
REVIEW ESSAYS

THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT: Epitaph or New Beginning?*

José L. Rénique

Lehman College, City University of New York

THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT: FROM ALLENDE TO PERESTROIKA. Edited by Barry Carr and Steve Ellner. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993. Pp. 256. \$49.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

THE PALACE OF JUSTICE: A COLOMBIAN TRAGEDY. By Ana Carrigan. (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993. Pp. 303. \$22.95.)

UTOPIA UNARMED: THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT AFTER THE COLD WAR. By Jorge Castañeda. (New York: Knopf, 1993. Pp. 498. \$27.50.)

EL PCP SENDERO LUMINOSO Y SU IDEOLOGIA. By Manuel Jesús Granados. (Lima: EAPSA, 1992.)

THE SOCIALIST OPTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA: TWO REASSESSMENTS. By Shafik Handal and Carlos M. Vilas. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993. Pp. 143. \$26.00 cloth, \$14.00 paper.)

CON LA MIRADA EN ALTO: HISTORIA DE LAS FPL FARABUNDO MARTI A TRAVES DE SUS DIRIGENTES. Second edition. By Marta Harnecker. (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993. Pp. 376.)

MARXISM, SOCIALISM, AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA. By Richard L. Harris. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992. Pp. 234. \$44.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

NOCHE DE LOBOS. By Ramón Jimeno. (Bogotá: Planeta, 1988. Pp. 180.)

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THE GUERRILLA WARS OF CENTRAL AMERICA: NICARAGUA, EL SALVADOR, AND GUATEMALA. By Saul Landau. (New York: St. Martin's, 1993. Pp. 222. \$35.00 cloth.)

LA CRISIS DE LAS IZQUIERDAS EN AMERICA LATINA. By José Rodríguez Elizondo. (Madrid and Caracas: Instituto de Cooperación Ibérica and Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1990. Pp. 152.)

SENDERO LUMINOSO AND THE THREAT OF NARCOTERRORISM. By Gabriela Tarazona-Sevillano. (New York: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1990. Pp. 168. \$35.00 cloth, \$12.95 paper.)

In the history of the Latin American Left, the last fifteen years have been an ambiguous period. Significant advances clouded by symptoms of ideological exhaustion, paralleling the course of world events, have led to a profound crisis in socialism as a utopian horizon for a series of anticapitalist traditions, in Marxism as its doctrinal basis of support, and in the very idea of revolution as the founding act of a new society.

By 1994, indications ranging from the confused "dialogue" of Sendero leaders with Peruvian authorities to the recent post-election crisis of the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador were mounting of more than a passing crisis—a real blurring of the sometimes precise contours of the set of collective experiences known as "the Latin American Left." What is the place of this chapter of meteoric changes in a history dating back to the 1920s? Is there a future for the Left in the Latin America of the twenty-first century? If so, at what price?

Assessments of the Latin American Left

The central themes of the essays collected in *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika* are internal debates that have at times been rending, accommodation to the rules of the democratic game, and the resulting identity crisis. By means of eight case studies and three thematic analyses, the volume edited by Barry Carr and Steve Ellner attempts to present a balanced view of the last twenty years in the history of the Left. Taken as a whole rather than as a set of shared problematics, these studies reveal the array of political times and social spaces in which Latin American leftists have been acting.

The goal of *The Latin American Left* is to analyze events of great fluidity whose historical dimension remains uncertain. Most of the contributors opted to concentrate on the organizational ups and downs: the debates, ruptures, and alliances made habitually behind the backs of their followers. The result turns out to be a kind of "institutional history" of the Left that is of limited value for understanding the deeper roots of the current situation.

For example, the study by Nigel Haworth is a lengthy recounting

of the evolution of the Peruvian Izquierda Unida (IU) that, in the end, does not manage to explain the crisis brewing within this group since the mid-1980s. Such an explanation would have required going beyond party alliances to explore the links between parties and social actors. From this perspective, the IU appears to be a loose electoral front whose ties to its bases depended largely on nongovernmental organizations, subsistence programs, or groups linked to the Catholic Church—a weak structure ill-suited to resisting the double pressure of the Peruvian militarization and the pounding by Sendero Luminoso. In 1987 Sendero declared an “implacable fight” against “revisionism and electoral opportunism,” as a result of which the spaces for IU action were significantly reduced.¹

In contrast, Marc Chernic and Michael Jiménez seek to place the contemporary Colombian Left within a broad historical perspective. They want to explain the unusual durability of the guerrilla movements of the 1970s. These analysts discard the idea that the phenomenon might be a consequence of the structural characteristics of Colombian capitalism or merely an ideological persistence of vanguardism. According to Chernic and Jiménez, the guerrillas’ durability is rather the reflection of old forms of protest that, when faced with a dearth of viable liberal or social democratic proposals, maintain their effectiveness by serving as channels of opposition to the oligarchy. In such a context, although leaders may adopt the Marxist-Leninist discourse, they act guided by a “Jacobin sensibility” of longstanding in Colombian politics and manage to direct toward their positions a set of latent traditions of “popular liberalism” and “radical democracy.”

In Argentina and Brazil, similar antecedents have given rise to contrasting results. The contribution to *The Latin American Left* by Donald Hodges traces the complex strategy that in combining “*vanguardismo*” with “*movimientismo*” led to the confrontation at La Tablada on 23 January 1989.² In the contrasting Brazilian case, as Maria Helena Moreira Albes explains, out of a drastic denunciation of the past arose the Partido dos Trabalhadores, which was intent on creating a flexible and dynamic mass organization “dialectically related to the grass-roots movements and capable of changing with historical contexts without losing its crucial connection to those movements” (p. 231).

The characteristics of the Latin American Left in the 1990s that

1. Partido Comunista del Perú, *Bases de discusión* (Lima: Ediciones Bandera Roja, 1987), 122. Haworth commits the indiscretion of naming Peruvian anthropologist Manuel Jesús Granados as one of the main Sendero thinkers. Anyone familiar with the subject knows that the very nature of Sendero does not allow such a possibility.

2. As Hodges explains in his contribution, on this date, fifty guerrillas who presumably were members of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (a group working in close collaboration with the Movimiento Todos por el Pueblo founded in 1986), launched an attack against the third infantry regiment stationed in the district of La Tablada in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Twenty-eight of the attackers, nine soldiers, and two police officers died in the confrontation (*The Latin American Left*, pp. 164–65).

emerge from *The Latin American Left* are the decline of Leninist style, the spread of pragmatic attitudes inspired by a marked cosmopolitanism, and a greater appreciation for the autonomy of social organizations. Ellner warns, however, that the fact that the Left has begun to appreciate the importance of civil society does not mean that it can count on viable strategies and definitive models. He concludes that the Left's fate is being debated in terms of two possible scenarios: the first is that spurred on by inequality and extreme poverty, the Left will reaffirm its anticapitalist critique and take on defending a revised version of socialism; the second is that disheartened by the changes on the world scene, the Left will try to fill the void left by radical populism by falling back into a vague "Third World" discourse, setting Marxism aside, and ceasing to call itself socialist.

What concerns Mexican political analyst Jorge Castañeda in *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War* is the Left's lack of a coherent and well-buttressed proposal, an alternative to the current consensus about the market. *Utopia Unarmed* constitutes an ambitious effort to fill this gap. Its major relevance lies in the effort to define a proposal for the Left. It is also valuable because it is grounded in a broad survey of what the Left has managed to accomplish at the level of *municipios*, nongovernmental organizations, and social movements rather than in abstract models or a "return to the classics." In Castañeda's view, these multiple local processes can provide the foundations for "Latin Americanizing" the Left.

Such an effort amounts to rebuilding the bonds between the parties and society. Party leaderships, Castañeda affirms, must come to an understanding with civil society: by strengthening leftist forms of political expression, channeling leftist mobilization toward dismantling the patrimonial state, and forging a great pact on national programs capable of contending with the Right over management of Latin American modernization. But to assume this role, the Left must change. It must make drastic changes that are nonetheless workable in the wake of the cold war: admitting that "the very idea of revolution has lost significance"; assuming as its strategic perspective "the democratization of democracy"; redefining nationalism and relations with the United States; and acknowledging the logic of the market. In other words, the Left must renounce the search for a different model and compromise rather than try to turn the existing systems into something new.

Castañeda's thesis rests on a particular reading of history whose main subject is suggested by the full title of *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War*. As a critique of the model of armed struggle, the study inevitably addresses the topic of Cuba and its relation to the military buildup. Castañeda believes that "the democratic credentials of the Latin American Left" will remain in doubt if it is not capable of taking "a position that is openly critical in disapproving of the violation of

human rights and the lack of democracy in Cuba."³ This call sets the denunciatory tone of Castañeda's analysis of relations between Cuba and revolutionaries in the region: "Fidel Castro and the Cubans did not invent the armed struggle in Latin America and the Caribbean. . . . But they refined a tradition and made it a policy of state and party" (p. 69). In this sense, the Cuban leaders promoted a militaristic focus with elements of heroism and solidarity but also arrogance and imposition of their will.

Yet *Utopia Unarmed* does not offer any substantial exploration of the relationship between the Fidelistas and their followers. This shortcoming is camouflaged by anecdotal stories that reveal a certain taste for sensationalism, as exemplified by Castañeda's examination of Havana's relationship with the Colombian guerrilla group known as the M-19. This kind of treatment may be what caused Michael Jiménez to assert that Castañeda tries to explain "thirty years of civil war in Latin America" on the basis of "the insurrectionism" of the "revolutionary intellectuals."⁴

The impact of Castro's triumph on the region is one of the central themes of *La crisis de las izquierdas en América Latina*, by Chilean researcher José Rodríguez Elizondo. He approaches the subject from the perspective of a generation in the Southern Cone who have learned that democracy is "not only the least pernicious of the historical political systems but also the most profitable in terms of peace, security, disarmament, development, ecological consciousness, and consolidation of a universal culture of human rights" (p. 18). To become a part of the process of building democracies, according to Rodríguez Elizondo, the "Latin American Lefts" must free themselves of their "ideological mortgages" by experiencing their own "autochthonous perestroika" (pp. 18–19).

Within the "new Left" that arose out of the enthusiasm engendered by the Cuban Revolution, a "new orthodoxy" is emerging that challenges traditional communism by setting forth "a pure theory of revolution": an eclectic conceptual mix of pre-Leninism and Stalinism with ideas taken from Leon Trotsky, Mao Tse-Tung, C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, Régis Debray, Franz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and André Gunder Frank. This ideological amalgam promotes an "ultra-leftist" reading of the world in the 1960s starting with a method of analysis based on mutually exclusive dichotomies and extrapolations. This approach allows, for example, applying the image of Fulgencio Batista's army in Cuba to the military in the rest of the region without dwelling on either the profound national differences or the changes now taking place in the armed forces across Latin America.

Traditional communism, in being confined to a reading of reality

3. Julio Ortega, "El imperativo democrático," interview with Jorge Castañeda, *Socialismo y participación*, no. 62 (Sept. 1993):1–19.

4. Michael F. Jiménez, "A Sense of Loss," *The Nation*, 14 Feb. 1994, pp. 203–5.

based on circumscribed data provided by a “militant science,” cannot respond to the challenge. It remains sunk in a paralyzing ambiguity. Voluntaristic and subjective, the “warlike triumphalism” takes over and attributes to violence “a founding role and a strategic category” whose “destabilizing and polarizing” practice will contribute to “an absurd weakening” of “the possibilities for negotiation and dialogue within its systems” (pp. 13 and 55). According to Rodríguez Elizondo, the ideological struggle remains bounded by “a social ghetto,” within whose confines it can scarcely visualize the complex world of the era of Nicolai Khrushchev and John Kennedy, of developmentalism and counterinsurgency (p. 129). What emerges is more than an ideological position: it is a worldview, an ethos, and a style that stamp the university system as well as the processes of political socialization, a crushing legacy that the liberating winds of the late 1980s finally allowed to be confronted.

Rodríguez Elizondo concludes in *La crisis de las izquierdas en América Latina* that “Romantic reason” and “Stalinist reason”—the “ultra Left” and traditional communism—differ but are profoundly similar in that they both share the same essential lack: “a basic incomprehension of the problems of the individual, of democracy, and of liberty.” Herein lies the essence of their crisis.

The Impact of the Sandinista Triumph

In 1979 the Sandinista triumph in Nicaragua altered the terms of the leftist debate over forms of revolutionary struggle. As Jaime Bateman, leader of the Colombian M-19 asserted, “The enthusiasm of the vanguards rekindles in reaffirming armed struggle as the only solution when faced with imperialism and the oligarchies.”⁵ It is this vision that Chilean researcher Marta Harnecker has sought to systematize over the past decade.

Harnecker’s name is inextricably associated with the history of “the new Latin American Left” as the author of a manual that contributed, more than any other text, to popularizing Marxism in universities, labor unions, and study circles throughout the region.⁶ In her new book, Harnecker’s goal is to contribute to formulation of a revolutionary strategy that is “genuinely national and Latin American,” one that she claims is rooted in the particular reality and the traditions of struggle of each people.⁷ Reformulating the notion of vanguard by taking the dogma out

5. Jaime Bateman Cayón, *Oiga hermano*, interview with Ramón Jimeno (Bogotá: Macondo, 1984), 15.

6. Marta Harnecker, *Los conceptos elementales del materialismo histórico*, various editions.

7. Harnecker, *La revolución social: Lenin y América Latina*, 2d ed. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1989).

of Lenin's legacy is a central aspect of her project, which took the form of a series of interviews with the leaders of the guerrilla Left in the 1980s.⁸

Con la mirada en alto: historia de las FPL–Farabundo Martí a través de sus dirigentes presents Harnecker's conversations with six leaders of the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL). Founded in 1970, it became an integral part of the FMLN throughout the Salvadoran civil war. The book has been structured according to her theoretical outlines. Yet this structure impedes neither the work's fluidity nor its self-reflectiveness, qualities enhanced by Harnecker's informed and stimulating questioning.

The result is a singular history: a vision from within of the building of an insurrectional force, one moving from parochialism to the international scene, from its crude initial dogmatism to its complex strategies of the 1980s, which were capable of coordinating diverse forms of struggle and incorporating the broad spectrum of Salvadoran society that had been mobilized. With candor and realism, the leaders' statements reveal how the drive and initiative of a handful of militants gradually intermingled with traditions, values, and memories to produce a "counter-power" capable of resisting the pressure of an army several times stronger. In this process, violence appeared as a gradual alternative, introduced astutely by the militants as an unavoidable option for collective self-defense when faced with closed and increasingly repressive regimes.

It is not a triumphal history, however. One interviewee admits, "No one likes the war. We're in it because it's a necessity" (p. 299). They speak readily of the difficulties the war brought with it: the social and psychological problems involved in maintaining an army of full-time combatants; the dangerous similarities at times between violence committed in the name of the people and that committed by government forces. Hence the leaders assert that "shortening the war, lowering its human, social, and material costs can be a legitimate aspiration."

Con la mirada en alto is also the history of the crisis of a worldview, one whose validity became so weak that "the world of living in hiding" was left behind and the militants experienced what one interviewee calls "that great therapy of colliding with reality" (p. 344). Then the necessity arose of imagining a way out that, without renouncing the insurrectional possibility, might pave the way for dialogue and negotiation. Flexibility is, in the end, an objective achieved at great cost. As "Facundo" declares, "It is when you are strong that you can become more flexible because if you do it when you are weak, they can break you" (p. 304).

The Socialist Option in Central America: Two Reassessments brings together an analytical study by Carlos Vilas and a new interview by Marta Harnecker, this time with Shafik Handal, secretary general of the

8. Harnecker, *América Latina: izquierda y crisis actual* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1990), 21.

Salvadoran Communist Party. At the time of the interview in early 1991, the Sandinistas had been defeated in the general election and the Salvadoran peace accord was an imminent reality. The conversation revolved around two themes: the effectiveness of socialism in the Third World and the options of the Salvadoran Left in the new context that is developing.

Although Handal accepts the necessity for a conceptual renewal, he rejects categorically what he calls "the new dogma of the inviability of revolution in third world countries" (p. 6). Moreover, Handal is convinced that only a revolution can liberate the productive and human resources that will put poor countries on the path to development. He recognizes, however, that the current goal is to create a realistic model that would allow his country to enter into an increasingly multicentered and interdependent world. It would be a regime based on mutual acceptance by former enemies. Handal states that he told business representatives that "we have nothing against the idea that once the revolution triumphs, their parties will struggle for the capitalist option, but if so, we are going to struggle from below, with the people, and from above with everything we have, to stay the course of the democratic revolution and its transition to socialism" (p. 47).

The ambiguity of this situation is perceptively analyzed by Carlos Vilas in the second half of *The Socialist Option in Central America*. As the Argentine researcher explains, it is the paradox revolutionaries face in that without having prepared themselves for the role, they end up being part of a process of reforms. This is no simple undertaking. The transformation of a political-military organization into a political party functioning in a competitive democracy, Vilas continues, is much more than merely an institutional topic. To begin with, such transformation implies going beyond the vague proposals for global change into constructing specific platforms capable of winning the attention of voters, and in circumstances that tend to discourage electoral participation due to the reduced capacity of the system for incorporating marginal sectors. Yet such transformation also involves confronting by legal means a system that is not neutral, that will not wait until the former guerrillas learn to be legal politicians, a system that will try to co-opt them or (as happened to the Colombian Unión Patriótica) will proceed to wipe them out physically. Such transformation ultimately involves facing the possibility of divisions arising from the ideological mutations created by accepting the new rules of the game. Vilas observes that some will interpret these changes as evidence of political maturity, but others will dismiss them as nothing more than vulgar opportunism.

How can this outcome be explained? How should the weakening of revolutionary positions be interpreted? Is it the result of U.S. pressure or, rather, of the socialist collapse?

The Guerrilla Wars of Central America: Nicaragua, El Salvador, and

Guatemala represents the first full-length study of the three Central American insurrections. In this work, Saul Landau undertakes a historical-structural interpretation that casts the Central American revolutionaries as victims of macropolitical trends beyond their control. He argues that the tragedy of Marxist revolutionaries is that, in essence, they consider their struggle to be a continuing fight for the ideals of those who sought independence. The Marxist insurrection began in a world where fighting for sovereignty and independence still had meaning. But during the 1980s, this era came to an end. Today, when a handful of international corporations and multilateral financial institutions control the economies of most poor countries, achieving the status of nation-state has lost its liberating meaning. In such a context, Marxism-Leninism became an archaic doctrine long before the Soviet collapse. Central American revolutionaries, increasingly disoriented and hoisting standards belonging to the generation of Simón Bolívar, are now left to do what they can to adapt to the realities of the new world order. For all their heroism, their struggle has not been enough to alter international conditions.

As of May 1994, conflict within the FMLN seemed to be worsening. Although Handal believes that the current democracy in El Salvador is meaningful as one phase in a process that is leading to socialism, Joaquín Villalobos holds that "to accept electoral democracy implies quitting thinking about power based on class or on a hegemonic party."⁹ Similarly, while Handal proposes to establish forms of popular control over the economy, Villalobos believes that "bringing genuinely free competition between social and individual benefits to the market" as well as "taking the market to its ultimate consequences" are compromises the Left must undertake with "maximum clarity and without ambiguity." As the former military strategist of the Ejército Revolucionario Popular now attests, "If one is anticapitalist, one cannot be seriously democratic."¹⁰

Richard Harris, for his part, doubts the effectiveness of any type of democratization that is not backed by a set of economic and social reforms guided by an overhauled Marxism. In *Marxism, Socialism, and Democracy in Latin America*, Harris argues that "Marxist theory, with certain revisions, can be effectively applied to revolutionary transformation in the Third World" (p. 3). This process requires freeing Marxism from a long chain of distortions and rediscovering the lost threads of its democratic essence by returning not only to the classic texts but also to the critics of the Soviet model and the body of neo-Marxist thought generated by the revolutionary experiences of non-European countries.

The conclusions Harris draws from his exploration recall the ob-

9. Joaquín Villalobos, "Izquierda, democracia representativa y mercado," 1993 in-house document, Comisión Política PRS-ERP, San Salvador, p. 4.

10. *Ibid.*, 5.

stacles encountered by those who attempted to create socialism amid conditions of underdevelopment. Harris believes nevertheless that critical understanding of these efforts can provide the intellectual basis for developing a strategy capable of avoiding the errors of the past. Some of his conclusions, however, merely confirm why at a time when neoliberal "common sense" is prevailing, the socialist project can be viewed as the unmistakable manifestation of a bygone era. Harris contends, "the evidence seems quite clear that without a rapid and full-scale expropriation of capital, no socialist regime—and probably no revolutionary regime of any kind—can expect to survive in Latin America and the Caribbean" (p. 68). He draws similar conclusions on the question of development of the forces of production. Any Latin American or Caribbean country that chooses to undertake the transition to socialism in the future, Harris asserts, will have to face U.S. efforts to undermine its economy and isolate it from international sources of finance and assistance. In his view, two possible measures for confronting such pressure would be "as rapidly as possible to gain control over the major means of production and eliminate the economic power base of the bourgeoisie" and to seek a "self-reliant approach to the development of domestic technology and industry, with appropriate foreign technical assistance (from friendly countries in Western Europe, Asia, and/or the Third World)." Harris cautions nevertheless that this approach "has not yet been tested or proven by experience" (p. 105).

Colombia and Peru: Two Extreme Cases

In the 1980s, South America awakened from its long dictatorial night. But in Colombia and Peru, armed insurgencies spotlighted the challenges facing nascent democracies that were also having to confront the severest economic crisis in the region since the 1930s. Both countries suffer from weak state structures, fragmentation of political power, sharp regional inequities, and teeming areas of colonization where drug-trafficking flourishes. These conditions favor the development of armed groups like the M-19 and Sendero Luminoso. Yet these same circumstances are not enough to encourage formation of antigovernmental coalitions like the one that made the Sandinista victory possible. Rather, confrontation leads to a situation of entrapment or stalemate. In both Colombia and Peru, violence became the chronic trademark of a tragic decade.

The seizure of the Palacio de Justicia by the M-19 was chronologically a brief chapter in the hazardous process of confrontation and negotiation that Colombia was living through in the 1980s. This event was nonetheless too important to become a mere footnote in the contemporary history of this country, according to Ramón Jimeno and Ana Carrián. Each has written a book dedicated to the events of November 1985. *Noche de lobos* and *The Palace of Justice: A Colombian Tragedy* are basically

devoted to reconstructing in detail what transpired during these twenty-eight hours of unequal combat. The authors then try to use these facts to answer broader questions.

After granting amnesty to most of the M-19 leaders, the government headed by Belisario Betancur signed a cease-fire accord with the M-19 in August 1984 that included the summons to a national dialogue. It was a troubled and short-lived peace. In July of the following year, the M-19 decided to resume armed activities. Jimeno reports in *Noche de lobos* that M-19 leaders felt that the government had dealt dishonestly with them and that given the popular support they could count on, the M-19 could score a political victory by armed means. According to their plan, once the Corte Suprema de la República was captured by an M-19 unit, the court would indict President Betancur publicly for his role in frustrating the peace process. Jimeno stresses that those who conceived the operation, faithful to their philosophy of voluntarism, believed that this “exceptional judgment” could end in the formation of a new government.

Twenty-eight hours later, however, 115 bodies lay lifeless in the rubble of the Palacio de Justicia, including nine members of the supreme court. How can this willingness to commit violence be explained among forces that, a few weeks back, were talking about peace? According to Jimeno’s account in *Noche de lobos*, the seizure was the outcome of an ineffectual dialogue: between insurgents who, although they had succeeded in playing the strings of discontent with the two-party system, had not delivered resounding military blows, and a government whose head was trying to restore the regime’s lost prestige by means of a change of image tailored according to a populist pattern. Neither the elites nor the army could recognize this dialogue as valid, convinced as they were that it would be treating those who had been defeated on the field of battle as victors.

The Palacio de Justicia became the stage for the final act of this empty dialogue. As Jimeno explains, after the M-19 had concentrated its efforts for several months on discrediting the army, it placed itself in front of the army like someone waving a red rag in front of a brave bull. Betancur, greatly debilitated after his one-man plan to “get the guerrillas back on track toward civil life” had failed, opted to let the armed forces crush the rebels, even at the cost of the lives of the judicial officials themselves. Jimeno concludes that in retrospect, the events of 6 and 7 November 1985 signaled a complete discrediting of the forces favoring peace and opened the way to the climate of military impunity and lack of control that launched Colombia down the path to the dirty war.

It was to this violence-wracked country that Ana Carrigan returned in 1991 to complete the investigation into the seizure of the Palacio that she had begun four years earlier. New evidence now permitted reconstructing with greater precision what happened inside the Palacio

during twenty-eight hours of horror. The point of view of the M-19, virtually left out of Jimeno's *Noche de lobos*, could now be elaborated in greater detail by following the personal accounts given after the tragedy and recapturing their sense of generational protest against the pitfalls and deceptions of the two-party system. In *The Palace of Justice*, Carrigan perceives the seizure of the palace as the referent for understanding a peculiar climate of toleration and immunity: "since I was here last, in the spring of 1968, the leadership and membership of one political party, the Unión Patriótica, have been systematically eliminated" (p. 20).

According to Carrigan, when the establishment saw its continuance in power being threatened, it closed ranks to defend itself by fire and sword. The establishment's distance from the popular sphere, its cynical conservatism, and the lingering specter of the "Bogotazo" that erupted in 1948 all facilitated this option.¹¹ Whereas Jimeno seeks explanations in the political process, Carrigan finds them in the cultural patterns that rule the "hermetic," "tribal," and "immutable" oligarchic world in Colombia. These characteristics explain its counterpart as well as the indignant and romantic vision of the petty bourgeois youth who embarked on the guerrilla adventure. Carrigan comments, "I was twelve when I first met this world. Too old to become a part of it, old enough to observe its tribal rituals with astonishment. It has taken me many years to piece together an understanding of its ethos" (p. 17). The daughter of an Irish father and a Colombian mother, she dedicates a lengthy prologue to this subject in which she airs her disenchantment with "this country afflicted with national amnesia" (p. 54). With an indignation reminiscent of Flora Tristán, another European traveler who abandoned Lima a century earlier, Carrigan left Bogotá certain that there was no place for her there. She returned without sorrow to her "own world, the rational world of laws and structures where a person can speak freely on the telephone to their friends, or wander out to buy a pack of cigarettes at the corner store at night without fear of being bundled into an unmarked car and 'disappeared'" (p. 44).

Setting personal feelings aside, the prospects for negotiating a peaceful settlement with the guerrillas in 1991 were the best since 1984. Judging by what has happened since 1991, moreover, Colombian elites have shown greater flexibility than Carrigan could recognize in them. In the last half of the 1980s, the gravity of the crisis, fueled by the violent irruption of drug trafficking, persuaded Colombian elites to seek a democratic way out.¹² In 1987 the M-19 became part of legal political life in

11. The urban uprising dubbed "el Bogotazo" occurred on 9 April 1948, following the assassination of reformist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. This event inaugurated the tragic period of Colombian history known as "La Violencia."

12. Eduardo Pizarro, "Insurgencia en un contexto no revolucionario: violencia política y proceso de paz," paper presented at the seminar "La Violencia Política en el Perú," orga-

Colombia. According to Colombian sociologist Eduardo Pizarro, by acknowledging the impact of the failure of socialist experiments in the Third World and recognizing the enormous costs that the civil war entailed for the country, the M-19 leadership succeeded in resolving the tension between "radical methods of struggle and the democratic content of its discourse."¹³ Soon afterward, the M-19 played a prominent role in drawing up the Constitution of 1991. Although the dynamic of violence and negotiation did not disappear entirely, from then on—and with the backing of a vigorous economy—the possibilities for stability began to grow. According to French social scientist Daniel Pecaute, this outcome is characteristic of the Colombian process: "Despite its intensity, violence had not completely hobbled all the economic and political mechanisms."¹⁴

No less complex and challenging is attempting to understand the Peruvian scene in the 1980s, which has been dominated by the emergence of the Communist Party's Sendero Luminoso. Peruvian researchers Gabriela Tarazona-Sevillano and Manuel Jesús Granados have investigated the sources of its strength as well as the factors that explain the Senderistas' relative success where their antecedents in the 1960s had failed utterly: in developing a social base among the rural population. It is necessary nonetheless to clarify that at the present time, initial characterizations of the Sendero insurgency as a peasant rebellion no longer have a place in the debate.¹⁵ Ideology and internal organization seem to be central topics in both studies.

Tarazona-Sevillano's *Sendero Luminoso and the Threat of Narcoterrorism* focuses on the problem from the perspective of the Peruvian group's possible conversion into "an international threat." The message (for the benefit of Sendero sympathizers in the United States) is directed at policy-making circles in Washington. According to the author of the prologue, David Long of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, the terrorist and guerrilla activities of Sendero Luminoso should be perceived as a manifestation of the type of violence that, in the uncertain postwar world, "we could find ourselves obliged to confront" (p. vii). What is it that makes this movement so particularly threatening? According to Tarazona-Sevillano, the answer is "the unusual efficiency of the system it has devised to spread

nized by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos and the North-South Center of the University of Miami, Lima, 21–23 July 1993, p. 17.

13. Eduardo Pizarro, "Elementos para una sociología de la guerrilla en Colombia," *Análisis Político* 12 (Jan.–Apr. 1991):7–22.

14. Daniel Pecaute, "Colombia: violencia y democracia," *Análisis Político* 13 (May–Aug. 1991):35–49.

15. Carlos Iván Degregori, "Campesinado andino y violencia: balance de una década de estudios," in *Perú: el problema agrario en debate/SEPIA IV*, edited by Degregori, Javier Escobal, and Benjamín Marticorena (Lima: Seminario Permanente de Investigación Agraria, 1992), 413–39; and Orin Starn, "New Literature on Peru's Sendero Luminoso," *LARR* 27, no. 2 (1992):212–26.

its [Senderista] doctrine and the ominous possibility that its ideology will become unshakably rooted with time" in broad sectors of Peruvian society (p. 33).

In Tarazona-Sevillano's view, such a possibility could become real due to the capacity of Sendero ideology for offering a seductive escape from the generalized hopelessness prevailing in a country "where opportunity and social mobility are both virtually nonexistent" (p. 74). She explains that it is not economic oppression but the sense of "cultural strangulation" born of Hispanic imposition in the fifteenth century that became the fuel powering Sendero Luminoso (p. 9). Abimael Guzmán reminds Tarazona-Sevillano of fellow Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s, both of them being "mestizos with irregular family backgrounds." She describes Guzmán as harboring feelings of resentment: "It became his goal to unite the marginal classes in a violent, vindictive revolt that would destroy Eurocentric Peru and build a new nation grounded in indigenous institutions," the same ones that Mariátegui had recommended so emphatically (p. 19).

Beyond proposing a debatable reading of Mariátegui, Tarazona-Sevillano's interpretation highlights the "Indianness" of Sendero Luminoso, a characterization disseminated widely by researchers and journalists (especially foreign ones) but now disputed flatly by analysts who underscore in contrast the "hyper-classist vision" of Peruvian society maintained by Sendero Luminoso.¹⁶ Tarazona-Sevillano takes no side in this debate. She prefers to take a regional view of Senderista expansion in order to demonstrate the notable autonomy with which local Sendero leaders act and "to provide a picture of what the future may hold for the rest of Peru unless the insurgency is effectively countered" (p. 99). The case she presents is the Huallaga Valley, the main center of coca production in the Peruvian Andes, with tremendous financial resources that could prove decisive in attaining the Senderista goal she imagines as unifying "the entire 'Andean nation' against the exploitative and divisive state structures" (p. 134). Without offering any other proof and thus contributing directly to a swelling Senderista mythology, Tarazona-Sevillano states, "Bolivia is ripe for infiltration." She goes on to claim that "Sendero has penetrated northern Argentina" in seeking "control of the Corredor Salteño-Jujeño, a territory connecting Argentina with the Bolivian Chaco." Tarazona-Sevillano speculates further that Sendero Luminoso "may also be seeking to expand north into Ecuador" (p. 135).

Familiarity with the Senderista phenomenon arises for Manuel Granados from his years as a student at the Universidad de Huamanga,

16. Nelson Manrique, "La década de la violencia," *Márgenes*, nos. 5–6 (1989):137–82; and Carlos Iván Degregori, *El surgimiento de Sendero Luminoso: del movimiento por la gratuidad de la enseñanza al inicio de la lucha armada* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1990), 205.

cradle and setting of the initial stage of this movement. On the basis of that experience, Granados seeks to offer in *El PCP Sendero Luminoso y su ideología* a vision “from within” of the ideological Senderista world. He considers it “a system of ideas” whose “basic outlines” are taught “the oral way.” As Granados explains, the party did not issue documents until at least 1986. In these circumstances, “el pensamiento Gonzalo” went along reinventing itself in the heat of armed struggle. The trend was not a matter of creating robots but of generating by a constant process of trial and error an ideology of “disturbing coherence” borne by militants full of conviction (pp. 30, 67).

The image that emerges from *El PCP Sendero Luminoso y su ideología* is not that of a group marching toward unification of the “Andean nation,” as claimed by Tarazona-Sevillano, but a political force whose militants know how to exacerbate the tiniest divisions criss-crossing rural society in order to create the dynamic of war that fits their mode of action. There are those who have material goods and who consequently adopt an arrogant attitude. There are also those who, historically crushed, have assimilated “a vision of fatalistic resignation of their place in society, accepting domination as something natural” (p. 13). In the context of the armed struggle, both groups will be the ones who “align themselves with decent people and the armed forces.” People who, in other words, put themselves in the path of a revolution that is defined in favor of “the peasants who fight and against those who defend the patrón who exploits them, the priest who deceives them, and the authority who punishes them” (p. 13).

Like Tarazona-Sevillano, Granados believes that “the resentment accumulated over centuries of domination and being marginalized” is an element that explains the meteoric rise of Sendero. He differs, however, in his interpretation of the alternative offered by the followers of Guzmán. Granados characterizes it as “a rationalized offer” that is neither terrorism nor merely an insane act. Joining Sendero is a response that obeys ideological conceptions, one that does not translate into blind violence that is out of control. Rather, Sendero attempts “to convert desperation into a rational act in order to change reality” (p. 88). Even vengeance is exercised by Senderistas only when it can be translated into “a message that can be apprehended” (p. 73).

How can a force of this kind be conquered? Granados believes that the key lies in analyzing “el pensamiento Gonzalo,” getting into its logic in order to invert it by turning its ideology and methods upside down. The “rondas campesinas” (committees for civil defense) are a workable formula for curbing Sendero’s rural activities. Where the rondas operate, Granados maintains, Sendero Luminoso has not succeeded in confronting them. Perhaps Senderistas may find the way to corner the rondas from within. Time will tell. For now, Granados concludes, when faced

with the rondas, the Senderistas act in only one way: with extreme cruelty (p. 105). Tarazona-Sevillano asserts, in contrast, that the civil defense committees are a military imposition cast in the mold and resembling the strategic villages established in Vietnam and Guatemala. In 1989, seven years after implementation, "the Civil Defense Committees have served only to pit Peruvians against Peruvians. Compelled to fight a war without [a] victor, the indigenous population, which Sendero claims to represent, is the true victim of Sendero Luminoso's revolution and the government's ineffectiveness" (p. 97).

How, then, to explain the military and political decline experienced by Sendero Luminoso in the last two years? The capture of Abimael Guzmán in September 1992 was the indisputable turning point. New investigations have revealed nonetheless that since at least mid-1983, the activities of peasant groups in various parts of the central and southern Peruvian Sierra had been gradually and quietly eroding the bases of Sendero's initial rural dominance. And in 1986, an article by Ronald Berg began to analyze peasant responses to Sendero Luminoso based on field studies.¹⁷ These responses have been as diverse as Andean microcosms are fragmentary and as varied as the conditions under which towns and communities live out the war. By now, enough better-informed works have appeared that researchers are returning to the field and formulating accounts of the problem that challenge views like those expressed by Tarazona-Sevillano, which rely on newspaper sources based in turn on second- and third-hand information.¹⁸

Ponciano del Pino and José Coronel Aguirre of the Universidad de Huamanga are the ones who have followed this line of exploration most fully.¹⁹ Their studies question the widespread image of "a passive peasantry trapped between two fires." To the contrary, these researchers narrate the history of peasants who, after a period of coexistence with or submission to Sendero Luminoso, are creating different organizational formulas of their own—"rondas campesinas" or "committees of civil defense"—as much to articulate their rejection of the Maoist cadres as to defend themselves from the abuses of the authorities and "repressive excesses." According to Coronel, what motivates these peasants is their

17. Ronald Berg, "Sendero Luminoso and the Peasantry of Andahuaylas," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1986–1987):165–96.

18. As José Gonzales, journalist for the Peruvian magazine *Caretas* during the 1980s, has pointed out, it is important to remember that after the tragic assassination of eight newspaper journalists near Ucchuraccay, Ayacucho, in January 1983, everyone covering the confrontation between insurgents and counterinsurgents virtually quit going out into the field, limiting themselves to following events from a distance.

19. Their most recent articles are Ponciano del Pino, "Tiempos de guerra y de dioses: Sendero, ronderos y evangélicos, historia de una guerra sin fin"; and José Coronel Aguirre, "Violencia política y respuestas campesinas: Huanta, 1980–1993." Both essays will appear in a forthcoming volume to be published by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos. Thanks to Carlos Iván Degregori, editor of the work, for supplying both manuscripts.

loathing “of a conflict that lacks even minimal rules, with no gains to show after several years, a conflict in which they are the main victims.”²⁰ Augmenting this change is a new attitude on the part of the Peruvian armed forces and the government, which decided in 1990 to deliver arms to “*los ronderos*.”²¹ After that, conditions evolved that now allow for designing an alliance between peasants and the military, as happened in Bolivia in reaction against the guerrillas of Ñancahuazú.

What would have happened to this movement reacting against Sendero if the organization’s supreme leader had not been captured in September 1992? There is no way of knowing exactly. What is certain is that while the prisons were filling up with Sendero leaders, this genuine “rebellion within the rebellion” led by the *ronderos* in the countryside was closing the spaces that had been opened up with such zeal and audacity by the “militants of steel” led by Abimael Guzmán. It remains to be seen whether, as Del Pino and Coronel believe, the civil defense committees are the embryos of a new “social fabric” and the organizational referents of a local democratic and autonomous power that, after thirteen years of military dominance, can be turned into new forms for exercising authority.²² If so, perhaps the possibility of another Sendero will be eradicated forever in the Peruvian sierra.

When viewed in perspective, the M-19 and Sendero Luminoso represent two extreme cases: the M-19 exemplifies “armed populism” and Sendero, “radical *campesinismo*.” Although this is not the end of the story, the decline of both these movements—and the negative reactions they have ended up inspiring—may be a bona fide sign of the exhaustion of these two wellsprings, both so deeply established in the Latin American leftist tradition.

Conclusion

As has been discussed, criticism of the so-called new Left is the major theme emerging from attempts to present a balanced view of it. The new Left’s breaking away from traditional communism harbored the promise of making the revolution—in its Marxist-Leninist definition—a genuinely Latin American idea. To what extent was this promise fulfilled? The new Left’s evolution reflects the profound diversity of Latin America. The evidence reveals the broad range of experiences that make up this diversity: successes in combining tradition and innovation to build accepted and legitimate organizations as well as the Left’s limita-

20. Coronel Aguirre, “Violencia política y respuestas campesinas.”

21. On this topic, see Carlos Iván Degregori y Carlos Rivera Paz, *FCAA, subversión y democracia: 1980–1993*, IEP Documento de Trabajo no. 53 (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1993).

22. See also *Hablan los ronderos: la búsqueda de la paz en los Andes*, edited by Orin Starn, IEP Documento de Trabajo no. 45 (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1993).

tions in "seriously integrating" democracy and its failure to consider the necessity of autonomous agencies that can mediate politically between state and society.²³ The new Left's story is one of innumerable local attempts to comprehend and go with the volatile and rapidly changing forms of a budding reality. Its story also reflects a gigantic effort to adapt and transform disparate outcomes ranging from the full adaptation to the rules of the democratic game suggested by Southern Cone and Mexican processes to the insistence on "vanguardism" and the "*vocación campesinista*" illustrated by the Central American countries. In an intermediate position, the Colombian and Peruvian cases with their intricate regional combinations of factors resist sharp definition.

Amidst all the diversity, a common pattern has been the displacement of the revolution by democracy as the main topic in the Left's political and intellectual debate. Hence arises the emphasis on criticizing the armed struggle and the use of violence. But what is to be done with the rest of the Left's history? Throw it overboard? Perhaps this may be the opportunity to liberate the "new Left" from that paradox in which no advance ever achieved true meaning except in reference to the proximity or distance of the mythic moment of "seizing power." Perhaps the aspects of leftist experience that constituted effective responses to the needs and demands of thousands of Latin Americans as well as the valid efforts made to reconcile modernity with tradition will find meaning in a model of radical democracy yet to be formulated.

Latin America is not alone in the effort, in any case. As José Aricó recently observed, the crisis in the countries of Eastern Europe is holding up a giant mirror for Latin Americans. Another historic occasion is presenting itself for "reflecting upon ourselves."²⁴ If this is the case, perhaps it may be necessary to recognize from this side of the Atlantic what Polish writer Adam Michnik has affirmed: "We are where we were thirty years ago except that we have lost our illusions and gained more humility."²⁵

23. Robert Barros, "Izquierda y democracia: debates recientes en América Latina," *Cuadernos Políticos* (Oct.–Dec. 1987):65–81 (published in Mexico City).

24. José Aricó, "1917 y América Latina," *Pretextos*, no. 2 (Feb. 1991):42–54 (published in Lima).

25. "'More Humility, Fewer Illusions': A Talk between Adam Michnik and Jürgen Habermas," *New York Review of Books* 51, no. 6 (24 Mar. 1994):24–29.