

## OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES?: CORPORATISM IN LATIN AMERICA

*THE NEW CORPORATISM: SOCIAL-POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN THE IBERIAN WORLD.*

Edited by FREDRICK B. PIKE and THOMAS STRITCH. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974. Pp. 218.)

*AUTHORITARIANISM AND CORPORATISM IN LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by JAMES M. MALLOY. (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977. Pp. 549. \$5.95.)

Most of the pieces in the two books under review deal mainly with the usefulness of applying the concept of corporatism to the study of present-day Latin American politics.<sup>1</sup> As noted in some of the readings themselves—mostly from United States scholars, but with the participation of a few Latin Americans—the emphasis on utilizing the corporatist framework seems to have been a reaction against the failures of pluralist democracy to take roots in the area, and, in a parallel fashion, against the emergence of military regimes in many countries since the sixties.

In some instances the concept is used in a most sophisticated way—Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, Evelyn P. Stevens, Kenneth S. Mericle—by linking it with the state, society, economy, and polity of the given case or cases. In others it leads to vague generalizations that do not really advance our understanding of the problem. One such example is provided by Fredrick Pike's remarks: "The United States government in its desperate search for remedies to the depression leaned toward the use of corporatist tactics in the early days of the New Deal; therefore it could respond with tolerance and forbearance when Latin American governments introduced corporatist and/or socialist experiments (often the two cannot be distinguished) as they moved toward 'statism' and controlled economics" (Pike and Stritch, p. 146). Ronald Newton suggests, with his notion of "natural corporatism," that the concept has to be understood merely as an "analytical construct" (Pike and Stritch, p. 51). But for still others, corporatism has to be looked upon as, perhaps, the most persistent of the many "colonial legacies" of the Spanish-Portuguese past that almost single-handedly allows us a more perceptive comprehension of the continent's present.

To this variety of approaches, which are conveniently summarized and elaborated upon in "Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America: A Review Essay" by Silvio Duncan Baretta and Helen E. Douglass (Malloy, pp. 513–24), this reviewer would like to contribute some comments of his own, to put the issue of corporatism in Latin America in a more realistic perspective.

Taking as a point of departure the observations made by John J. Bailey (Malloy, pp. 261ff), most of the articles under consideration can be subdivided roughly into those that offer a "cultural" explanation and those that present a

“structural” one. For the first set of explanations, of which Howard Wiarda’s approach appears to be the most characteristic, it suffices to say that they fail to indicate properly the differences among political regimes and socioeconomic preconditions in the development of a *particular* type of corporatism in a *particular* country. The complexities of a given situation tend to be subsumed in a static and uniform view of Latin America as a whole, emphasizing the “uniqueness” of its colonial past and the persistence of the old wine in the new bottles of the twentieth century. This position flows from Wiarda’s definition: “The second sense in which we use the term corporatism is broader, encompassing a far longer cultural-historic tradition stretching back to the origins of the Iberic-Latin systems and embodying a dominant form of sociopolitical organization that is similarly hierarchical, elitist, authoritarian, bureaucratic, Catholic, paternalist, and corporatist to its core” (Pike and Stritch, p. 6). The difficulties of operationalizing this definition, even in conjunction with the more “structural” one that the author also provides, are quite formidable.

Authors writing along a “structural” framework seem to move on firmer ground when they address themselves to the concrete links of corporatist structures with the history and socioeconomic circumstances of the individual countries, not excluding the issue of autonomy or dependence as a conditioning situation (stages of delayed, dependent capitalism, rapid mobilization of the popular classes, prerequisites for economic growth, and so on). I think particularly about O’Donnell and Schmitter, in spite of their divergences.<sup>2</sup> They do not look at corporatism as a single, all-comprehensive, explanatory formula for all Latin America, and are of course less one-sided about the role of cultural factors in the Hispanic-Luso tradition. Overemphasis on “cultural determinism” will, in my opinion, give birth to another kind of reductionism as dangerous and unproductive to really understanding the present as mechanical economism or “politicism” were in their days. Richard R. Fagen has recently synthesized the question very appropriately: “Political arrangements necessarily reflect or express the changing economic forces and thus social forces at work in and on the dependent society.”<sup>3</sup>

In light of the above, and also taking into consideration some of the arguments advanced in the *dependencia* approach as being too externally oriented,<sup>4</sup> I believe it is high time to attempt a meaningful, critical integration of many findings of the *dependentistas* with those of the structural *corporativistas* (for lack of a better term). Therefore, a more concrete analysis of the concrete situations will throw some new light on the descriptive/prescriptive levels and avoid the usual traps of wishful thinking or dogmatic extrapolations.

Let me give a few brief examples. If we can agree that corporatist solutions have been employed in many Latin American countries, this general consensus still is not specific enough to fully explain some of the important internal differences in the cases of Brazil and Argentina vis-à-vis the uneven development of their respective working classes, their organizational levels, their relative weight in the overall arrangements of their political systems, etc. To account for these and other related differences (such as the more penetrating and inclusive role of *peronismo* in comparison with *varguismo*), one must unavoidably move away from the use of corporatism as the only explanatory device.

Partially, this difficulty may be overcome if we tend to consider corporatism as a relationship or a series of relationships between state and society, as a process affecting certain specific classes in different ways (e.g., the working classes and the so-called national bourgeois sectors), and not only as a general pattern or trend in authoritarian regimes (as does Malloy, for instance). What an exclusive reliance on the corporatist focus may entail is that by concentrating on state measures in relation to organized groups in society, the observer tends to lose track of the class relationships, the different class alliances or coalitions active at a given period, and eventually—say, in Argentina—of additional structural reasons related to the “social impasse” at play in the last decades.<sup>5</sup>

Also, and closely related to the previous points, corporatist explanations fail to come to terms satisfactorily with other state features that are in fact independent of this model, for instance, the public character of the state, its role in economic affairs, the exercise of a monopoly of force, etc. Any discussion about Latin American politics must undoubtedly integrate in a meaningful fashion issues such as the ones just alluded to.

Another important aspect that makes me still more reticent about the full-fledged potentialities of corporatism as a key causal explanation of most if not all current Latin American political systems is that the phenomena basically described by this theory have not yet run their full course. In my view, the lack of an appropriate temporal perspective is a missing dimension in the analysis. In short, whatever evaluation undertaken about the corporatist tendencies in the Peruvian military government from 1968 onwards also has to take into account crucial developments since at least 1975: “consolidation,” softpedalling of previous reforms, etc. For instance, is SINAMOS—to which Malloy devotes a perceptive article (Pike and Stritch, pp. 52–84)—a reality for the future or a mere passing trend in the general conceptualization of the regime? Are traditional factors, such as the possibility of elections in the next few years, at least as relevant as the more immediately noticeable corporatist features in the Peruvian military?

Perhaps we are still too much concerned with the idea of getting to the “true” nature of Latin American politics so as not to realize that in the long run what is considered today as a point of arrival may, in the not too distant future, be a transition or even a point of departure. Our memory recalls ephemeral generalizations that only a few years ago predicted the “twilight of the tyrants” à la Tad Szulc. I am not against an analysis that centers on corporatist structures, as long as it is kept within reasonable bounds; and I do not purport to provide definitive explanations, but only tentative hypotheses that will have to be tested and retested against the individual or regional realities. Section 3 in the book edited by Malloy seems to me a positive step in the right direction, in spite of (or because of) the diverse lines of enquiry.

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NOTES

1. See also Ronald C. Newton, "On 'Functional Groups,' 'Fragmentation,' and 'Pluralism' in Spanish American Political Society," *HAHR* 50, no. 1 (Feb. 1970):1-29; Howard J. Wiarda, "Toward a Framework for the Study of Political Change in the Iberic-Latin Tradition: The Corporative Model," *World Politics* 25, no. 2 (Jan. 1973): 206-35; Wiarda (ed.), *Politics and Social Change in Latin America: The Distinct Tradition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974); James A. Morris and Steve C. Ropp, "Corporatism and Dependent Development: A Honduran Case Study," *LARR* 12, no. 2 (1977):27-68.
2. In my opinion, these divergences, important as they may be, are not essential for the purposes of the general arguments presented in this review.
3. Richard R. Fagen, "Studying Latin American Politics: Some Implications of a *Dependencia* Approach," *LARR* 12, no. 2 (1977): 10 (author's emphasis).
4. For useful discussions of dependence theory (theories), imperialism, etc., see the issues of *Latin American Perspectives*, especially 1, no. 1 (Spring 1974); 2, no. 2 (Spring 1975); and 3, no. 4 (Fall 1976).
5. In this vein, see Guillermo O'Donnell, "Estado y alianzas en la Argentina, 1956-1976," Documento CEDES/G.E. CLACSO, Buenos Aires, no. 5 (October 1976), and "Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State," *LARR* 13, no. 1 (1978):3-38.