation organization within the context of government-controlled liberalization and the political spaces opened up by the 1978-1980 strike wave. Like the black and women's movements, Brazilian gay organizations passionately debated issues of autonomy, coalition building, and the role of the left as they fought marginalization, *machismo*, and homophobia. This article contributes to a new area of study about Latin America that has until recently been noticeably neglected.

Pellegrini directs attention to cultural resistance to the military dictatorship of the 1970s. During the generals' rule (1964-1985), many people believed that Brazilian intellectuals had filed away dozens of literary masterpieces that would not pass the censor's pen. It was assumed that the burst of creativity of the 1960s that had produced Cinema Novo, the lyrical protest songs of Chico Buarque, and a genre of political and popular theatre was simply lying dormant, ready to spring forth when democracy returned. When the generals returned to the barracks, however, the cultural renaissance did not take place. Pellegrini analyzes literature and politics in the 1970s, during the worst years of government repression, to explain how capitalism transformed culture under the dictatorship. As the industry modernized and consolidated under the control of several monopolies, it even packaged and marketed "literature of resistance" with financial success. Pellegrini examines three examples of literary production in the 1970s to show how new economic, social, and political conditions transformed Brazilian letters and how resistance literature became a mere conjunctural aspect of that metamorphosis.

Rocha brings us to the present with an analysis of the structural reforms of the Fernando Collor de Mello (1989-1992) administration, which were designed to transform the Brazilian bourgeoisie into the leading agent of national development in the 1990s. Rocha argues that these policies did not

represent a shift from past growth strategy. Rather, they reflected policy changes favoring foreign capital interests and strengthening dependent development. Whether the move to privatize state-owned industries and the increased penetration of international capital under the guise of neoliberal reforms will ultimately be successful, according to Rocha, will depend on the response of popular forces. The economic elite's continued emphasis on global profit maximization over the improvement of living standards may result in another working-class response similar to the labor unrest of the 1980s.

Marini broadens the examination of recent Brazilian economic developments to a study of the impact on Latin America of long-term international economic trends. The noted Brazilian social scientist asserts that capitalism has entered a new long cycle characterized by a recovery at the center but marked by sudden changes and unexpected developments. Transitions in the world economy from a predominance of manufacturing and services to new technologies have stimulated an increased internationalization of production, with the resultant lowering of labor costs through wage squeezes. National and regional policies promoted in Latin America in the 1970s emphasizing national "affirmation" have left the region in a deep economic crisis. Marini observes that the mass movement has responded by pushing democratization, the end of military dictatorships, and the formation of new organizations such as the PT.

Zirker develops an analysis of Brazilian foreign policy during the transition period of the 1980s based on Marini's theoretical model of the country as a subimperialist power. Marini's interpretation, popular in Marxist circles in the 1960s, held that the Brazilian military state had assumed the role of a regional center from which United States imperialist expansion in Latin America would radiate. The unification of internal and external factors, according to Marini, provided the conditions for the development of a Brazilian foreign policy that went beyond accepting North American power to collaborating with imperialist expansion. President Carter's human-rights policy, the U.S.-Brazilian rift over nuclear proliferation, and an autonomous orientation toward the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, to cite only three examples among many, seemed to suggest to many observers that the Brazilian military and the immediate successor government of President José Sarney had forged an independent foreign policy course. Zirker argues, however, that during the past decade the Brazilian government has not transcended its subimperialist role. Although acting in some foreign policy arenas with relative autonomy remains, as Marini suggested, a possibility, industrial manufacturing for export has become the motive force behind Brazil's junior-partner expansionist role. This analysis will no doubt spark

further discussion about Marini's provocative and controversial theoretical model.

Chilcote presents an incisive overview of five recent works on the Brazilian labor movement, including books by Antunes and Boito. In addition to exploring the question of the relationship of unions to the state and populism, these books address the link between labor and left parties, particularly the PT, which has become a key player in Brazilian politics.

The outcome of Brazil's transition to democracy and civilian rule is by no means clear to most observers. Social polarization, economic crisis, and political instability have produced unpredictable results as a working-class leader came close to occupying the presidency in 1989 and impeachment became a household word. Undoubtedly, Brazil will provide the battleground for turbulent class conflict in the coming years.