

THE SOCIAL SUBJECT VERSUS
THE POLITICAL:
Latin American Labor Studies at a Crossroads

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- AUTHORITARIANISM AND DEMOCRATIZATION: SOLDIERS AND WORKERS IN ARGENTINA, 1976–1983.* By Gerardo L. Munck. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998. Pp. 334. \$55.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- LABOUR RELATIONS AND THE NEW UNIONISM IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL.* By Maurício Rands Barros. (New York: St. Martin's, 1999. Pp. 321. \$65.00 cloth.)
- BREAD, OR BULLETS! URBAN LABOR AND SPANISH COLONIALISM IN CUBA, 1850–1898.* By Joan Casanovas. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998. Pp. 320. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- MEXICAN WORKERS AND THE STATE: FROM THE PORFIRIATO TO NAFTA.* By Norman Caulfield. (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998. Pp. 180. \$24.95 cloth.)
- DULCINEA IN THE FACTORY: MYTHS, MORALS, MEN, AND WOMEN IN COLOMBIA'S INDUSTRIAL EXPERIMENT, 1905–1960.* By Ann Farnsworth-Alvear. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000. Pp. 303. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- NA LUTA POR DIREITOS: ESTUDOS RECENTES EM HISTORIA SOCIAL DO TRABALHO.* By Alexandre Fortes, Antonio Luigi Negro, Fernando Teixeira da Silva, Hélio da Costa, and Paulo Fontes. (Campinas, S.P.: Editora da UNICAMP, 1999. Pp. 210.)
- CONTESTED COMMUNITIES: CLASS, GENDER, AND POLITICS IN CHILE'S EL TENIENTE COPPER MINE, 1904–1951.* By Thomas Miller Klubock. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998. Pp. 363. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- ERA UMA VEZ EM SÃO BERNARDO: O DISCURSO SINDICAL DOS METALURGICOS, 1971–1982.* By Kátia Rodrigues Paranhos. (Campinas, S.P.: Editora da UNICAMP, 1999. Pp. 329.)
- THE IDEA OF THE MIDDLE CLASS: WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS AND PERUVIAN SOCIETY, 1900–1950.* By D. S. Parker. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998. Pp. 266. \$49.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

In 1973 in the pages of *LARR*, three eminent scholars examined the new field of Latin American labor studies and posed the question: "What Is Left to Be Done?" (Erickson, Peppe, and Spalding 1973). The field barely existed at that time, and there was indeed much to do. The nine books under review here demonstrate the great strides made in the field of Latin American labor studies since 1973, and they also reflect some long-term trends that have shaped the literature.¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, many of the initial studies of Latin American workers focused on macro-level politics and did not examine the lives and experience of workers, the creation and operation of unions, conditions on the shop floor, or similar themes.² This trend continued well into the 1980s.³ Simply put, scholars tended to write about politics without much reference to the social subjects who made those politics.⁴ The studies to be reviewed here have made significant methodological advances that detail the lived experiences of urban workers. And yet they also demonstrate just how difficult it is for scholars of Latin American labor to abandon entirely a macro-level perspective.⁵

The tendency of analyses of Latin American labor to focus on macro-

1. Since 1974 Latin Americanists have come to accept the fact that urban workers, although often small in number at different historical moments, have fundamentally influenced the region's economic, social, cultural, and political development. This realization was perhaps the greatest contribution made by Bergquist's (1986) comparative analysis of export-sector workers. Collier and Collier (1991) also placed labor at the center of twentieth-century Latin American politics. Adelman (1998) has moved beyond Collier and Collier with a careful comparative analysis of the role of labor in a distinct period of political transition in three countries.

2. For studies that treat the entire region in this way, see Alexander (1965) and Spalding (1977). For early studies of Brazil with a similar perspective, see Fausto (1976) and Maram (1979).

3. Winn (1986) made a number of claims about class formation and the language of class but provided little or no evidence of any process of class formation beyond a handful of interviews with almost exclusively male militants (1986, 79–91). Winn rejected any notion of historical memory among Santiago's industrial workers and ignored the existence of women workers. James (1988) focused so intently on masculine, macro-level politics in his study of Peronism that he wrote women out of Argentine history by incorrectly asserting that they gained the franchise in 1912 (James 1988, 15–16). The book fails to address any aspect of women's lives at work or in unions, even though Juan Perón granted them the vote in 1947.

4. De Shazo (1983) is an important exception to this trend. This work meticulously analyzed key aspects of working-class life and politics in Santiago and Valparaíso. De Shazo came to significantly different conclusions about the nature of the Chilean working class than did Winn (1986) and Bergquist (1986).

5. I have focused here more on works produced by foreigners than on those by Latin Americans. Major methodological and analytical innovations in the field certainly have been produced by Latin Americans (see particularly Chalhoub 1986 and Pinto 1994, 1997), but structural factors including research funding and broader distribution of published works have made the output of foreign scholars more broadly available throughout the hemisphere and thus more influential. A few notable exceptions to this tendency can be cited, such as Zapata (1986, 1993).

level politics at the expense of the workers themselves raises a fundamental methodological issue. Do structures dominate or even obliterate human agency, or do workers modify and even create structures through the exercise of their agency? This is an old question that has taken multiple forms in debates between Louis Althusser (1969) and E. P. Thompson (1978), between Michel Foucault (1980) and David Harvey (1990), and even between Lenin (1975) and Rosa Luxemburg (1971). The argument advanced here is that a focus on macro-level politics will, more often than not, obscure the actual history of working people as well as the histories of peasants and slaves (Scott 1990). This tendency in turn skews general understanding of politics toward established notions of the role of labor, the bourgeoisie, the state, and so on. In other words, classifying working people as "labor" (and individual firms as "the bourgeoisie" and complex and competing bureaucracies as "the state") reifies politics and creates a dominant narrative for Latin America. The nine books to be reviewed certainly address the social subject, but often within the context of the dominant narrative for the field that focuses on macro-level formal politics.⁶ This need not be the case. In a concluding section, I will suggest ways in which different methodological foci can alter scholarly understanding of what constitutes "Latin American labor." With a more nuanced comprehension of the social subject, analysts will then be able to address questions of macro-level politics in a more comprehensive way.

New Trends in Labor Studies

Perhaps the most significant innovation in new work in the field is a focus on the process of class formation. These studies avoid terms such as *labor* and even *the working class* and analyze instead the development of distinct groups of workers in specific industries and geographical settings. This practice has led to the more frequent use of gender, in addition to race and class, as a category of analysis. Ann Farnsworth-Alvear's *Dulcinea in the Factory* and Thomas Miller Klubock's *Contested Communities* are sophisticated, well-researched, and methodologically innovative studies of textile workers in Antioquia, Colombia, and miners in Chile's El Teniente copper mine. In

6. Spalding (1977), among others, provided the first clear explication of the progression from anarcho-syndicalism, to Communism, to populism, and back to Communism for Latin American labor studies. As in many other dimensions of Latin American history, Mexico does not fit easily into this schema. The Mexican Revolution and its aftermath disrupted the national narrative to such an extent that few scholars have tried to force Mexican labor history into this framework. A recent collection of essays on women workers in the region ignores Mexico completely (see J. French and James 1997). On women workers in Mexico, see Basurto (1993), Ramos-Escandón (1990), Porter (1997), Cook (1996), and (W. French 1992, 1996), among others. A more balanced collection of studies on work and workers in the hemisphere can be found in Brown (1997).

diverse ways, both studies push the field forward by focusing on how gender has shaped class in two distinct settings.

Farnsworth-Alvear seeks to understand how industrialization in Antioquia shaped gender identities and how men and women (but primarily women) shaped this part of Colombia's "industrial experiment" in the first half of the twentieth century. *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905–1960* makes several significant contributions to the field. Farnsworth-Alvear does a fine job of combining a broad range of archival sources with oral testimony from former workers. She paints a rich portrait of life on the shop floor in Antioquia and traces evolving notions of both class and gender—and the ways they were intertwined—through analyses of strikes and changes in work regimes. She focuses on the region's women textile workers and how ideologies of "the good female" and "the bad female" were utilized by factory owners to discipline labor. In the final analysis, Farnsworth-Alvear succeeds in tying class formation to the broader process of industrialization in new and provocative ways by detailing how Colombian elites' desire for modernity determined how they embraced industrialism and therefore how they interacted with workers. Even more significant is her close reading of the interactions among industrialists, the Catholic Church, and the state on the one hand and women workers on the other. Farnsworth-Alvear closely documents the ways that this interaction shaped and reshaped both gender and class over time.

Dulcinea in the Factory makes a fine addition to the growing historiography on labor and gender in Latin America, much of which Farnsworth-Alvear does not sufficiently acknowledge.⁷ Her analysis of technology and changes on the shop floor confuses a number of significant issues. She is right to reject the idea that technological and managerial interventions introduced by foreign engineers and advisors unilaterally altered gender and class identities (pp. 209–28). But her analysis of paternalism and Fordism obscures more than it clarifies. Farnsworth-Alvear confuses work speed-ups, factory redesign, and the "rationalization" of production with Fordism. The key component of Fordism is a high industrial wage, for the system is predicated on increasing domestic markets for internally produced goods. Fordism is therefore defined largely by the consumption of goods and services by workers earning high wages that they often receive in exchange for laboring in monotonous and sometimes dangerous factory settings (Harvey 1990, 121–97; Hamper 1991; Gramsci 1971).⁸ Farnsworth-Alvear conflates

7. On Mexico, Farnsworth-Alvear is indebted to works such as W. French (1992, 1996) and Ramos-Escandón (1990). On Brazil, her analysis reaches conclusions similar to those in the works of Rago (1985) and Wolfe (1993).

8. Farnsworth-Alvear invokes Gramsci without grasping the complexity of his analysis regarding the role of high wages (Gramsci 1971, 280).

the attempts at social control known as *la moral* with the practices of the Ford Motor Company's sociological department during the short-lived Five-Dollar-Day experiment in the 1910s. By focusing on discourses of sexual propriety at the expense of a careful analysis of the cost of food, housing, clothing, medical care, transportation, and other expenses for these workers, Farnsworth-Alvear has painted an interesting but incomplete picture of Colombian industrialism and working-class life.

Thomas Klubock's *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904–1951* provides a carefully crafted analysis of class formation in the unique setting of the U.S.-owned El Teniente copper mine. Like Farnsworth-Alvear, Klubock is interested most in the ways that gender, particularly masculinity, shaped class identities, but he makes explicit connections between those class identities and an emerging working-class politics during the key years of the Frente Popular. Klubock begins by studying corporate-welfare policies that were put in place to create a stable and more domestic workforce. By granting a wage bonus to married miners, the Braden Copper Company encouraged its workers to marry and lead more domesticated lives. While this and other welfare policies limited labor turnover, drinking, and violence, the social intervention also strengthened the bonds of class identity and increased workers' desires for social mobility. Klubock details the creation of a strongly masculine labor identity among the miners, the strict sexual division of labor in and around El Teniente, and the ways in which this solidarity shaped the structure of unions and working-class politics. Klubock relates this process of class formation to the politics of the Frente Popular governments of the 1930s and 1940s. The book excels in its detailed analysis of the connections between one group of Chilean workers and macro-level politics.

The uniqueness of this case is both a strength and a weakness of *Contested Communities*. Klubock sensitively depicts both the ongoing class development of these miners and their relationship to the foreign-owned Braden corporation. The strong sense of working-class community, nationalism, and ties to formal political parties of the Left were as important in the process of class formation as the creation of an extremely masculine orientation in the idea of class. These components combined to create a distinct image of the Chilean copper miner that came to represent an ideal type that various scholars and political figures have embraced as the authentic Chilean worker (Winn 1986; Bergquist 1986). The question unanswered is to what extent that identity was actually representative of Chilean workers. Readers are left to speculate on the impact of this dominant image of work and workers on women and men in radically different industrial settings, particularly in the urban milieu of Santiago. Klubock's muscular labor may exemplify the copper workers and nitrate miners who came before them, but it cannot be representative of textile, food-processing, shoemaking, and other

workers in the cities.⁹ Nor does Klubock attempt to place these workers into a comparative framework with other Chileans or with miners in other countries (Pinto 1994, 1997; Worger 1987; Gaventa 1980). *Contested Communities* provides a number of key insights into the connections between at least one group of workers and the governments of both the Frente Popular and Unidad Popular, but it leaves unanswered broader questions about the connections between social and political history.

At first blush, it may seem out of place to include David Parker's *The Idea of the Middle Class: White-Collar Workers and Peruvian Society, 1900–1950* in a review of recent works on labor studies. Yet this brilliant and path-breaking study of white-collar workers in Lima provides a near perfect mix of the material, cultural, and political components of class formation. And because Parker is not influenced by the dominant narrative of Latin American labor studies, he is not ensnared in the existing methodology on class formation. Parker analyzes the ways in which Peruvian white-collar workers relied on everything from lobbying and legislation to public debates and political alliances in order to define themselves as middle-class. One of the book's great strengths is that Parker does not assume the existence of such a class and then artificially force diverse workers from what John Johnson (1958) famously termed "the middle sectors" into it. Instead, Parker studies closely the experiences of office workers, bank employees, and retail clerks to see how they differentiated themselves from what would have been recognized as the working class. These white-collar employees self-consciously reached out to political leaders and struggled for legislative intervention on their behalf but did not shy away from strikes and other forms of mobilization to push for their demands.

The Idea of the Middle Class transcends most labor studies that analyze consumption in order to understand worker discontent (such as the Klubock book under review, Wolfe 1993, and De Shazo 1983) and addresses instead how the desires of Lima's white-collar employees shaped their identity and their political demands. Those workers sought higher salaries to meet the higher expenses of dress, education, and other aspects of middle-class life. They coded their expectations as "requirements" of their class and sought protective social legislation to guarantee their social status. The development of a middle-class politics was then embraced by APRA (the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana), which built lasting ties to this group of workers despite various fissures in the coalition (pp. 176–78).

The Idea of the Middle Class deals with another major component of class formation too frequently ignored by labor studies: the social construction of race. Parker skillfully examines the ways in which the burgeoning

9. Winn (1986) represented textile workers in this way, but even a cursory examination of De Shazo (1983) challenges Winn's assumptions about the structure of the urban industrial working class, the role of historical memory, and the politics of labor leadership.

middle-class identity in Lima was closely associated with the notion of whiteness. Like David Roediger (1991) and others working on this topic in U.S. labor studies, Parker examines middle-class claims to whiteness and how this shaped their politics (pp. 172–73). The analysis presented for Lima is yet another powerful example of the way that race, like gender, shapes conceptions and definitions of class as a social rather than a biological category (pp. 191–92). Parker further argues that this perspective on race challenges assumptions about the impact of women's entrance into the white-collar workforce. Men often welcomed the presence of women from socially acceptable (white) households because they maintained or even elevated the standing of middle-class professions (pp. 197–98). Parker, Klubock, and Farnsworth-Alvear present divergent perspectives on gender, but they all show the ways in which it shaped the distinct class identities of three separate Latin American cases. Parker goes one step further than Klubock and Farnsworth-Alvear, however, in broadening his perspective on class and gender with an analysis of race.¹⁰

Joan Casanovas's *Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850–1898* examines issues of race and class in the context of Spanish colonialism. This study of an early period in Latin American labor history offers many insights into the development of class and the relationship between race and class on the one hand and nationalism on the other. Casanovas focuses on three broad issues: the relationship between free wage labor and slavery in the urban setting; the social construction of Cuban anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism; and the ways in which the urban labor movement participated in the independence struggle and thus shaped the later years of Spanish colonial rule. Well researched and written, *Bread, or Bullets* makes several valuable contributions to both labor historiography and Cuban studies. Casanovas's analysis of the impact of Spanish colonialism on the development of the Cuban working class and her depiction of the role of Cuban workers in shaping the independence struggle is one of the book's strong points. Casanovas paints a colorful picture of the impact of nineteenth-century globalism by examining the role of foreign ideologies, the politics of exile communities, and the interventions of the colonial state. The book does not assume that foreign ideas or experiences dominated Cuba. Rather, it details the social construction of a domestic anarcho-syndicalism and its role in the independence process.¹¹ In other words,

10. Klubock examines the ways in which U.S. managers racially denigrated Chilean miners. Farnsworth-Alvear notes the connections among race, class, and gender in her discussions of theory (pp. 28–29, 235), but she does not integrate race into her analysis of the other two categories.

11. Casanovas presents these conclusions as a major finding for Latin American labor history. Work on Brazil has long documented the complex interactions between immigrants and native workers in the social construction of anarcho-syndicalism. See E. A. Gordon (1978), among others.

Casanovas succeeds in writing a political history of the rise of the Cuban working class that is not burdened by the need to locate the origins of the Revolution of 1959. Because she locates labor history in politics, however, the book provides little or no information on the cost of living, patterns of consumption, where and how Cuban workers lived, or even what life was like in the work setting. This failure to address the basics of the lives of the subjects of the book is one weakness in an otherwise rich and important study. Similarly, attention to women and gender is nonexistent.¹²

Norman Caulfield's *Mexican Workers and the State: From the Porfiriato to NAFTA* is a broad overview of the impact of globalization on the Mexican working class from the late nineteenth century to the 1990s.¹³ This broad sweep of analysis in only 135 pages makes it impossible for Caulfield to provide specifics on working-class life, wages, conditions on the shop floor, and other issues. He does, however, introduce a series of case studies based on archival materials to support his broad conclusions about the impact of the United States, the Mexican Revolution, and the long rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) on Mexican workers. Caulfield's book is actually a long analytical essay on the continuity between Mexico's paleoliberal era (the Porfiriato) and its neoliberal present. Given the historiographical turn against viewing the Revolution as offering any sort of positive change for Mexico's popular classes (see particularly Womack 1991) and the PRI's attempts in the late 1980s to resuscitate of the legacy of Porfirio Díaz, Caulfield's study is a welcome addition to the literature.

Na luta por direitos: Estudos recentes em história social do trabalho contains five essays written by advanced graduate students at the São Paulo state university at Campinas, UNICAMP. Using different foci, the essays analyze the creation and operation of Brazilian unions in the context of state intervention and industrial change. By studying diverse groups of workers and industries in a broad array of settings, this volume transcends previous analyses that have attempted to present a unified picture of labor in Brazil.¹⁴

Alexandre Fortes's essay on the origins and functioning of the metalworkers' union in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, reveals the bureaucratic and legal struggles required to craft the *sindicato único* of the years under Getúlio Vargas. The study is extraordinarily well researched and enhances the literature by examining this process in an area geographically far from the national capital but politically close to the national leadership.¹⁵ It leaves

12. Casanovas, for example, does not attempt to locate women's activism outside formal protest activities and concentrates instead on anarchists' rhetoric about the need for women to become more politically engaged (pp. 196–97).

13. The sections based on primary research conclude with the late 1950s. Analysis of later decades is more interpretive.

14. For a critique of the totalizing perspective on Brazilian labor studies, see Wolfe (1994).

15. Both Vargas and his first labor minister, Lindolfo Collor, came from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where Vargas had served as governor.

readers wondering nonetheless about how individual workers viewed their relationships to the unions and to the state. Hélio da Costa's analysis of strikes in São Paulo between 1943 and 1953 is likewise well researched and a valuable addition to the historiography. It details the important role of strikes in shaping the ongoing development of labor policy in this key period. Like Fortes, Costa focuses on the union level in an analysis that skirts the often conflictive relationship between rank-and-file workers and union leaders in this period of Paulistano labor politics. Paulo Fontes's study of the 1957 *greve dos 400 mil* (strike of the 400,000) in São Paulo puts this important but little studied uprising into a broader perspective. Fontes does an excellent job of retelling the complex, macro-level machinations of the strike, but he does not place it in the appropriate historical context with reference to the decisive *greve dos 300 mil* in 1953.

Of the five essays, Fernando Teixeira da Silva's analysis of dockworkers, their union, and politics in the port of Santos on the eve of the 1964 *golpe* provides the closest examination of the relationship of the rank and file to union leadership. This important contribution to the study of post-1945 labor also reveals the unity and power of a radicalized group of workers during the tumultuous early 1960s. Two of the strengths of this piece are the careful study of internal union politics and the focus on the port of Santos. Antonio Luigi Negro's contribution is less a study of workers than a fascinating examination of a foreign firm operating in two countries: Kaiser Industries' subsidiaries Kaiser-Frazer in Argentina and Willys-Overland do Brasil. Negro successfully mines the Kaiser archives to show how the foreign auto company played into developmentalist politics in both countries and crafted a capitalist alternative to Communist Party and other leftist perspectives on labor. Negro's study provides significant context for understanding Brazilian labor relations in the 1950s and 1960s. All five essays are only small portions of UNICAMP doctoral theses that will undoubtedly make major contributions to Brazilian and Latin American labor studies.

Kátia Rodrigues Paranhos's *Era uma vez em São Bernardo: O discurso sindical dos metalúrgicos, 1971–1982* is a lively and informative account of the evolving labor ideology in the industrial suburbs of São Paulo in the 1970s and early 1980s. She is interested primarily in analyzing the transformation of union leaders from unpopular co-opted agents of the Ministério do Trabalho (so-called *pelegos*) into effective representatives of a democratic and powerful new social movement.¹⁶ Paranhos scrutinized union newspapers and public pronouncements from the era to trace the changing discourses of work, unionization, and politics. She analyzes the modifications in union

16. A *pelego* is literally a kind of sheepskin horse blanket. The term was first used in the 1930s to criticize the state-supported labor leaders in Getúlio Vargas's system of industrial relations. The union leaders were viewed as smoothing the industrialists' ride on the backs of the workers. See Wolfe (1993, 75–80).

politics resulting in broad strikes that paralyzed the Brazilian automobile industry and led to the development of a democratic praxis in the union movement and in civil society. Although Paranhos concentrates on the public statements of labor leaders, her study speaks to rank-and-file perspectives because these unionists became by the middle to late 1970s extremely effective in representing workers' interests and aspirations. The study would have been even better had it transcended newspaper sources to include interviews with the many participants from this era who are still active in the metalworkers' union, the Partido dos Trabalhadores, and other social movements.

Maurício Rands Barros's *Labour Relations and the New Unionism in Contemporary Brazil* is the one book under review that combines a careful analysis of rank-and-file perspectives on work, unions, and politics with a broader macro-level view of politics. Specifically, Barros studies the ways in which the new unionism that developed in the late 1970s shifted workers' attitudes toward the issue of citizenship itself. His research also demonstrates how workers' new sense of "active citizenship" altered the trajectory of their unions. Barros, a professor of labor law and a lawyer for the Central Unico dos Trabalhadores or CUT (the union federation associated with the Partido dos Trabalhadores), is uniquely qualified to undertake such a study. Moreover, he both works and studies in Recife, in the Brazilian Northeast, and thus brings a different perspective to these issues than most of the literature on the topic focusing on greater São Paulo in the Center-South of Brazil. His book carefully reconstructs the nature of the corporatist labor system and examines challenges to it through a series of interviews with labor leaders and rank-and-file workers.

Barros has produced an invaluable contribution to the field. His interviews document workers' concerns with not only the shop floor but broader issues of life in their neighborhoods, cities, and even the country (pp. 190–234). One of Barros's main theses is that these attitudes are strongest among workers in unions associated with the CUT and that membership in such unions has fostered a deeper sense of Brazilian citizenship. That new identity has in turn encouraged these workers to become active union members who continue to push the CUT to embrace an array of issues involving life beyond the shop floor. Still, Barros leaves many issues unexamined. He does not analyze how social pressure, historical memory, and a host of other factors may have influenced his respondents' answers. Like all survey material, Barros's findings should be put into context. But even with that caveat, Barros's *Labour Relations and the New Unionism in Contemporary Brazil* is an original and extraordinarily valuable addition to the field.

Of the works reviewed here, Gerardo Munck's *Authoritarianism and Democratization: Soldiers and Workers in Argentina, 1978–1983* most fully embraces the methodologies of the earliest Latin American labor studies. Munck is concerned primarily with the role of Argentine labor in regime

formation and does not undertake to analyze workers as workers. His book provides a careful analysis of the ways in which the military viewed and acted toward labor in the 1976 seizure of power and the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime that lasted until 1983. Munck's theoretical framework owes much to Guillermo O'Donnell (1973), Charles Bergquist (1986), and Ruth Collier and David Collier (1991). Munck proposes to understand bureaucratic authoritarianism not only as a product of the crisis of populism but also as a regime fundamentally shaped by the military's dealings with labor. Like Bergquist, Munck seeks to place labor at the center of Latin American politics. In this regard, his book is a valuable contribution to the study of macro-level politics. Munck's brief comparative analysis of the Chilean and Brazilian regimes and their relationships to labor should generate thoughtful debate in the coming years.

Authoritarianism and Democratization is nevertheless burdened by its reification of workers as "labor." Munck can demonstrate institutional support for or opposition to regimes, but he cannot accurately analyze the relationship of individuals to those institutions. The weakness of this approach is the assumption that workers nearly reflexively share the politics of their unions, or even that individual unions somehow represent what comes to be known as "labor." Long ago, the original school of U.S. labor studies at the University of Wisconsin warned scholars to delineate carefully between unions as institutions and workers as social actors. More recent studies such as *Na luta por direitos*, with their careful explication of the process of unionization, reveal the limits of Munck's approach.

An Agenda for Labor Studies

So much of Latin American labor studies is fixated on politics that the social subject becomes lost or at least obscured. This is true despite the fact that the field has made tremendous strides since the 1970s. The research agenda has become much more sophisticated, especially with the recent acceptance of gender as a category of analysis, and labor is now perceived as instrumental in economic development and politics. And yet the field still suffers from serious methodological biases and analytical lacunae. The problem that plagues the literature most is the near total absence of workers themselves. This failure limits the value of the kinds of broad conclusions about regime type, economic development, and even modes of production that many labor scholars seek to draw. Without a more complete understanding of individuals' experiences at work and in their homes and neighborhoods, scholars cannot analyze their politics accurately. The critique offered here is that the top-down focus on macro-level politics has skewed scholarly understanding of working-class lives. Students of labor need to disengage from the dominant narrative and its focus on high politics to create a more

representative picture of workers' participation in local and national political arenas.

To move beyond the standard view of Latin American labor studies, scholars must understand its origins and resilience. The tendency to theorize "labor" as a political actor at the macro-level is a legacy of the area-studies focus of the discipline. The types of sources that most labor scholars use have only reinforced this trend. Although early works in labor studies (such as Alexander 1965) examined the sector in the context of modernization theory, the field developed largely in opposition to that orientation (Spalding 1977; Bergquist 1986). Labor scholars challenged the cold-war-inspired area-studies perspective of the field by first adopting and then redirecting the intellectual vocabulary of their predecessors. In retrospect, it is easy to see how this sequence of events led to the obvious methodological trap of maintaining the field's focus on macro-level politics. Traditional scholars of labor in Latin America rejected the idea that unions were a component of the modern sector of society that would usher in an era of capitalist democracy and instead depicted labor as a vanguard against both corrupt civilian regimes and military dictatorships.¹⁷ The sources that these scholars relied on—labor and leftist newspapers, U.S. diplomatic reports, oral histories with union leaders, and similar documents—reinforced the existing tendency to focus on macro-level politics.

A logical, if heretical, way out of this tendency is to adopt methodologies from peasant studies. The analytical schema laid out by John Tutino in his now classic *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico* holds key insights for the study of urban labor (1986, 13–37). Tutino examined the interplay of four broad issues: material conditions, autonomy, security, and mobility. These categories may seem better suited to analyzing agrarian social actors, but they can and should be applied to industrial and other urban laborers. An examination of workers' material conditions is clearly fundamental to understanding workers' lives and politics.

Application of the remaining three categories requires some further explanation. Security for peasants refers to their ability "to attain subsistence consistently" (Tutino 1986, 28). This concept can easily be applied to workers with the understanding that security is measured through analyses of skill, labor markets, and local and national economic conditions. Regarding mobility, Tutino explained, "Mobility is the ability to choose among multiple means of attaining subsistence" (1986, 28). In terms of industrial workers, mobility relates both to labor mobility and to social mobility. This category allows analysts to examine workers' ability to improve their security through family strategies, education, migration, and other means. For peasants,

17. Bergquist (1990) and Adelman (1991) debated the methodological component to this question in a lively and little cited exchange in *Labour/Le Travail*.

“Autonomy reflects peoples’ abilities to produce the necessities of subsistence independently” (Tutino 1986, 26). Industrial workers by definition reproduce their labor power through participation in markets, and thus autonomy is a political metric. That is, we should attempt to measure individuals’ and groups’ abilities to organize, negotiate, and protest within existing social, political, and legal structures to determine the level of workers’ autonomy in a given social formation.¹⁸

Tutino’s four-part schema provides an analytical tool for interpreting the meaning of peasant action by seeing how they prioritized their interests through these categories. Labor scholars often rely on union and leftist newspapers and oral interviews to glean working-class motives, aspirations, and consciousness, but doing so privileges public political discourses that may be strategic in nature or may not be at all representative of the rank and file. Tutino’s categories suggest productive ways to uncover what James Scott (1990) has termed “the hidden transcripts” of working-class identity and politics. First and foremost, the literature must address the material conditions of working-class lives. Few works in the field have systematically studied individual and family wages and the cost of living. Even fewer have broken down the components of the cost of living.¹⁹ One recent collection on women workers in a few Latin American countries (J. French and James 1997) covered female labor activists, the social construction of the idea of the woman worker, women’s sociability, women’s voting patterns, and domestic violence. The essays did not, however, place any of this activity in the context of working-class life. Nor did they provide data or cite previous studies on wages or the cost of living. In the name of fighting essentialized versions of gender, some authors have essentialized class by ignoring men and women workers’ participation in markets for labor, foodstuffs, housing, transportation, clothing, and other goods. It is truly lamentable that studies of Latin American workers have ignored their material conditions.

Security should be studied in terms of understanding much abused terms such as *skilled labor* and *unskilled labor*. This approach involves analyzing the ways in which these ideas are socially determined, but more fundamentally figuring out how factories, machines, and work processes are freighted by politics. Comprehending how skills are defined and valued complicates ideas about segmented labor markets (Downs 1995; Sabel 1982). Studying the political nature of artifacts allows scholars to examine

18. Collier and Collier (1991) examined autonomy in this regard in their analysis of political incorporation, but only on the level of formal politics.

19. Notable exceptions are De Shazo (1983) for Santiago and Valparaíso, Lobo (1978) for Rio de Janeiro, and Wolfe (1993) for São Paulo. None of the works reviewed for this essay provide a systematic analysis of wages and spending. Farnsworth-Alvear includes basic real-wage data for women weavers and spinners (p. 20), and Parker lists a typical family budget (p. 212).

more fruitfully production as well as workers' democratic interventions in the work process (Feenberg 1999). Macro-economic conditions fundamentally shape worker security, as is obvious to anyone who has witnessed bus burnings (*quebra-quebra* in Brazil), food riots, and other uprisings in the wake of "adjustments" in food and fuel subsidies mandated by the International Monetary Fund. Less dramatically, the economy—its structure and performance—influences everything from wages, rents, and food costs to levels of child neglect and domestic violence in households (L. Gordon 1988).²⁰ Moreover, careful analysis of micro- and macro-economic factors should discourage facile generalizations about socialism and capitalism.²¹ Markets, planning, and work regimes are in practice often nearly indistinguishable for urban workers in both command and capitalist economies (Stiglitz 1994; Siegelbaum 1993; Fitzpatrick 1994; Filtzer 1992).²²

Labor mobility—as in the ability to bid up wages or flee abusive bosses—and social mobility (often a product of labor mobility) must be key components in any analysis of work and politics. They are inevitably related to material conditions and security. To understand mobility, analysts must examine the ways in which life inside and outside the factory is shaped by place, space, and landscape. Workers and others often intervene in the social construction of space through social protest, the creation of custom and ceremonies, and other means (Lefebvre 1991; Gregory 1994; Holston 1989). Works on individual cities reveal the complex creation of solidarity spurred by changes in the urban setting (Cohen 1990; Harvey 2000). Regional studies may clarify issues of nationalism and profoundly alter facile assumptions about the supposed rural-urban dichotomy (Cooper 1987). Too often labor scholars tacitly embrace ideas about the bifurcated nature of Latin American societies based on Marxist and liberal ideas about modernism and modernization. But careful analysis of the workers' social spaces and labor mobility usually reveals the tendency of industrial workers to utilize internal and external migrations that have profound implications for class formation and consciousness.

Where individuals live and what they do shape their range of actions, but political structures—from regime type to labor laws—create the social universe of potential activity. Examining autonomy for workers re-

20. Chronic economic stress has been shown to have had a greater impact on neglect and violence than sudden changes in household economies. For a careful historical analysis of the data, see L. Gordon (1988, 146–50).

21. Krugman (1997) critiques economics for failing to embrace theories that cannot be modeled. The reverse could be said of Latin American labor studies: scholars reject components in their analytical schemas that might be modeled, such as examinations of labor markets, the impact of currency fluctuations on production and consumption, and other aspects of micro- and macro-economics.

22. A command economy is a centrally planned noncapitalist economy, like that of Cuba or the former USSR.

quires close study of labor laws and their implementation; the structure, density, and operation of unions; and arenas of formal and informal politics. For example, it makes little sense to speak of corporatist institutions affecting consciousness and shaping politics if individuals fail to participate in those unions or peasant leagues (Wolfe 1993; Rubin 1997). Rather than focusing on macro-level political alliances, labor scholars should embrace a more micro-foundational approach to politics by examining factories, neighborhoods, union halls, and other contested sites. Only then can we make broader claims about citizenship and the relationship of the popular classes to the state. We must also pay attention to the ways in which the global context has shaped workers' room to maneuver since at least the mid-nineteenth century. In more recent years, increasing globalization, formal and de facto dollarization of economies, transnational migration, and expanded ties among unions in the Western Hemisphere have all accelerated and deepened the regional and global components of workers' autonomy.

In the early 1970s, French historian Michelle Perrot warned that when scholars refer to "the spontaneity" of strikes and other forms of working-class protests, they are only highlighting how little they know about the workers' consciousness and level of organizing because large groups of people do not suddenly decide to gather in the same spot, seeking the same things without prior planning (Perrot 1974, 2:414).²³ The call made here to adopt a modified version of Tutino's agrarian-peasant schema for labor is above all an attempt to privilege the study of what workers actually did and do and in what contexts. Paying close attention to material conditions, security, mobility, and autonomy relieves labor scholars of the tendency to embrace exotic views of workers' consciousness and encourages instead a linking of the long history of popular-class organizing and protest activities from the rural sector to the urban and from the distant past to the present.²⁴ That is not to say that workers' testimony, newspapers, and business, union, and government sources should be ignored. But they should be used in a more rigorously analytical way that focuses first on the lives and experience of the workers themselves. Once that is done, we may be able to develop a much more nuanced and realistic understanding of the roles played by working people in Latin American politics.²⁵ Workers' struggles on the job

23. This perspective is also a fundamental aspect of Scott's (1990) analysis of "hidden transcripts."

24. By focusing on formal labor politics, for example, some have located women's activism only in the period since 1954 or even since 1960, ignoring scholarship on women's organizing and protest activities in the urban setting before that time as well as the legacy of women's roles in uprisings in the colonial era (Taylor 1979, 116; Cope 1994, 157–58).

25. For example, the focus on populist and Communist labor leaders, who maintained a strong focus on influencing or seizing the state, has obscured the legacy of factory-specific labor negotiations and thus provided an unnecessarily narrow vision of industrial relations in Latin America.

and in their neighborhoods and cities shape national politics fundamentally. We must turn first to their lives and struggles to define more accurately macro-level politics, rather than assuming that a certain set of extant political structures shape individual workers into "labor" or even worse, "the masses," now divided only by new analytical subcategories such as gender and race. In the final analysis, focusing on the social subject will serve to clarify the political.

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