

Review Essays/Ensayos de Reseña

Probing the Significance of Latin America's 'Pink Tide'

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- *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America*, by Eduardo Silva. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*, edited by Geraldine Lievesley and Steve Ludlam. London: Zed Books, 2009.
- *Contemporary Latin America: Development and Democracy beyond the Washington Consensus*, by Francisco Panizza. London: Zed Books, 2009.

Undoubtedly the most important questions being debated about Latin America right now are those concerning the significance of what Lievesley and Ludlam call the 'pink tide', namely the wave of 'new left' governments that have taken power in the region over the past decade. The three books reviewed here mark the arrival of comprehensive book-length treatments of the phenomenon in English; they complement each other in that they adopt a largely sympathetic though critical stance and they reach broadly similar conclusions though each has its distinctive contribution to make. Eduardo Silva's book focuses largely on the wave of what he calls contentious politics that led to the emergence of the new left and it is the most rigorously scientific of the three. Geraldine Lievesley and Steve Ludlam's edited collection contains four overview chapters (including the editors' introduction and conclusion) and ten case study chapters. Francisco Panizza's book is an analytical history of the emergence and decline of the neoliberal paradigm and the emergence of its successor, the post-Washington Consensus (PWC). This is the context in which he treats the emergence of the new left. The three books therefore offer complementary theoretical and methodological approaches. Silva's focus is on the politics of new social movements though placed firmly within the political economy project of the imposition of neoliberalism, or a 'market society' as Silva terms it, drawing on Karl Polanyi. Lievesley and Ludlam are more descriptive in their approach, examining the nature and emergence of the new left and categorising it as a 'radical social democracy'. Two central questions frame Panizza's approach: the relationship of interests, institutions and ideas in processes of economic and political change, and the relationship between democracy and political change, particularly how democratic arrangements treat losers. His book also shows a keen sensitivity to the wider ideological and economic context in which the new left achieved power.

As he puts it on page 14, Silva sets himself the task of finding out what transformed protest by individual movements, frequently localized, into 'a nationwide concatenation of diverse social actors demanding change on a wide variety of connected issues?' Furthermore, he wonders why contentious politics against neo-

liberalism emerged in Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela and not in Peru and Chile. His focus therefore is primarily on analysing social movements and specifically on what turned a variety of diverse and fragmentary movements based on subjectivity and discrete identities ‘into a substantial challenge to neoliberal economic and social policies and purely formal conceptualizations of democracy’ (10). In doing this, he explicitly distances himself from the state-centric focus of the literature on democratic consolidation and of historical accounts of state-society relations in Latin America. Instead he argues that what needs to be brought into focus is the state’s relationship to ‘other organized power networks nationally and internationally such as the economy, class relations, the military, and ideological production.’ As he puts it in what to me is a very rich and important insight: ‘In other words, state power is relational. It depends, at least in part, on its relationship to these other sources of power in society’ (12-13). In his second chapter, Silva outlines his methodology which is based on two key elements. The first is the attempt to identify how, through the ways issues were framed by movements and through strategies to broaden the collective base of movements, broad movements against neoliberalism were built up. The second concerns power, namely the capacity of these broad movements to achieve their ends. To understand this, he develops a relational approach to power examining the interaction of the power of the forces promoting neoliberalism versus the power of the many different movements against it to create horizontal linkages. All of this Silva places in the context of Polanyi’s conception of ‘market society’ and the ‘double movement’ that emerges from society to counteract the imposition of commodification on society, though he writes that Polanyi’s work lacks ‘a framework that articulated how state, economic, and transnational power sources affect structures of domination and generate mobilization’ (31). Neither, according to Silva, was Polanyi interested in specifying either the subordinate social groups that participated in the countermovement or the combination of factors that affected the dynamics of mobilisation (31). These methodological features of Silva’s work therefore make an important original contribution to our toolkit of analysis.

In Chapter 3, Silva summarizes his examination of his six cases. Anti-neoliberal contention began with organized labour spearheading mobilization but unions had been greatly weakened by neoliberal reforms and so popular sectors soon took the lead in reconstructing associational power and, in Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador, they built forms of collective power over several waves of contention from the late 1980s up to the 2000s. The case of Venezuela was somewhat different. Social mobilization never reached the level of co-ordination as in the other three cases, though he argues that more spaces to contest the project of building a market society remained both within the CTV trade union confederation and the Acción Democrática party. However, interestingly, he argues: ‘Even in its decentralized and uncoordinated form, the confluence of different strands of protest at critical moments brought significant associational and, at times, some (mostly unplanned) collective power to bear. The unintended consequence was to embolden military putschists’ (219). Thus he links popular mobilization to the emergence of Chávez. Why did this anti-neoliberal contentious politics not happen either in Peru which was very similar to the Andean cases analysed or in Chile which was very similar to Argentina? Silva answers that, in Peru, Fujimori’s *auto-golpe* in 1992

closed down the spaces for movements to organize while the inroads of Sendero Luminoso into popular movements discouraged the creation of horizontal linkages as Sendero was very hostile to other left-wing forces. In Chile, he argues that social mobilization did emerge briefly in the 1983-86 period of limited political liberalization and severe economic crisis but this space was closed again following the attempt on Pinochet's life in 1986; more substantially, he argues persuasively that the Concertación governments that took power in 1990, while they continued the strongly pro-market economic policies of the dictatorship, counteracted the building of a market society through active social policies and measures to protect vulnerable sectors.

Reclaiming Latin America offers a broader treatment of the rise of the 'pink tide'. Lievesley and Ludlam's opening and concluding chapters offer a comprehensive overview of the context, emergence, and content of the rise of the new left. They stress the variations between the governments labelled new left, discuss the dimensions of what they call a 'new continentalism' (6) such as ALBA, Mercosur and Unasur and they broaden the focus beyond the electoral field (parties being elected to power) to emphasize the social activism that is also a feature of the region's leftward turn (8-10). The earlier failures of left-wing politics such as the guerrilla movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the more moderate revisionist left that accommodated itself to neo-liberalism in the 1990s has, they argue, forced the left to grapple with new issues and to forge new relationships with social forces 'whose political importance they had previously denigrated or ignored, such as peasants, shanty town inhabitants and women' (11). This raises the issue of how successful the new left governments are in meeting the pent up popular expectations of the movements that have helped put them in power. Finally, they discuss typologies of the new left governments, taking issue with Castañeda's 'right left' and 'wrong left' and urge an awareness 'of the origin and purposes of typologies' (16). They quite rightly challenge the dismissive use of the term 'populism', pointing to the lack of precision in its use and emphasizing that 'left-wing populism can be seen as part of a continuum of social democratic and socialist politics' (17).

In their concluding chapter, they return to some of these key issues, in particular the characterization of the variety of experiences that are covered in the book. Here the treatment becomes sharper as they emphasize the strong component of popular mobilization that underpins the 'pink wave', suggesting that this progressive populism, this relationship between popular movements and charismatic political leaders, may have real transformative potential. And, in the book's most original contribution to debates on the 'new left', the editors argue persuasively that social democracy 'is not an ideology or a class movement, but became a series of national political programmes of social amelioration within liberal capitalist societies, programmes varying in different countries and at different times' but characterized by the commitment to greater equality, not only of opportunity but also of material condition to make opportunity real (225). Commenting that the British post-War Labour leader, Clement Attlee introduced more radical social reforms in three years than has Chávez in ten, they provocatively ask: 'So if Chávez is tail-ending Attlee, why is he demonized as a populist threat to social democracy?' (226). Observing that the rigid distinctions between different degrees of socialism have lost much purchase today and arguing that what really matters is

aims rather than methods and agencies, they argue that ‘we may be witnessing in Latin America the revival of the socialism that rejected the revolutionary method in favour of reforming capitalism into socialism by winning elections and wielding state power’ (227).

This discussion is important as it manages both to capture the variety and complexity of the turn to the left while also providing a balanced conceptualization that captures well its significance without making exaggerated claims for it. The rest of the book’s chapters help flesh out the themes introduced by the editors, offering differing perspectives and emphases in doing so. In the first of the opening chapters on the left in Latin America, Lievesley discusses the problems and prospects for the region’s left with a strong emphasis on popular empowerment while, in the second, Francisco Dominguez offers a rich panorama of the cultural and intellectual history of Latin American progressive politics. This is followed by a series of country cases. Julia Buxton traces the political evolution of Bolivarianism in Venezuela showing how the experiment of *Chavismo* has itself evolved while Sara C. Motta seeks to characterize the phenomenon from the standpoint of poor communities. John Crabtree traces the emergence of Evo Morales and offers an overview of his first two years in power. David Close’s chapter on Nicaragua critically examines the return of Daniel Ortega to power, emphasizing his authoritarian methods and his personalisation of power. A particularly welcome contribution is Steve Ludlam’s very informative chapter on Cuba; this serves not only to draw Cuba into the discussion of the new left but offers a rare and detailed examination of key elements of public policy. More disappointing is Valeria Guarneros-Meza’s chapter on Mexican political parties and local participation as the focus is on how little the PRD’s discourse and practice differs from those of the PRI and the PAN; more useful would have been a wider discussion of the legacy of the PRD’s defeat in 2006 and the prospects for a move to the left in Mexican politics. Sue Branford entitles her chapter on Brazil ‘Has the dream ended?’ as she traces the Workers Party’s rightward move in economic policy in response to market pressures following its election in 2002. Guy Burton’s chapter on Brazil traces the education policies of PSDB in Ceara and the PT in Rio Grande do Sul, showing how each offered contrasting solutions to common educational challenges. On Chile, Patricio Silva provides an enlightening analysis of the particularities of the country’s social democracy and its quiescent civil society and foresees a further depoliticization of society in coming years. Finally, Ernesto Vivares, Leonardo Diaz Echenique and Javier Ozorio offer an overview of what has been achieved by the two Kirchner governments in Argentina, placing them in the context of national populism but arguing that ‘domestic and international constraints plus the orientation of the political-economic alliance at the core of its government cast doubts upon the sustainability of the strategy’ (215). Overall, then, this is an excellent introduction to the new left, combining the breadth and variety of different country cases with a sharp analytical treatment of key issues by the editors.

Francisco Panizza’s *Contemporary Latin America* is, in his own words, a tracing of ‘the intellectual and political journey from the Washington Consensus to the post-Washington Consensus and beyond in the context of uneven processes of democratization and the parallel rise of LOC [left-of-centre] forces in the Latin American region’ (4). With his twin approach of linking interests, institutions and

ideas, and probing in some depth the nature of democratic arrangements in different countries, his book is far more than a narrative history and discusses some key issues not raised in the other two volumes reviewed here. Thus, the first half of his book, on the ascent, hegemony and decline of the Washington Consensus, complements well the treatment in Silva's book of the imposition of market society; where Silva's focus is on the contentious politics, Panizza's is a broader and more comprehensive treatment of the political, ideological, economic and social context, both of individual countries and of the wider region.

Panizza's discussion of the rise of the new left in the second half of his book is of more relevance for this article. He frames the ascent of the left in the context of the post-Washington Consensus (PWC) which he treats in Chapter 7. This offers a very informative discussion of the changes in the World Bank and IMF approaches to development and helpfully he includes a brief overview of ECLAC and IADB approaches, emphasising their 'thick' concept of institutions over the technocratic approach of the Bank (160). He identifies in the PWC 'a powerful critique' of some of the key assumptions of neoclassical theory as it adopts a new agenda about the value of democracy, the strengthening of state institutions and the importance of investment in health and education; as he puts it, it is 'an arena of contestation as well as of consensus' (166). This provides the ideological context for the emergence of the new left, though as he stresses in Chapters 8 and 9 support for the new left comes from a broad and heterogeneous constituency and he importantly reminds us that 'free market reforms increased socio-economic inequalities but dissatisfaction with the status quo was not the same as support for radical change; nor did it imply a common vision about the direction and intensity of change' (194). His distinction between party, personalist and social forms of political representation and the ways these are shaping different left governments and movements, and his stress on the different ways in which these combine in different countries, offer rich insights into the differences between the left in various countries and the reasons for these differences. While this is not inconsistent with the approach of Lievesley and Ludlam, it does probe key differences somewhat further.

A major contribution of Panizza's book is its discussion of democracy which, he argues, needs to be informed by the 'balance between conflict and accommodation that creates the political space for the popular sectors to advance their rights, while avoiding the extreme polarization that has led to democratic breakdowns in the past' (198). He thus raises questions about 'the impact of mass protests on democratic governability', for example in Bolivia and Ecuador (199) whereas the left in Chile, Brazil and Uruguay have reached power with lower levels of political conflict. He analyses the differences between the levels of social mobilization, party-system institutionalization and the policy orientation of leaders in Brazil and Venezuela and is able to draw nuanced conclusions about the institutional and socio-economic factors that help explain political polarization in Venezuela and the moderation of political antagonisms in Brazil. Overall, however, he concludes that the ascent of the left can be seen as part of 'a new wave of political and social incorporation into the democratic process of previously excluded social sectors' (222). Another major contribution is his sensitivity to the wider international economic context and how it has benefited the new left. He places more emphasis than do the other authors reviewed here on the favourable international economic con-

text in which the new left governments achieved power as the region's growth was sustained by demand for its primary commodities, particularly from China. This not only allowed them gain higher levels of policy autonomy from international financial institutions but also gave the luxury of avoiding difficult choices and combining economic growth with social policies to reduce poverty and inequality. As he writes in his conclusion: 'A deterioration in the economic environment is likely to place new constraints on these governments' policy options and limit their ability to address social demands' (251). But the rise of China and India also provide challenges, and he rightly identifies 'the implications that economic competition from these countries has for economies characterized by low labour productivity, low institutional capabilities and dependency on commodity exports' (225).

Overall, then, these three books offer an excellent introduction to the complexities of what is happening on the left in Latin America today, combining rich and dense description of all the major cases with different but largely complementary analytical frameworks through which to understand the phenomenon. They thus move us far beyond Castañeda's crude dichotomy between the good reformist left and the bad populist left that unfortunately has had such influence on English-language treatments of the subject over recent years. There is substantial agreement among the authors on a number of fundamental questions. Among these is that, despite all the differences among them, the governments of the new left can be treated as a common category. A second key question concerns whether they are promoting a new political economy model beyond neoliberalism. Here the conclusion of Panizza is shared by all the authors it seems to me: while 'there is a rich repository of economic principles and policy suggestions alternative to the orthodoxy of the WC [...] the accumulation of diagnoses and policy suggestions does not add up yet to an alternative economic model' (229). Eduardo Silva's analysis of this question is particularly helpful. He agrees that 'all that can be observed, for the most part, are more or less partial, gradual, halting, timid, and possibly contradictory reforms to neoliberal capitalism' which some argue are virtually indistinguishable from it (280). However, he cautions against too quick a judgement: 'In my view, such perspectives ask too much of these fledgling social and political movements at such an early stage of an unfolding historical process' (280). He argues that the present era bears similarities to the birth of national populism in the first half of the 1900s when the 'model' did not spring forth fully formed but developed at least over a 20-year period and there was a tremendous variety in the pace, depth and timing. 'We observe the same today and, in time, a "model" (or "models") may emerge' (281).

If there are differences between these authors, it seems to me that they lie more in different emphases rather than in any fundamental disagreements. For example, Panizza adopts a more cautionary approach to social mobilization than do either Silva or Lievesley and Ludlam. This derives from his attention to how democratic institutions deal with the losers in the struggles for economic and political power. As he puts it: 'A shared sense of citizenship requires legitimate institutions that are able to strike a balance between conflict and accommodation which [...] is characteristic of a democratic order' (254) and he is clearly concerned that this balance has not yet been struck in many Latin American countries. In a very real sense, then, this is a story with as yet no clear outcomes. In one telling footnote, Silva

ventures that ‘to the extent that it contributes to a new process of reincorporation of the popular sectors into politics and the extension of economic and social rights to them, we may be at the threshold of a new critical juncture in Latin America’ (footnote 5, page 2). But what is striking is his reluctance to be more than tentative. It is likely to take a lot more time before more definitive conclusions can be drawn but, as is clear from these volumes, we are in the midst of momentous changes in power and politics in Latin America.

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