

BOOK REVIEW

The Peculiar Revolution: Rethinking the Peruvian Experiment under Military Rule, ed. Carlos Aguirre and Paulo Drinot (Austin: U. of Texas P., 2017; pp. 353. \$25.99).

As the editors, Carlos Aguirre and Paulo Drinot, correctly note, there has been a dearth of studies on the Peruvian reformist military regime of 1968–75 and yet at the time it occupied the attention of leading national and international social scientists. They suggest that the subsequent Peruvian experience of Shining Path and the Fujimori authoritarian regime may have distracted scholars from this original and important subject. Now it is the turn of (mostly) historians to attempt a redefinition and re-analysis of this experience, and this book provides a useful guide to both the classic and more recent literature on this period.

The book chapters themselves fall into three major groups of studies: the cultural messages; the government and conflicts with civil society over the reforms; and the changes effected in given regions of the country. The cultural chapters are the least satisfactory in this volume. It is interesting to know about the revival of Túpac Amaru as a national hero even before the revolution and his symbolic role in the Velasco pronouncements of completing his unfulfilled revolution, but chapters on the government's publication of historical documents and an analysis of anonymous comments on YouTube videos of Velasco add little. The idea of linking the death of Velasco to the death of his revolutionary experiment is an interesting one but needs far more development and, in fact, is better analysed in a later chapter on the cause for the collapse of the Velasco regime. The same occurs with a chapter on the changing rhetoric of the army, which provides a useful survey of recent scholarship but fails to explain the changing 'tropes' of that institution.

It is in the relation of the regime to teachers, peasants and fishermen that we get some insights into the causes of the successes and failures of reform. The military designed their top-down reforms with the object of eliminating the influence of the powerful left parties and unions. Thus the clash with these popular forces was inevitable. The military's educational reforms were a complex mixture of all the ideas then prevalent, from those of Paulo Freire to beliefs in active parent and community participation. The situation among the less developed peasant unions was more chaotic, given their weaker original position, but there was universal hostility to payment for expropriated lands and opposition to government leadership of the newly created rural co-operatives that were given these lands. These teacher, peasant and fishermen union conflicts with the regime reflected the split in the entire left between those who were willing to work with Velasco and those who strongly opposed his policies and thus weakened popular support for the regime. Finally, the violent repression of the fishermen's union in the key port of Chimbote in 1973 marked the end of popular support for the regime.

The regional studies show that the impact of the Velasco reforms depended on local conditions and were often initiated by spontaneous peasant land invasions. The Agrarian and Water Reform Acts of 1969 had the unanticipated

effect of eventually opening up the north coast to non-traditional commercial agriculture by shifting control over water resources to the government and eliminating the old sugar and cotton haciendas. The military regime was more successful in developing a national tourist industry, especially in Cuzco. But, apart from the successful land and water reforms, the Velasco government probably had most long-term impact on the Amazon and its long neglected Amerindian native peoples, who were finally legally recognised and granted their own territories in the eastern *montaña* and lowland regions.

In their historiographical chapter, the editors show how the interpretation of this period has slowly changed from the corporatist model through a frustrated bourgeois revolution to an incomplete revolution paradigm, depending on the politics and discipline of the scholars examining the process. But they do not develop a new model of the regime from the disparate parts of their survey, as indicated by the title of this volume. Except for the chapter on the causes for the economic and political failure of the regime, which offers some useful comparative analysis with other such military regimes of the period, there is no international context here—and that is crucial. There are numerous recent studies on the military regimes of the Cold War in Latin America and so we can compare and contrast the Peruvian experience with what happened in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil in this period rather than treating it in isolation, as the authors do here. In many ways, Peru has much in common with the Brazilian regime in its concern for social and economic change. Their respective officer classes engaged in serious efforts to understand the problems of backwardness and institutional blockages to development even before they came to power. The Peruvians viewed this from a left perspective and the Brazilians from a more conservative one, but both adopted a very similar nationalist and top-down reformist approach, aimed at eliminating Marxian mobilisation from below. Both regimes were committed to state control over the economy and an active government role in production. What was unusual about the Peruvian regime is that, for all its repression of strikes, it never descended into uncontrolled violence, which occurred in all the other military governments of this Cold War period. Yet, compared with Brazil, it faced more opposition to its reforms and had less long-term impact. Was it the policies adopted, the nature of the relations between the state and civil society, or the structure of the government, or other factors, which led to this outcome? Providing a more coherent analysis of these questions and undertaking a systematic comparative analysis of the other military reform regimes of the period would have allowed readers to better determine what was unique or common in this reformist military regime.

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