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A Review Essay

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REVIEW ESSAY/NOTE CRITIQUE

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA:

A Review Essay

Peter Blanchard

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Kenneth Paul Erickson, *The Brazilian Corporative State and Working-Class Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1977).

John M. Hart, *Anarchism & the Mexican Working Class, 1860-1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1978).

Guillermo Lora, *A history of the Bolivian labour movement 1848-1971*, edited and abridged by Laurence Whitehead. Translated by Christine Whitehead (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977).

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Hobart A. Spalding, Jr., *Organized Labor in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Workers in Dependent Societies* (New York: Harper & Row 1977).

UNTIL quite recently the history of the Latin American working class has been something of a mystery. The general impression gleaned from a few monographs and fewer general syntheses was that over the years Latin American workers have been kept well under control by their employers and the government with the assistance of the military; that little working-class consciousness developed because of this repression and the workers' lack of education; and that, consequently, the workers have had little impact on national developments. On only a few occasions have they managed to leave their mark: for example, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when foreign

anarchist agitators tried to establish the first modern unions and led the first strikes, and again in the 1940s when populist leaders like Juan Domingo Peron of Argentina used the support of the workers to secure and maintain political power. The workers' relationship with Peron was seen as proof of their need for direction from above for they had tied themselves to a man who was internationally condemned for his fascistic and anti-democratic actions. The impression was that the workers were still too naive and uneducated to recognize the danger of such leaders as Peron.

Within the last few years the history of the Latin American working class has attracted increasing attention from scholars so that the scope of the labour movement and the accomplishments of the workers have become apparent, as have the deficiencies of the early evaluations. The books under discussion are but a small selection of the monographs, articles and theses which have been produced in the United States, Europe, Latin America and even Canada in the last decade. The abundance of material now permits a far more accurate analysis of the movement and Professor Spalding provides an excellent introduction to the topic. His first two chapters bring together the various trends that marked the formation and development of the early movement, while his later chapters present case studies of Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Cuba after 1930, indicating some of the common threads that weave through the rich tapestry of Latin American working-class history.

Although there are many similarities, one is also struck by the significant differences that exist among the movements in the various Latin American countries, and in order to understand completely the intricacies of each movement it is necessary to examine closely local pressures and developments. This holds true as well when placing the Latin American movements in a wider, international context. While similarities are evident between the mobilization of workers in Latin America and Europe or North America, there are also profound differences. Professor Erickson includes the very nature of the trade unions. In his examination of Brazilian unions he uses the Portuguese word *sindicato* (it is the same word in Spanish) to indicate that he is "dealing with a phenomenon which is far from an exact replica of Anglo-Saxon trade unions (2)". The major difference seems to be that the Latin American unions lack the autonomy of unions elsewhere. In Brazil the development of unions occurred largely within a framework set by the government. This seems to be true of the labour movements elsewhere in Latin America and is a key factor in explaining both their accomplishments and their failures.

The roots of the modern Latin American labour movement can be found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It appeared at a time when the countries were emerging from the instability and chaos that marked the first decades after independence. Stability was achieved mainly as a result of the growing exports of raw materials to feed the factories and factory workers of the industrializing nations of Europe and North America. There was a return flow of foreign investment, directed mainly into the primary producing sector and the infrastructure which facilitated the export of those raw materials. At the same time, capital, both foreign and domestic, was flowing into Latin America's principal cities. They grew in size, modernized, and experienced some industrial growth. Factories producing non-durable consumer goods for local consumption sprang up, creating in their wake a small but growing urban proletariat. Factory workers were joined by stevedores, railway workers, construction workers, tram operators, street cleaners and a variety of other wage earners to comprise this new urban working class.

The economic expansion at the turn of the century rested to a large extent upon the

exploitation of the working-class. Widespread harsh working conditions and low wages were the major reason behind the early organization and agitation of Latin America's workers. Professor Anderson comments: "The conditions under which Mexican workingmen and women labored varied greatly, but few were satisfactory from the workers' perspective and some were wretched by any standards (50)." The workday was usually more than 12 hours. The introduction of electric lighting meant that hours could be extended and in Mexico 14 hours was normal while 16 hours was not uncommon. Accidents were frequent because of the long hours, unhygienic conditions and minimal safety precautions. Injured workers rarely received compensation. And in most factories various internal regulations severely limited the workers' freedom. "In Buenos Aires, for example, any workers who arrived ten minutes late lost a quarter-day's pay; unacceptable work had to be paid for; protest resulted in dismissal; factories set salaries fifteen days after initial employment; and workers could not talk, smoke, wash, or change clothes before the quitting bell. Infractions resulted in fines, some owners subjected employees to corporal punishments, and male supervisors often sexually exploited women (Spalding, 3)."

The level of real wages in this early period is not well-documented. Anderson has calculated that in Mexico in the first years of this century real wages declined as prices rose so that few urban workers took home sufficient to meet their minimum needs. Their take-home pay was lower than their contracted wages because of a wide variety of deductions for such things as religious and civil holidays. One Mexican company made weekly deductions to feed its dogs. The small amount that remained was quickly swallowed by the company store which charged highly inflated prices for the goods it sold. As a result, working-class living conditions were as unsanitary and unattractive as the working conditions. The situation in Mexico City prompted a workers' newspaper to comment that "the watercloset of the rich were more hygienic than the homes of the workers ."(Anderson, 46)

At this early stage any improvements in the workers' situation had to be accomplished by the workers themselves. The governments with their commitment to economic growth were not particularly interested in ameliorating the workers' lot or assisting them against their employers. The workers had little leverage over the government since political participation was reserved for a small elite, most of whom were beneficiaries of the recent economic developments. Moreover, the workers tended to have little confidence in politicians because of the lack of responsiveness, corruption and instability that marked the political system. Denied or having rejected the political route to change, Latin America's workers resorted to direct action. They formed working-class organizations, engaged in agitation, and threatened class conflict as they confronted both employers and government in their search for better working and living conditions and respect from their fellow citizens.

Organizations of workers have been a part of Latin American life for a long time. Artisan guilds were formed during the colonial period and remained important institutions until the present century. In the mid-nineteenth century, in response to the changing economic conditions and to the creation of similar organizations elsewhere, mutual aid societies appeared. They attracted mainly artisans — both shop owners and journeymen — but included employers, professionals and some workers as well. Reflecting their membership they tended to be rather conservative bodies concerned with providing accident, sickness and death benefits to members and, when the society represented a particular occupational group, with protecting the interests of that profession. Yet, as their working-class member-

ship increased and workers' complaints about their conditions grew, the societies displayed greater militancy. They continued to favour negotiated settlements over strikes, but they began to join strikes and support strikers with moral and material aid.

There is some disagreement over the importance of mutual aid societies in subsequent labour mobilization. The failure of the societies to confront consistently the real problems of the workers has prompted Anderson to conclude that in the case of Mexico the more militant labour movement which developed in the early twentieth century "sprang from independent origins, in the main, and was not the product of the mutualist experience (86)." Spalding, on the other hand, argues that while the mutual aid societies were supplanted by unions by the late nineteenth century, "they provided many workers with important organizational experiences and sowed intellectual seeds that later bore fruit under the impact of more militant working-class ideologies (15)." Guillermo Lora adds that the mutual aid societies in Bolivia provided many of the early labour and socialist leaders.

The emergence of an ideologically based movement can be traced to the appearance of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in Latin America. Other European working-class ideologies also had an impact on the Latin American workers, but it was anarchism which produced the initial class consciousness and the first modern unions. The traditional explanation for the success of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in Latin America has been that it arrived along with the large numbers of Italian and Spanish immigrants at the turn of the century. Many of these had been anarchists in Europe and, finding similarly harsh working conditions in the New World, they reacted by establishing unions and fomenting strikes. However, this fails to explain the success of anarchism in countries where there was little European immigration.

John Hart provides some new answers. In his study of Mexico he shows that although the number of immigrants was small, there were anarchists among them and their dynamism meant that their influence far exceeded their numbers. Moreover, they were accompanied by propagandists from Europe and Latin America who travelled around the continent addressing workers, and by an avalanche of anarchist newspapers, pamphlets and books. Mexicans were receptive because of several factors: the country had inherited many of its cultural elements from Spain so that it was similar in many respects to the mother country; it had a liberal tradition which was strongly anti-church and thus related to anarchism; it had a growing number of dispossessed peasant farmers whose former villages resembled the kind of agrarian communities that the anarchists proposed to establish; and it had begun industrializing which had alienated its artisans and produced an exploited industrial proletariat. Also important to anarchist success in Mexico was the political situation. The country had suffered years of political instability with numerous coups and dictatorial governments, internal rebellions and foreign intervention. This had produced a lack of confidence in the existing governmental system and hostility towards the state. As a result, the anarchists won support, unions were founded, labour agitation was promoted, and the government and employers were challenged.

Elsewhere in Latin America the anarchists were equally active in the years before the First World War. Indicative of their influence was the adoption of May Day by Latin American workers as the international labour day and the growing demand for the eight-hour day. But the anarchists were not the only groups influencing the workers and promoting unionization. Socialists formed unions at the same time as they were forming political parties, and following the success of the Russian Revolution communist groups

appeared in Latin America. From the 1920s they played an increasingly important role in organizing and leading the labour movement. Like the socialists they supported the creation of both a political party and a centralized labour organization to assist the workers. Adding to the melange were various political parties which expressed interest in the workers' plight but only, according to Spalding, "to capture their votes and, often, pre-empt the appeal of progressive ideologies (35)." Also pushing the workers along a more moderate path were institutions like the mutual aid societies which continued to attract large memberships; the Catholic church which formed its own workers' organizations; and even factories which set up their "yellow" unions. These latter concerns may have assisted employers and the government more than the workers, but they did bring the workers together, promoted the idea of unionization, and stimulated the workers' political consciousness.

The second element in the emergence of an organized labour movement was the workers' participation in labour agitation. Strikes, general strikes, boycotts and sabotage became a part of day-to-day life in Latin America from the late nineteenth century and the various authors provide an abundance of illustrations. Strikes constituted the main weapon in the workers' arsenal. Spalding notes that in Argentina the number of strikes rose from 48 in the 1880s to 1,081 between 1907 and 1913. In Mexico there were 44 strikes in the 1890s and although only six occurred between 1901 and 1905, the number and severity of strikes in 1906 were such that Anderson refers to it as "the year of the strikes." An examination of the industrial action that occurred during this early period reveals no particular pattern except that the workers expanded their demands from better wages to improved working conditions, freedom to unionize, and other changes which would have given them more control over their daily lives. Also, although the workers' participation in both industry-wide and general strikes and their acceptance of radical ideologies suggests a growing militancy and commitment to change, few workers were committed revolutionaries. The vast majority remained motivated primarily by bread-and-butter issues rather than long-term goals or an interest in some fundamental transformation of society.

The workers' actions seem to have had little political content. Strikes with a primarily political focus have been rare both during the formative stage and subsequently. There have been some: in 1912 Peruvian workers declared a general strike to frustrate the election of a pre-selected presidential candidate; in October 1945 Argentine workers used the same tactic to secure Peron's release from prison and thereby caused the collapse of the existing government; and workers' strikes were an important element in the 1952 Bolivian Revolution. But these seem to have been the exception. The pattern has not changed in more recent years. Professor Erickson after examining 17 "political" strikes that occurred in Brazil between 1960 and 1964 — "political" because "they were called to demand action from the government and public administration or which otherwise had important political implications (98)" — concludes that they were essentially economic in scope. Economic factors motivated the strikes and, in fact, determined whether they were called. Moreover, the rank and file responded only because they were experiencing economic hardships.

Other factors have played a role in the success or failure of strikes. Erickson mentions in the case of Brazil the attitude of the military who in the early 1960s occasionally allowed strikes to occur and even supported them. One might also point to the attitude of the government and the strength of the local labour movement. In Mexico at the turn of the century when the government of Porfirio Diaz opposed labour agitation and the movement was in its infancy,

successes were rare. On the other hand, in Argentina in the 1940s when Peron was fostering working-class ties and the workers had several decades of organization and agitation behind them, the workers tended to win more strikes than they lost.

Nevertheless, even in their most successful periods the workers have played only a small role in national affairs, exerted limited power, and had little effect on the political, economic and social structures of their countries. This contrasts sharply with the confident predictions of labour militants in the early years of the labour movement: that the working class would soon assume a position of dominance. What are the reasons for the workers' failure to maintain the momentum that was evident during the early years of this century?

Writers suggest a variety of answers and in most cases a full explanation requires a close examination of the local situation. But there are some common factors as well. Spalding points to the fact that the formative period of the Latin American movement was much shorter than in Europe so that the workers' consciousness was incompletely developed and the movement was consequently weakened. The books under review indicate three other factors which seem common to the continent: repression by government and employers, divisions within the movements and a lack of union autonomy.

Repression has been a part of labour movement history everywhere. In the case of Latin America, violence has been used to keep the workers under control since the colonial period, but what sets it apart is the extent to which violence is still used. Examples are legion. In January 1907 between 50 and 70 Mexican textile workers were killed by troops after striking and attacking company stores, and six instigators were subsequently executed by firing squads in the ruins of the stores. In Chile that same year the army fired on striking nitrate workers in Iquique and shot over 2,000 men, women and children. In more recent years Bolivian troops killed 20 mine workers in June 1967 to prevent a workers' demonstration and a miners' conference. And following the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile and the Isabel Peron regime in Argentina many union leaders and workers were murdered. The use of violent repression may, in fact, be a way of measuring the harshness of working conditions: the harsher the conditions, the more force is necessary to keep the workers on the job.

Repression has not been limited to the use of armed force. The various governments have also arrested, imprisoned and exiled labour leaders and agitators. They have closed and dissolved unions, suspended publication of working-class papers, and denied permission to hold meetings or used police to disrupt them. Often these acts were committed illegally, but protests merely produced laws which approved past actions.

Repression was also carried out by employers who had a free hand over their workers. Their methods included firing workers, breaking unions, declaring lockouts, employing scab labour, blacklisting suspected trouble-makers, reducing wages, and fomenting divisions among their work force. The tactics succeeded in intimidating many workers who feared losing their jobs by joining unions or engaging in agitation. Once repression had shown its effectiveness, it was used again and again.

The workers were unable to protect themselves against these repressive acts largely because of their lack of unity, the second factor in the weakness of the labour movement. Divisiveness was evident early and affected workers in every country. Employers promoted it by hiring different ethnic groups or races and playing one off against the other. In Porfirian Mexico companies hired both Americans and Mexicans, paid the former twice as much as the latter, and, when one section went on strike, used the other as strike breakers. Companies hired women and children who

were paid less than male workers although expected to provide the same amount of work. Their reputation as a less militant group also made them attractive and meant that they were often used as strike breakers. As the necessity for skilled workers grew with industrialization, employers fostered the growth of a labour elite. The elite, to protect their higher wages and better conditions, became more conservative than the rank and file and showed little interest in agitating.

The tremendous growth of the Latin American population in the present century has served as another obstacle to working-class unity. The resulting labour surplus has caused those workers with jobs to do all they can to protect them, poorly paid though they might be, and not risk them by forming unions, demanding improvements and helping their comrades. This has been particularly true during periods of economic distress and exceptionally high unemployment when the labour force has tended to become even less vocal.

Another divisive factor has been, paradoxical though it may seem, the formation of workers' societies and unions. Conflicts developed early between rival mutual aid societies, often because of personality or political differences. With the formation of ideologically based groups, further splits developed, both between the militant groups and the conservative mutual aid societies and among the various radical groups. As in Europe ideological differences divided the anarchists who rejected any kind of political involvement and the socialist and communist groups who viewed political involvement as a vital component in assisting the working-class. Ideological differences even prevented those who agreed on the necessity for both union and political activity from joining forces. The result of this endless squabbling, however, was working-class alienation.

Guillermo Lora shows that divisions of this sort have been evident throughout the history of the Bolivian labour movement. First there were divisions between artisans and workers. With the radicalization of the movement after 1910 new splits appeared, now between anarchist and Marxist groups, until the suppression of the former in the early 1930s. Then the problem was the failure of the Trotskyists and Communists (or "Stalinists" as Lora calls them) to agree on tactics. Because of this split the Trotskyists in the 1940s joined with a nationalistic anti-government group, the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR), to try to educate a truly revolutionary proletariat and to form an effective labour organization. The two cooperated in 1952 to carry out the Revolution. This unity was short-lived, however, new splits appeared in the labour movement, the workers' influence deteriorated, and the increasingly conservative MNR emerged as the main beneficiary of the Revolution.

Internal divisions were in part a result of the third factor which weakened the labour movement, loss of autonomy because of dependence on the government. Ties between workers and governments were established everywhere and were to be expected. A comment by Anderson about the Mexican workers could be applied to the rest of Latin America: "Without active government aid, the position of the workers was too weak to enable them to confront their employers (88)." Moreover, there was a tradition of ties between the workers and those above them on the social ladder. Paternalism has characterized Latin American labour relations since the Spanish conquest. In the past rural bosses established both economic and personal ties with their workers; in the present century, the president, according to some writers, has become the *patron* of industrial workers, especially those workers who are recent migrants from the countryside. This has been a common explanation of Peron's success in Argentina. The thesis is not unanimously accepted. While Spalding and Erickson

agree that rural paternalistic forms have been transferred to the urban centres, Anderson argues that precapitalistic paternalism was not a significant characteristic in the Mexican industrial system.

Government-worker relations have been evident from the beginning of this century. Bolivian workers named high government officials honourary members of their mutual aid societies. In Mexico workers sought assistance even from the notoriously pro-business Diaz government. In 1906 striking textile workers asked him to intervene and Anderson notes that he broke with his "past laissez-faire labor policies in order to impose a settlement sufficiently attractive to the workers, but one which did not wreak any harm on the basic economic interests of the industrialists (151)." This case and others like it indicated that the workers could get at least some of their demands recognized by appeals to the government and this justified further contacts.

Some odd relationships have been established over the years. In 1914 in revolutionary Mexico the anarchist *Casa del Obrero Mundial* allied itself with the bourgeois "Constitutionalist" forces led by Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregon. This reversal in the anarchists' traditional anti-political policy was a result of past repression and Carranza's offer of support which presented an opportunity for increasing the Casa's influence. Carranza was interested in the alliance because he wanted urban labour support as a counterweight to the peasant forces of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. The Casa had substantial influence among the urban working class. Following the alliance the union discouraged strikes, despite the difficult economic situation of the period, and provided soldiers for the Constitutionalist army in the so-called "Red Battalions." However, the Casa's inherent radicalism and Carranza's basic conservatism meant that the alliance was a flimsy one. With the conclusion of the armed conflict in Central Mexico, the Casa's demands for a more radical revolution, and its renewed support of strikes, the two parties split and Carranza eventually suppressed the Casa.

Like Carranza, other political leaders were determined to prevent the growth of an independent labour movement. They supported economic development and viewed with some trepidation the increasing power of the workers as demonstrated by the latters' strike activity. The workers were also involving themselves in politics as the liberalisation of the political process in the present century gave them a new opportunity to exert their influence. Both developments called for some type of government control. Repression was one answer and it was tried; but repression and bloodshed can have negative effects. They disrupt production, antagonize the labour force, discredit the government and arouse nationalistic feelings since the companies involved are often foreign-owned. As a result, most governments have come to use repression only selectively. Instead they have sought other means to maintain labour discipline, such as passing labour legislation. They have also promoted the growth of labour unions, providing benefits to members, but under very strict guidelines.

In the case of Mexico this began with the 1918 formation of the *Confederacion Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM). Under the direction of the opportunistic labour leader, Luis Morones, the CROM was independent in theory, espoused the radical labour rhetoric of the day, supported strikes and occasionally even challenged the government. But the organization, like its leader, was basically opportunistic and practical and "quickly came to terms with capitalism, government, and employers (Ruiz, 60)." Alvaro Obregon used the CROM's support to win the presidency in 1920 and his successor appointed Morones minister of labour and industry. The link between labour and government was institutionalized in 1938 with the formation of the *Partido de la Revolucion Mexicana*, the official government party.

It was composed of the four functional sectors that comprised the "Revolutionary Family:" the working-class, the peasantry, the military and the middle-class. The system was designed to prevent conflict between the components and although all had influence over national policy, the middle class sector soon became dominant. Nevertheless, the workers continued to participate because they were ensured government support and some concessions. Their leaders remained loyal because it meant power, prestige and material benefits.

A similar type of relationship was established in Bolivia in 1952. The participation of the workers in the Revolution was recognized by the election of a long-time labour leader, Juan Lechin, as vice president of the country. But, again, the intention was to ensure control over the rank and file and as the MNR expanded its power, it bought off many of the union leaders with positions and perquisites and absorbed them into the government structure.

This pattern of institutionalization and loss of autonomy has been analyzed by Professor Erickson in his stimulating book. Although his case study is Brazil, his model could be applied to other Latin American countries. According to Erickson, in the 1930s when Brazil's industrial sector was expanding, the government attempted to establish a corporative state to prevent any conflict between labour and capital. The workers' corporation was composed of an elaborate network of sindicatos, federations and confederations. The workers had the right to organize but only recognized groups could declare legal strikes and receive government-legislated benefits. Since non-recognized unions were subject to legal repression, independent organizations were rare and most existing unions, including the communist unions, chose to operate within the system. Official control was pervasive; for example, the government collected union dues and then determined their distribution. Unions became mere dispensers of social services while their leaders gained substantial power. For one thing, their participation in the governing councils of social security agencies meant that they had control over the apportionment of welfare benefits. Since there was a limited amount of capital and a wide variety of demands, they could exert tremendous power over those seeking benefits. The government believed that by allowing union leaders these opportunities for personal enrichment, social ascent and political prominence they would then make certain that the rank and file followed orders. The results have been a corrupt leadership, dependent unions and little organizing of workers. In fact, the government has been more prominent in organizing workers than have the unions.

The system of labour control has not been completely successful. Worker distrust of corrupt leaders has led to the formation of some independent unions and even dependent unions have regained some of their autonomy at times when the government has been weak. Yet, any momentum towards complete independence has been quickly curtailed. If the corporative system appears threatened, the military has stepped in, imposed a repressive regime, and re-introduced tight labour controls. This occurred in 1964 after President Goulart seemed to be responding to labour demands rather than controlling them. According to Erickson, the subsequent military governments have not sought to destroy organized labour; rather, as technocrats committed to industrial growth, they have tried to strengthen the old corporative system in order to ensure collaboration between labour and capital. Thus, while the radical labour movement has been decapitated, the sindicatos continue to exist and their members enjoy the perquisites of scholarships for their children, subsidized housing and controlled rents.

The pattern of labour development and many of the problems encountered in

establishing an effective movement in Latin America's cities have been repeated in the countryside. Studies of the rural labour movement are still few and far between. This is an unfortunate gap for until quite recently all the Latin American countries were rural countries and their economies depended on the export of raw materials produced in the countryside. Thus, the rural workers were more economically important than the urban workers and their control over essential exports placed them in a more powerful bargaining position than their urban colleagues.

The rural movement, however, was a much later and less influential development. Although there were rural labour organizations and agitation in Cuba in the 1850s and in the northeast of Brazil in the late nineteenth century, and strikes occurred on plantations in several countries like Peru and Argentina in the early part of this century, there was not the same explosion of labour mobilization that took place in the cities before the First World War. One factor in this was the workers' economic importance which meant that governments and employers were less willing to allow organizations and more willing to use repression than in the urban centres. Strikes like the ones in the Peruvian sugar plantations in 1912 were violently crushed; between 150 and 200 Peruvian workers were killed. The government gave employers complete freedom over their workers and legislatively prohibited rural unions. It was not until the 1960s that rural sindicatos were allowed in Brazil and in Chile the rural movement was outlawed until 1967.

Added to this repression were internal divisions which hindered mobilization, perhaps ever more than in the cities. The authors in the volume, *Land and Labour in Latin America*, indicate the incredible diversity of rural labour relations in Latin America. Very few rural workers were wage labourers. Most were peasants with a piece of land which supplied them with some of their necessities. They might own the land; more often they rented it for cash, goods, or labour, or a combination of these. On one estate an assortment of relations could exist between the owner and his labour force. Bauer and Loveman point out that in Chile the major sector of the labour force were service tenants called *inquilinos*. They received a piece of land and other privileges for working the *hacendado's* land. But they did not perform the work themselves; they hired and paid all the temporary workers that were needed. The *inquilinos*, therefore, were a kind of rural middle class. From the 1930s, however, their position came under attack as the *hacendados* tried to regain complete control over land whose value had grown in response to both the national and international demand for raw materials and the construction of an adequate transportation network. The *inquilinos* began forming labour organizations and engaging in strikes, but not with a revolutionary purpose in mind. What they wanted was not some new landholding system, but rather a return to the system of the past.

The Chilean situation was not unique in Latin America. Elsewhere the peasantry also won certain rights and privileges from the estate owners. It was often in the latter's interest to grant these, for by giving the peasant a small piece of land to use as he wished, the employer obtained a guaranteed labour force over whom he enjoyed paternalistic control. He did not have to pay wages, which was an important factor at the turn of the century because the market was uncertain and often unprofitable. Primitive production methods limited output so that cash returns were small and spent mainly in unproductive areas. Thus, non-monetary relationships were common. The peasants approved because they obtained a piece of land which they came to view as their own. As a whole, they seem to have enjoyed a greater degree of control over their lives than past studies have shown. In areas where there was an abundance of land and little labour, the

workers often bargained with the landholders for better conditions. In the Peruvian sierra, Indians hired out their labour in order to obtain the cash they needed to maintain their traditional style of life. In other words, the incorporation of Latin America into the world economy in the late nineteenth century did not necessarily mean the proletarianization of the rural labour force. Occasionally it resulted in the intensification of pre-capitalist labour systems.

Changes began in the 1930s and were linked as much to the growth of the population as to the demands for modernizing agriculture. The price of new machinery placed pressure on the landholders to increase their income. The old systems of labour recruitment were now more costly than wage labour because of the value of the privileges won in the past and new laws that ordered improvements in the working and living conditions of resident workers. The use of machinery reduced the need for a large permanent labour force and temporary workers were available in unlimited numbers because of the population explosion. The problem of surplus labour was not new to rural labour relations in Latin America. In the northeast of Brazil following the abolition of slavery in 1888, the large population and the monopolization of land by the sugar planters meant that the latter could obtain sufficient workers by offering very low wages, lower than the amount they had spent on maintaining their slaves. In Chile a similar monopolization of land and labour surplus made *inquilinaje* the attractive system that it became. In recent decades rural workers have again suffered because of a scarcity of jobs and lack of land. With regard to the labour movement the result has been the same as in the cities — reluctance to unite and challenge employers despite low wages, harsh working conditions and primitive living conditions.

The divisions between employed and unemployed workers, peasants and wage earners, service tenants and cash tenants, seasonal labour and permanent labour have been major obstacles to rural organization. These divisions might have been overcome, or at least reduced, with some assistance from the more militant and organized sectors of the urban movement. Attempts were made — in the early part of the century anarchist agitators devoted some of their attention to the countryside, as did communist organizers and political leaders later — but they failed to establish many ties between the urban and rural workers. In Mexico during the Revolution the anarchist *Casa del Obrero Mundial* preferred to support the bourgeois Constitutionalist forces than establish links with the revolutionary peasant forces of Zapata and Villa. Hart and Ruiz argue that this reflected the urban prejudice against the rural peasantry, the former's feeling of superiority over the latter. It was also a result of the religious devotion of the Zapatistas which alienated the urban anarchists and of the peasants' attacks on urban enterprises like the textile mills. Consequently, the Casa viewed the peasant forces as the enemy.

In Chile the position of the urban workers was improved at the expense of the peasantry. Between 1940 and 1964 as a result of urban labour agitation and the introduction of a more representative political system, the government introduced maximum food prices to prevent demands for higher wages by urban workers and a loss of electoral support. But this necessitated satisfying the *hacendados* who were adversely affected by these controls and who comprised the most important sector of the ruling elite. The government gave the *hacendados* a free hand over their estates, refused to apply existing labour legislation in the countryside, and prohibited rural unions. Loveman notes that the Chilean Marxist parties, with the exception of the Trotskyists, periodically participated in this repression and made no attempt to ally themselves with rural labour to break the control of the urban and rural elites.

The weaknesses of the rural workers hindered mobilization, but the working and living conditions of these workers were often inferior to their urban counterparts and this plus the changes introduced by modernization gradually brought the workers together and led to unrest and unionization. But these weaknesses also made the workers receptive to government offers of assistance so that rural workers have become as dependent as the urban workers. The Mexican peasantry, represented by the *Confederacion Nacional Campesina*, were one of the elements of the Revolutionary Family. In Brazil the military government that removed Goulart in 1964 created rural sindicatos, mainly to destroy the influence of the radical Peasant Leagues which had been organizing workers in the countryside. In Bolivia it was the MNR which won peasant support by organizing rural unions and implementing an agrarian reform after 1952. As a result, in 1964 when the mine workers challenged the now conservative MNR, the peasantry remained loyal to the government. They then shifted their loyalty to the military government of René Barrientos, who had taken advantage of the political unrest to stage a coup, because Barrientos resisted demands from more right-wing elements to reverse the agrarian reform law and give the land back to the *hacendados*.

The rural movement, like the urban movement, remains weak; the political consciousness of the workers is still undeveloped and union membership low. Only the most optimistic observers foresee the formation of a nation-wide labour movement. The workers today face the prospect of overcoming the obstacles of the past while coping with existing problems. Of these, the most serious are the continuing growth of the population and the accompanying rural-urban migration; the expansion of capital-intensive industry and agriculture which has cost jobs, not created them; and the continuing dependency of the most influential unions. A comment by Brian Loveman on the Chilean rural workers can be applied to all of Latin America's workers: "If the campesinos are to be successful they must trust no government, no party, no coalition, and no caudillo [political strongman] (333)." Any attempt by the workers to attack these problems may arouse military opposition. A number of those countries with military regimes have adopted the corporativist model so that the labour sector is controlled by its participation in the system. At the same time, if concessions fail, the military can employ the repressive power which they hold.

Nevertheless, there are indications that the workers are prepared to risk such a confrontation. Recent economic growth in many Latin American countries has taken place at the expense of the working class. Attempts to control inflation have resulted in wage controls and cutbacks in government spending. As a result, while these countries have been expanding their production of raw materials and manufactured goods, the situation of their workers has deteriorated. This development clearly indicates that modernization does not necessarily destroy the traditions of the past and produce a more equitable and prosperous society. The pressures on the workers have remained and in some cases intensified, and it is not inconceivable that these pressures will force the workers to unite, form independent unions, and agitate against both government and employers. These developments may not achieve success in the near future, but if the working-class does not receive significant improvements in their working and living conditions, an outburst of labour militancy similar to the early years of this century seems likely and might lead to the changes that Latin America so desperately needs.