

WHAT IS BEING DONE?
Some Recent Studies on the Urban Working Class and
Organized Labor in Latin America

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- ELITES, MASSES, AND MODERNIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA, 1850–1930.* Edited by VIRGINIA BERNHARD. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979. Pp. 156. \$9.95.)
- ORGANIZED LABOR IN LATIN AMERICA. HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES OF URBAN WORKERS IN DEPENDENT SOCIETIES.* By HOBART A. SPALDING, JR. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977. Pp. 297. \$15.00)
- A HISTORY OF THE BOLIVIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT.* By GUILLERMO LORA. Edited and abridged by LAURENCE WHITEHEAD. Translated by CHRISTINE WHITEHEAD. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Pp. 408. \$24.95.)
- WE EAT THE MINES AND THE MINES EAT US. DEPENDENCY AND EXPLOITATION IN BOLIVIAN TIN MINES.* By JUNE NASH. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979. Pp. 363. \$22.50.)
- SINDICATOS Y PROTESTA SOCIAL EN LA ARGENTINA. UN ESTUDIO DE CASO: EL SINDICATO DE LUZ Y FUERZA DE CÓRDOBA (1969–1974).* By IRIS MARTHA ROLDÁN. (Amsterdam: Centrum voor Studie en Documentatie van Latijns Amerika, 1978. Pp. 483.)
- THE BRAZILIAN CORPORATIVE STATE AND WORKING-CLASS POLITICS.* By KENNETH PAUL ERICKSON. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. Pp. 225. \$14.00.)
- FUERZA DE TRABAJO Y MOVIMIENTOS LABORALES EN AMÉRICA LATINA.* Compiled by RUBÉN KATZMAN and JOSÉ LUIS REYNA. (México: El Colegio de México, 1979. Pp. 337.)
- LOS TRABAJADORES PUERTORRIQUEÑOS Y EL PARTIDO SOCIALISTA, 1932–1940.* By BLANCA SILVESTRINI DE PACHECO. (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Universitaria, 1979. Pp. 196.)
- EL MOVIMIENTO OBRERO EN PANAMÁ (1888–1914).* By LUIS NAVAS. 2nd ed. ([San José], Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1979. Pp. 176.)
- IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by JUNE NASH, JUAN CORRADI and HOBART SPALDING, JR. (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1977. Pp. 305. \$14.50.)
- HISTORIA DEL MOVIMIENTO OBRERO Y SOCIAL LATINOAMERICANO CON-*

TEMPORÁNEO. By CARLOS M. RAMA. (Barcelona: Editorial Laia, 1976. Pp. 171.)

Seven years ago, Kenneth Paul Erickson, Patrick V. Peppe, and Hobart Spalding, Jr. published in this journal an important review of research on the urban working class and organized labor in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. The article's title ended with the question, "What is left to be done?"—a play on Lenin that focused attention on the authors' attempt to set an agenda for future research in the field of Latin American labor studies.¹ Much has changed since the publication of that review. World and regional economic and political trends—most notably and specifically the Unidad Popular experience in Chile and the Peronists' return to power in Argentina—have stimulated Latin Americanists to reevaluate the role of organized labor in the history of the region. At the same time, secular Western intellectual and historiographical trends—the resurgence of Marxist thought, particularly in the United States, and the emergence of the "new" social history—have fostered interest in the history of the working class in general. Together these developments have stimulated greatly scholarly interest in the field. They also have sharpened the debate over competing conceptual frameworks and historical methods.

Much of the debate revolves around the relative merits of the "new" social history in vogue in Europe and the United States. Recent contributors to this journal, inspired by that work, have advocated factory studies based on oral history techniques and, more broadly, stressed the superiority of studies of working-class culture done from the "bottom up."² Other scholars, while recognizing the importance of techniques and concerns of the new social history, have continued to search for interpretive frameworks that view Latin American labor history not only in a comparative regional context, but in the broad flow of economic, political, intellectual, and institutional history. This is the thrust of Thomas Skidmore's important essay, "Workers and Soldiers: Urban Labor Movements and Elite Responses in Twentieth-Century Latin America," which appears in the handsome little book edited by Virginia Bernhard.³ Skidmore explores the causes of the current "boomlet" in Latin American labor studies and provides a thorough review of the recent literature in the field. He then builds on a comparison of Brazilian, Chilean, and Argentine labor history to emphasize the historical role of the military in each of these countries in forging the institutions that attempt to regulate and control the incorporation of organized labor into national life. Skidmore can explain neither the timing of these military interventions (Chile 1924–25; Brazil, during the first Vargas regime; Argentina after 1943 under Perón) nor their very different outcomes. He suggests a variety of hypotheses (including macro economic trends,

quality of labor markets, role of middle-sector parties) but concludes that construction of a conceptual framework capable of explaining the divergent labor and national histories of the three nations must await the results of much additional research.

The search for an adequate conceptual framework and debate over rival historical methodologies informs the recent spirited exchange in this journal between Sofer, on the one hand, and Spalding, Erickson, and Peppe on the other.⁴ Sofer advocates the grass-roots study of working-class history. Spalding et al. focus on the larger economic and political constructs in which that history occurs. Both positions have merit. But, as framed by its protagonists, each position must advance largely at the expense of the other. Either we have the new social history of the working class or we have the institutional history of labor in dependent capitalist societies. This may state the respective positions too starkly. Nevertheless, although each party explicitly acknowledges the worth of the other approach, neither has been able to integrate the two and transcend the debate. The problem is how to put the approaches together in a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, sensitive to the unique in the history of the region, and appropriate to the state of the historiography of the field.

Clearly, such a task is no small order. But careful analysis of the major contributions by Hobart Spalding, Guillermo Lora, and June Nash in the books under review suggests a conceptual framework capable of overcoming what I perceive as a false dichotomy between the new social history, with its emphasis on working-class culture, and the “dependency” analysis of Latin American labor history, worked out most fully in the work of Hobart Spalding. Properly developed, such a framework could serve as a powerful interpretive tool not only for the labor history of the region, but for the whole of twentieth-century Latin American history. (It could help to answer, for example, questions of regional diversity of the kind raised by Skidmore.) Most importantly, such a framework could free Latin American historians from two potential pitfalls in the development of working-class and labor studies—an uncritical application of methods and models derived from European and United States historical studies, and a mechanical use of dependency concepts borrowed from Latin American social science.

Spalding’s *Organized Labor in Latin America* constitutes a major advance in the study of Latin American labor history. Incorporating the author’s own primary research in Latin America, Europe, and the United States into its synthesis of available secondary works, the book provides an analytical survey of the history of organized labor in the region far superior to anything published previously. Given the general underdevelopment of both monographic and synthetic studies in the field, the

national diversity within the region, and the poverty of the conceptual tools customarily applied to Latin American labor history, Spalding's accomplishments should not be underestimated. In less than three hundred pages, he succeeds in providing both specialists and beginning students with a wealth of information on the material life of urban workers in Latin America since the late nineteenth century; a detailed account of the national histories of labor in several important countries in the area; and an analysis of organizational, political, and ideological trends within the labor movement from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day. It is this last accomplishment, the analytical framework that Spalding develops to explain and interpret historical events, that constitutes the most significant—and problematical—contribution of the book.

For Spalding there is a fundamental unity in Latin American labor history, a unity forged by the evolving world capitalist system in which Latin America plays a dependent, peripheral role. International forces—economic, political, and ideological—propelled the transformation of Latin American labor and produced “common patterns [that] emerge at roughly the same time throughout the continent” (p. 282). Spalding identifies three such patterns, or stages, each defined by distinctive organizational and ideological features within the labor movement and by patterned responses by the ruling class and the state. These are: the “formative period” before World War I (chapter 1); the period of “explosions and expansion,” which runs to the depression (chapter 2); and the “cooptive-repressive” period, which begins with the depression and continues to the present day. This last period occupies Spalding throughout the remainder of the book and is dealt with through case studies of individual nations (chapters 3, 4 and 5). A subperiod within this stage, which Spalding calls the “imperialist thrust” (chapter 6), focuses on post-World War II efforts by the United States to contain and subvert the revolutionary potential of Latin American labor.

Spalding's thesis that there is an overarching unity of the history of the Latin American labor movement is both original and persuasive, but it soon involves him in a fundamental conceptual problem that greatly detracts from the strength of his study. He must contend, as he puts it, with the fact that “national and socioeconomic factors conditioned the intensity and duration of each [stage]” and even “accelerated or delayed stages” (p. 282). In other words, he must deal with the great diversity of Latin American labor history. This diversity is manifest in the excellent case studies that form the core of the book, and the titles that serve to group and characterize these case studies. Thus chapter 3, on Mexico, is entitled, “Cooptation and Repression, 1910–1970”; and chapter 5, on Bolivia and Cuba, bears the title “Labor and Revolution.”

Spalding's conceptual efforts to explain the diversity within the unity of Latin American labor history are detailed in the Introduction:

[Latin American] labor can be understood best within the larger context of the world economy. Within this framework, three variables have influenced labor's evolution: fluctuations of the international economy and decisions taken by governments in advanced capitalist nations; the composition of, and tensions between, the international and the local ruling classes; and the composition, structure, and historical formation of the working class. The impact of external events and domestic-foreign interrelations determined that broad trends emerged at roughly the same time throughout Latin America. However, national circumstances also influenced the tide of events, and therefore, local labor movements have their own particular histories. (P. ix)

Such an approach sounds reasonable enough. But as Spalding's argument proceeds, it turns out that, within these "national circumstances," the main influence on the history of a given national labor movement is not the internal dynamic of the working class itself, but rather certain characteristics of the local ruling class. Here, for example, is his explanation of the relative strength of the Argentine and Chilean labor movements before 1930:

In Argentina, agrarian interests held power, leaving industrial investment mostly to foreigners. The agrarian elements did not react harshly to organization by industrial workers so long as it did not threaten them directly. A relatively strong urban movement thus could form without constant harassment from the state. . . . In Chile, agrarian and industrial groups unified during the middle of the nineteenth century, allowing for their consolidation before any significant working-class organization occurred. As a result, despite its industrial component, the relatively secure Chilean ruling class did not perceive the need to repress labor severely when the first working-class organizations appeared; consequently, a relatively strong labor movement eventually emerged. (P. 32)

This passage illustrates a basic conceptual weakness in the book. Whatever reservations one might have about other statements in the passage, the last sentence on Chile clearly leaves the wrong impression. Labor in Chile, particularly in the nitrate zone, was repressed frequently and savagely in the decades before 1930. But the problem lies much deeper. Spalding's approach leads him to stress the similarity of the Argentine and Chilean labor movements—the fact that both were "relatively strong" before 1930. Yet it is around their differences that the most important historical and interpretive issues revolve. What allowed Chilean labor to resist systematic repression and concerted efforts at cooptation, to develop a powerful independent organization and a classist ideology, and then, in the decades after 1930, to push the entire spectrum of Chilean politics to the left and thus *change the course of national history*? Conversely, what explains the radically different course of labor and national history in Argentina, where the most powerful labor movement in Latin America in the early decades of the twentieth century

deteriorated into a captive, corporatist movement that, under Perón, likewise *changed the course of national history?*

Spalding also fails to explain convincingly why, for example, the corporatist period of Argentine history was out of phase, not only with trends in Brazil or Mexico, but in the world system as a whole. Or why organized labor played the leading role in the Bolivian revolution yet failed to build a socialist society, while in Cuba, where a socialist state did come into being, organized labor's role in the revolution was a relatively modest one. It is not that Spalding fails to deal with these basic comparative questions—in fact he often provides insightful answers to them—but that his approach to his subject does not lead him to ask these questions systematically nor equip him conceptually and methodologically to answer them very well. Because he focuses on the unity of Latin American labor history and explains diversity primarily as a result of the nature of the ruling class, Spalding fails to highlight and explain the most distinctive features of each country's labor and national history. As a result he seriously underestimates the role of organized labor in determining the direction of each nation's twentieth-century history.

That Spalding may not be entirely satisfied with the methodological and interpretive implications of his study is revealed, however obliquely, in the tone of his own assessment of his finished work. He alludes, for example, to the absence of "real people" in his book, a "painfully clear" problem he attributes to the scope of his study and the "impersonality of the written word." "Every action, every episode, sometimes recorded in a single line, reference, or footnote, involved real people, each with hopes, angers and aspirations. They lived that past, and they live this present. It is these anonymous human beings who collectively created the historical events that follow, and it is they who will create the ones to come" (p. xv). But these people never come to life in Spalding's book and his own assessment of labor's role in the region's history is (his own inclinations, one suspects, to the contrary) decidedly pessimistic. "Labor seldom if ever organized or operated independently; its fortunes have always been tied to political parties or power blocs at the national level. Only occasionally has it occupied center stage. Even in Cuba's Revolution of 1959, it played a supporting rather than a leading role" (pp. xiv–xv).

This assessment of labor's role in the twentieth-century history of the region confirms the views of most Latin Americanists. And Spalding's methodology shares with the work of most Latin American historians (including my own) a preoccupation with social elites and the political and economic dimensions of historical change. He virtually ignores the concerns and methods of the "new" social history—the emphasis on working-class culture and the attitudes and lives of real

people. There are obvious and defensible reasons for this neglect of social history, not the least of which is the underdeveloped state of the historiography of the field. But there are other reasons for the similarities that Spalding's book shares with the traditional historiography of the region. Surprisingly, these have to do in large part with the inadequacies of what is confusingly called "dependency" thought, an approach widely believed to be a major conceptual breakthrough in the study of Latin American and, more recently, world history.⁵

The fundamental achievement of the so-called dependency approach was to emphasize the historically dependent or reactive nature of capitalism in the Latin American periphery of the world system. The great strength of the Latin American structuralist current within the dependency approach, however, was to insist on the great diversity of developmental opportunities and constraints within peripheral Latin American capitalism over time by focusing on the divergent export structures called forth in the region after 1850. Conversely, and at great analytical cost, the North American neo-Marxist current within the dependency approach argued that the world capitalist system exercised a relatively static, homogeneous, and overwhelmingly negative influence on Latin American development. Capitalist development in the periphery, it argued, was virtually impossible.

If the strength of the Latin American structuralist school was its emphasis on the diversity of dependent capitalist development, its weakness was its economistic and deterministic conception of historical change. Economic change happened (somehow) in the world capitalist system and everything else (structural economic and social change, political developments) fell into place in the Latin American periphery. Focusing entirely on economic structures, this approach ignored the human dimension of historical change—the role of individuals, social groups, ideas. Denying the inevitability of class conflict, the Latin American structuralists advocated a national capitalism in which a coalition of industrialists, organized labor, and the state (made up of middle-class bureaucrats and technocrats) would usher in a new era of independent national capitalist development. The North American neo-Marxist variant, building on an intellectual tradition of rich and subtle analysis of the interconnections between material, social, and cultural life, and which recognized the role of class conflict as the motor for historical change, should have been able to overcome this weakness in the analysis of the Latin American structuralists. Instead, in practice, it proved no less economistic and deterministic. Preoccupied with demonstrating the unity of capitalist underdevelopment in the Latin American periphery, the neo-Marxists ignored the implications, for political and intellectual developments, of the diversity of economic structures and social formations in the region. They leapt analytically from an insistence on the

failure of capitalist development to a mechanical prediction of inevitable socialist revolution spearheaded by the dispossessed masses in the system. By denying the diversity of the developmental opportunities within peripheral Latin American capitalism, the neo-Marxists found themselves unable to account for the complexity and diversity of Latin American history. And this failure to understand the past made their thought of little use to the very social and political groups they hoped would transform social reality and build the socialist societies of the future.⁶

Although Spalding's sophisticated history is far removed from the methodological shortcomings and conceptual weaknesses of much early work within the dependency approach, it never completely extricates itself from the analytical constraints of either of the two main currents within that approach. Thus, while Spalding's subject matter and his training as a historian lead him away from the issue of economic underdevelopment and the economism of the early dependency approach, he nevertheless chooses to emphasize the unity of labor history in the dependent Latin American periphery. And although it is not immediately obvious, Spalding shares with the neo-Marxist dependency school an implicit assumption of the inevitability of socialist revolution in the region, a revolution spearheaded by the working class. When he confronts the historical fact that only one socialist revolution has occurred in Latin America and the problem that the organized working class played a secondary rather than a vanguard role in that revolution, he is forced to assess pessimistically the role of the working class in twentieth-century Latin American history and to take an ambiguous position on the revolutionary potential of labor in the future. On the other hand, Spalding fails to emphasize sufficiently the great strength of the Latin American structuralist approach, its insistence on the diversity of, and possibilities for, capitalist development in the region. That diversity, grounded in the divergent export structures of the region, has its greatest historical implications not in its meaning for the nature and historical formation of the ruling class, as Spalding contends, but in its meaning for the "composition, structure, and historical formation of the working class" (as he puts it in the passage quoted previously). Spalding fails to emphasize sufficiently this last and, I believe, most important aspect of his conceptual framework because he accepts the weakest and most suspect parts of each of the two main currents in the dependency approach while downplaying those elements that could be combined in a new and powerful synthesis.

Such a synthesis would emphasize the meaning for the working class and the organizational history of labor of the divergent structures called forth by Latin America's closer integration into the world capitalist system after 1850. It would concentrate, initially, not on *urban* labor (an approach appropriate to the industrializing center of the world sys-

tem), but on labor in the *export sector* (an approach attuned to the function of the Latin American periphery in that world system). It would not assume the class consciousness of labor, but concentrate on the fundamental human issue of its creation. Nor would it assume the revolutionary historical role of labor, but study the structural conditions leading to class alliances in which labor's revolutionary potential could be realized. It would thus investigate how some peripheral formations (both in the export sector itself and in the export society as a whole) favored the development of an autonomous working-class culture, independent working-class organization, and class alliances under labor's control (as in Chile) and discouraged all of these developments in others (as in Argentina). Such an approach would perceive the central role of labor—whether because of its strength and independence or because of its weakness and subordination—in determining the direction of the evolution of national history. Such an approach would incorporate methods and concerns of the new working class history, yet avoid the reactionary and antiquarian potential of history-of-the-lower-class-for-its-own-sake. At the same time, it would preserve the emphasis on the structural dimensions of economic, political, and institutional history so vital in an underdeveloped field. By combining the strongest elements of Latin American structuralism and Marxist historical analysis, such an approach, finally, would elevate, unambiguously, the struggle of the working class to its central place in the modern history of Latin American societies. This approach, however sketchily suggested,⁷ offers one way to move beyond the debate between Spalding and his critics. It finds inspiration and support in the remarkable contributions of Lora and Nash.

Over the course of the last quarter century, Guillermo Lora, like the Bolivian left he helped to lead and the tin miners he spoke for, has suffered brutal political repression and seen his political influence plummet. Yet, as his political fortunes worsened, his stature as a historian and polemicist grew. Now, thanks in part to a creative editor and a sensitive translator, English readers have access to a major sample of his humane, politically committed scholarship. The product of an activist tempered by a life of struggle that spans the genesis and outcome of the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, *A History of the Bolivian Labour Movement* distills much of Lora's published and unpublished work. It provides a detailed narrative and often cogent analysis of the century and a half of Bolivian labor and political history that ended in 1970. Perhaps the greatest quality of the book, however, lies beyond the realm of conventional historical scholarship. Somehow, as he goes about his announced and mundane task of writing history, Lora is able to convey to his reader a personal affirmation of human dignity—a sense of the grandeur of the human spirit in its struggle to overcome oppression and alienation.

Bolivian labor history has been an enigma for most analysts. One of the very poorest and least developed of Latin American nations, Bolivia has generated one of the most influential and ideologically sophisticated labor movements in the region. That paradox is explained more than analyzed in books 1 through 5 of Lora's narrative: the delayed and explosive political impact of postindependence free trade on the large artisan sector servicing a relatively wide internal market protected from the outside world by formidable geographic obstacles; the strong mutualist tradition of artisans and industrial workers in an economy dominated by precapitalist subsistence agriculture and a modern, cyclical mineral export economy too stagnant or too poor to protect workers (even after state welfare measures are introduced) from the violent fluctuations of world demand for silver and tin; a fractured working class deeply influenced by varieties of European Marxist thought filtered through the experience of Bolivian workers in the Chilean nitrate zone; the social disruption and political malaise caused by defeat in a hopeless war with Paraguay; and the enormous economic and political power of the mining proletariat once it broke out of its political isolation from the industrial workers and middle sectors of the larger cities.

Lora's account (book 6) of his own participation in the revolutionary process as student activist, labor organizer in the mining districts, militant leader of the Trotskyite POR (Partido Obrero Revolucionario), and early ideological mentor of the political leader of the tin miners, Juan Lechín, culminates in his analysis of the Thesis of Pulacayo of 1946. That document, "the most important thing I have ever said, done, or written" (p. 245), explained theoretically the historical role of the mining proletariat as the vanguard of the whole country in the drive toward a socialist society. It also armed organized labor led by the miners with a policy and tactics that culminated in the Revolution of 1952. The final part of the study (books 7 and 8) chronicles the failure of the miners, and of organized labor in general, to control and extend the revolution. It analyzes the politics of austerity borne by the working class and details the intermittent, massive repression of the unions and the left during the 1960s.

Here Lora provides much detail and insight, but rarely a systematic analysis of the relationship between miners, urban labor and the middle sectors, and, most importantly, the peasantry. Likewise, one must read between the lines for the reasons for the rise and decline of the POR, the great influence of the populist MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario), and the fortunes of the Communist left. The reasons for these interpretive weaknesses are various. Reflecting his experience as a high-level political leader on the left, Lora is more interested in working-class leaders and the problems of party coalition and government policy than in the culture and consciousness of the working class,

more attuned to the mechanics of politics than he is to economic and social structures (fortunately, the editor provides a minimum of economic and demographic information in his short introduction and a list of suggested readings following the text). As an activist involved in the day-to-day struggle of labor organization and party leadership, Lora had little time to research, contemplate, and analyze. These circumstances worsened in the sixties and seventies when much of Lora's work became clandestine. Two efforts to publish Spanish versions of the material covered in the second half of the book were thwarted by military interventions first in Bolivia in 1971 and then in Chile in 1973. Editor Whitehead has also cut out much of the didactic polemics that made the Spanish edition of the material covered in the first half of the book very much longer.

But the English version preserves in abundance what may be Lora's greatest literary and polemical strength, his ability to evoke, in short biographical portraits, the human virtues and frailties of dozens of Bolivian leftists. Here Lora, the social psychologist and keen observer of men, is at his humane and didactic best. A few short examples, chosen almost at random, will illustrate the measure of his talent.

Lora begins his three-page portrait of Tristán Marof, the influential novelist who was a symbol of Bolivian socialism in the thirties and who became "openly reactionary" as a private secretary of presidents in the late forties, in this way:

Gustavo A. Navarro, better known by his pseudonym Tristán Marof, was born in 1898 in Sucre. The location of his birthplace was to be an important influence in his life. The capital of the republic—at least it is still officially the capital—has always been a stronghold of social prejudice. Even the upper strata of the artisans have aristocratic pretensions and consider it a high honour to serve a count (even though he may have come down in the world). Marof was of very lowly origins and has never been able to overcome his resentment against those of his countrymen who had the privilege of being born with noble titles or were favoured with fortunes. The scorn with which the aristocrats treated the intelligent young Navarro deeply wounded him and he has never been able to get entirely over this trauma, not even with the help of Marxism. Nevertheless the influence of Chuquisaca on the writer and politician was not entirely negative; it is reflected in the brilliant wit and irony which distinguish him as a magnificent pamphleteer. Many of his novels are Rabelaisian in their humorous social criticism. His biting satire and his political militancy seem to have been inspired by some deep-seated urge to get revenge on the aristocrats and the powerful, who always excluded him from their closed circles. (Pp. 163–64)

Lora employs these biographical portraits to illustrate the pitfalls and moral rewards of militance on the left. He recounts the life of Arturo Borda, an early railroad worker organizer of anarchist tendencies. "His main occupations were writing, painting, acting, agitating and organising in the labour movement, and getting drunk." Borda ended his life in 1953 in a state of great bitterness and despair which Lora compassion-

ately illustrates with a passage from Borda's last writings. Then he describes the unbelievable circumstances of his death. "One dry Monday he had a terrible, urgent need for a drink; he just had to have alcohol if he was to go on living. He went round all the bars in the Chijini quarter of La Paz, asking for something to drink, and everywhere he got the same answer—no. He stopped at a small tinplate shop and pleaded for something to quench his thirst. He was told they only had hydrochloric acid. Borda asked them to give it to him. He poured some out and drank it. The poison destroyed his oesophagus completely, and he died in great agony" (p. 136).

Often Lora's didactic political task is facilitated by the biographical facts, as in the case of José Antonio Arze, founder of the Stalinist PIR. Arze followed Moscow's line and collaborated with the United States and the tin barons during the war. By 1951 he had withdrawn from politics to dedicate himself to teaching. "His irresponsibility and dissipation were proverbial and ended up destroying him. He died on 23 August 1955 aged 51" (p. 202). At other times, the biographical details work against him. He seeks to exalt the life of José Aguirre Gainsborg, an aristocrat who distinguished himself as a Marxist student leader in the early thirties, who joined and was later expelled from the Chilean Communist party after his exile from Bolivia for opposition to the Chaco War, and who founded the POR in 1934. Yet, although the circumstances of Aguirre's death in 1938 make Lora's task difficult, he rises to the occasion: "On 23 October, a rainy spring day in La Paz, José Aguirre Gainsborg fell to his death from the big wheel at a fun fair. He was only twenty-nine. Although it has been remarked that Aguirre died a stupid death, history has confirmed his basic ideas, which in itself is a sufficient justification for his life, however short" (p. 213).

Marxist labor activists like Lora (one thinks, for example of the Communists Elías Lafertte in Chile, José Peter in Argentina, Adolfo Quintero in Venezuela) have written some of the best Latin American labor history. Despite their polemics and the occupational limitations on their analytical and comparative vision, they come to their work with a powerful theoretical framework, a commitment to understand the past so as to change the future, a sure sense of the structure of their own societies—all four of these authors sought to organize workers in the export sector—and a knowledge of the world and of human nature gained through political struggle and the leadership of men and women. Lora combines these strengths with a literary ability to people his history with vibrant human beings. As he teaches us to comprehend his characters, we begin to identify with their virtues and sympathize with their tragic flaws—and gradually we are drawn into an epic struggle of a people and a class to overcome oppression.

But if Lora excels at bringing the leaders of the Bolivian left to life in his book, it is June Nash who penetrates the culture and consciousness of the people who comprise Lora's revolutionary vanguard, the tin miners and their wives. *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* greatly enhances our understanding of the dynamics of the Bolivian Revolution and its aftermath; it clarifies and deepens the much employed yet poorly understood Marxist concept of class consciousness; most importantly, it makes a major conceptual contribution to the study of labor in dependent capitalist societies.

The scope of Nash's achievement must be measured against the research obstacles she faced. As a North American, middle class, academic female, she was forced to contend not only, one supposes, with inevitable class, ethnic, and cultural barriers, but with her nationality (she was accused of being a counterrevolutionary agent) and her sex (women, believed to anger the spirits, are supposed to be barred from entering the mines). The extent of these obstacles and the degree to which she was able to overcome them are illustrated in the single photograph (among the many that enhance the book) in which she appears. The caption reads: "Anthropologist Attends Plenary Union Meeting." It is an outdoor meeting, held on a rock-strewn depression in what may be a market place. There, flanked by a score of miners, many in their hard hats and work clothes, her eyes shielded by sun glasses, pad and pencil in hand, sits a warmly and somewhat formally dressed Nash. Miners and anthropologist, their attention drawn by a speaker off camera, are engaged in serious business and seem determined to downplay the obvious incongruities of the situation.

Nash gained the trust of the miners and their families, and was able to explore the intimate structure of their daily lives, through a rare combination of intellectual and personal qualities. Her radical politics and her anthropological training helped, but one senses that it was her capacity to relate to other human beings and her zest for life that won the day. As we follow her through the book we see her research methods in action, now silently observing coca-chewing miners as they meditate to prepare themselves for the rigors of a new shift, now at the side of a mud-spattered driller in the bowels of the mine recording the tiniest details of the work process, now working all afternoon with a couple baking bread for the festival of Todos los Santos.

Nash's ability to interpret and transcend these experiences generates the analytical power of her thesis and enables her to convey the miners' world in universal, human terms. She accompanies a miner's widow as she climbs to the summit of a hill overlooking the San José mine and learns of the powers of the hill spirits from her companion, a *chola* who has adopted western dress and has visited Chile and Argen-

tina. They meet a Spanish-speaking paint contractor and his family who have brought the dried fetus of a llama and other ceremonial objects to make an offering to Huari.

As we chatted with this industrious young tradesman about how to increase his profits, occasionally gazing over the saucer-like plain that had been a prehistoric lake but now looked as though the tide had run out, leaving behind the Gulf Oil tanks, the chimney stacks of mud-brick factories, the rows on rows of new cooperative housing, and the festering lines of old company housing edging the slagpile of San José mine, I realized that the simple traditional/modern dichotomies were not going to explain much in this society. Present and past are fused in the struggle for survival, and the people maintain their alliances with old demons as they strive to strike a better bargain for the future. (P. 21)

She reflects on her bread baking experience:

Death is constantly juxtaposed with the assertion of life in the mining communities. I learned to overcome my own repulsion at the idea of eating at the wakes in view of the body laid out in the bier. The bread babies themselves seemed to me to be the assertion of new life in the face of death. When I watched Juan, with his arms whitened up to the elbows, passing out the vibrant dough to his children for them to make figures, it communicated a sense of the worthwhileness of life. Dough, which has a life of its own, became the medium for transforming the message of rebirth. Although no one was able to connect the bread babies directly with a meaning of this sort, the metaphor was there throughout *Todos los Santos* (Pp. 149–50)

What continually impresses her is the way the men and women who work in the mine are able to make their lives meaningful and rewarding. She recounts an early experience at a fiesta held in the small house of the widow of a miner. Shortly after the miner had contracted to give the feast he was paralyzed in an accident in the mine and died some time later.

Chica was flowing and a meal was served shortly after I arrived. Following this the band struck up a lively *cueca*, and a small spidery man dressed in black and wearing a fedora seized the hand of his partner, a huge chola with sunglasses and derby, and led a snake dance out into the rain. As we danced across the mud-rutted bus terminal, the dancers leaping and twirling according to their individual fancy but never letting go of the hands of their partners, I felt the urgency of their claim, not just on life, but on self-expression. (P. 15)

Nash builds on her experiences and the hours of taped interviews with several key local informants⁸ to write a history focused on the two decades since the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 from the grass-roots perspective of the tin mining community. From this angle of vision the problems of decapitalization and bureaucratization of the nationalized mines appear in stark and human terms: the frustrations and dangers caused by faulty drills or scarce inhalators, the scientific pretensions of a flood of highly paid middle-class technicians. From the miners' perspective, falling productivity results primarily from changes in the work

process that reward work on the basis of the quantity rather than the quality of ore mined. In the accounts of workers and their wives, the declining economic and political power of the miners after 1956 translates into moving descriptions of fluctuations in the price of bread and ingenious efforts to juggle household expenses, into stories of wife beating and of the frustrated educational aspirations of children, and, frequently, into shocking eyewitness versions of bloody massacres of tin workers by the military.

Nash develops this perspective of the revolutionary process in Bolivia to make an important theoretical contribution to Latin American labor studies and to the literature on class consciousness. Bolivian tin miners transcended their individual and group interests to act as a revolutionary class which changed Bolivian history. Nash explains this historical process as a unique and complicated interaction of three phenomena: the regenerative power of the miners' transitional chola culture, which adapts the communal and spiritual reservoirs of pre-Columbian and colonial beliefs and institutions to preserve and foster the vitality of the group in the face of extreme material hardship and the corrosive forces of capitalist industrial life; the structure of life in a mining community, where the group solidarity fostered by the dangerous, cooperative work in the mine is reinforced by a community life where dependence on company houses, company services, and the company stores places workers' families in a relationship to capital similar to that of the miners themselves; and the consequences of living in an export economy that has proven unable historically to generate sufficient development to unleash the individualist aspirations of miners for social mobility and material consumption, aspirations reinforced by aspects of chola culture and fostered by the nuclear family, by Catholicism, and by the capitalist ideology of the larger culture and the ruling class.

For Nash, then, the culture of the mining proletariat is filled with tension and conflicting tendencies. What tips the balance in favor of communal solidarity and class consciousness is the failure of capitalist development in the periphery. Her theoretical achievement is thus two-fold. She breaks down the traditional/modern dichotomy upon which liberal social theory and orthodox Marxist analysis depend. Her miners and their wives see no contradiction between lighting fires on the Christian festival of San Juan to warm the pre-Columbian life-force, the *pa-chamama*, on the coldest day of the year and then proceeding to use this same ceremonial occasion to mobilize themselves for class action against foreign imperialists and a corrupt national bourgeoisie. At the same time, Nash challenges Eurocentric liberal and Marxist models that slight the historical role of the Latin American working class. She shows how class consciousness and militant working-class action is much more likely to occur (at least at this stage) in the dependent periphery of the

world system (where capitalism has not worked very well) than it is in the core of that system.

More successfully than any book published to date, Nash's work fuses the strongest features of structural dependency and Marxist analysis. By concentrating on the consciousness of workers in the export sector and their central role in determining the course of national history, she integrates the concerns and techniques of the new social history with an appreciation for the larger economic and political dimensions of change in dependent capitalist societies over time. Her work is not perfect—her account of national political events is repetitious and sometimes poorly integrated with her grass-roots material—but it should serve as an inspiration for similar studies of the relationship between workers in the export sector and the modern historical evolution of the other nations of the region.

Among the books under review, two others merit detailed attention. The first, a dissertation by an Argentine sociologist, Iris Martha Roldán, is the voluminous product of a year and a half she spent in 1973–74 as participant-observer in the Light and Power Union of Córdoba, Argentina. That union, headed by the remarkable labor leader and champion of the ill-fated *Sindicalismo de Revolución*, Agustín Tosco, played a central role in the events surrounding the *Cordobazo*, the general strike-cum-revolt that shook the city of Córdoba in 1968. After 1968, until its power was curbed and its leftist leadership forced underground in 1974, Light and Power of Córdoba was a stronghold for the political left. The history of the union during the crucial years 1966 to 1974 forms the core of Roldán's book.

Roldán's study illustrates in a microcosm the contradiction with which the left has been forced to struggle in an Argentina molded by the Peronist experience. While the leadership of this union was leftist, its rank and file was predominantly Peronist. The union was successfully organized under Peronist auspices after 1943. During Perón's first government it won important material and social benefits—everything from substantially higher wages and better working conditions to access to luxurious resort hotels so that its members could enjoy extended summer vacations. While first-generation leaders acquired a corporatist political philosophy, the rank-and-file was developing what Roldán calls a "trade-union consciousness." Like the Argentine left in general, Tosco, a brilliant second-generation leader, was eventually stymied by this inheritance: his Marxist goal of building a democratic working-class movement capable of making the transition to socialism was effectively constrained by the bread-and-butter expectations and Peronist loyalties of the bulk of the union's rank and file. Tosco's preeminent leadership position was a result of his personal honesty and his energy and success in delivering

and administering the material benefits available through union solidarity; he was able to pursue intermediate-range leftist political goals only so long as he fulfilled what the rank and file considered his primary function. The result was a union whose leadership and membership were linked by certain contractual relationships but which lacked organic unity and democratic institutions capable of involving the rank and file in day-to-day affairs and decision-making. As long as the goals of the leadership and the rank and file could be harmonized (as during the repressive military regimes of the 1960s), the economic and political strength of this important union was formidable. Once that harmony broke down under the national and local pressures triggered by the Peronists' return to power, the union was slowly rendered impotent.

The strengths of Roldán's contribution are many. She frames her richly detailed narrative with a careful reading of the secondary literature on contemporary Argentine history. She is alert to the ways her study relates to theoretical issues raised in liberal scholarship on industrial relations and in the long-standing Marxist debate on the relationship of trade unions to revolutionary consciousness. In her research she couples the use of written union documents (particularly minutes of meetings and the union newspaper) with formal interviews with union officers (although her access to Tosco was limited). Her most important insights, however, result from her attendance at union meetings and her participation in the daily social life of the union hall. (Happily, although she is surprised at the superiority of these informal observations, she allows them to displace her initial, more "scientific" methodology.) Because of the tensions between the political factions within the union, however, she was unable to probe the values and world view of the union rank and file, a circumstance that seriously undermines her ability to address her central research and intellectual concern: how a union can be used as a vehicle for forging revolutionary class consciousness among workers. Roldán's answers to that question—the importance of democratic participation and communication, the need to focus on issues of worker control of the work place and the work process—are neither new nor bolstered by systematic evidence. But, by exploring the concrete dilemmas of the leadership and the Marxist cadres of Light and Power of Córdoba in the late 1960s and early 1970s, she reveals starkly the ongoing structural weakness of the left in a society transformed by the Peronist experience.

The other book, a revised and expanded doctoral dissertation in political science, is Kenneth Paul Erickson's *The Brazilian Corporative State and Working-Class Politics*. Trained in the politics of authoritarian regimes by Juan Linz at Columbia University in the mid-1960s, Erickson contributed to Marxist dependency approaches in a series of articles on Latin American labor written with Spalding and Peppe in the early

1970s. But it is his use of corporatist concepts that serves to link the chapters of this book, all of which deal with aspects and episodes of the relationship of the Brazilian state and labor during the period 1930–75.

Erickson makes important contributions to our understanding of how Brazilian labor law and institutions such as the social security system have been used to limit the independence and power of organized labor and to foster the process of capitalist accumulation over the course of a half century of Brazilian history. For reasons Erickson does not fully explain, the Vargas regime adopted a corporatist approach to labor after 1930. That approach, for reasons that are left largely obscured, intensified during the Estado Novo and survived the return to liberal democracy after 1946. Corporatist institutions and styles combined with liberal electoral competition during the period 1946–64 to produce populist episodes, which Erickson characterizes as the politics of opportunistic politicians courting self-serving labor leaders. By positing an absence of autonomous labor organizations and asserting the lack of links between leaders and rank and file, he explains the illusion of power held by the working class before the coup in 1964, and the success of corporatist techniques and severe repression in harnessing the working class to pay the material and social cost of the Brazilian economic “miracle” after 1964. While much of this information and analysis is not new, Erickson ably synthesizes the work of others and provides new insights. He shows, for example, how actual government social security transfers to labor varied indirectly with the intensity of radical rhetoric during the second Vargas presidency.

Erickson’s approach to the history of the Brazilian working class parallels that of the corporatist theory and practice he studies. He treats the working class as a passive, dependent variable in the historical process. Within the broad context of changing national and international economic and political conditions, corporatist approaches develop, intensify, and change not as a response to levels of organization or militance of labor, but as a result of the political ambitions and career patterns of political leaders and high-level government bureaucrats (see his tables 9 and 10). Consistent with this mode of analysis, Erickson’s final theoretical section on the future of the Brazilian political system excludes the role of labor from speculations on the potential for democratization, on the one hand, and evolution toward fascism on the other. Given his analysis of the historical effectiveness of corporatist solutions, it is not surprising that he concludes that a continuation of the current “authoritarian corporatist regime” is likely.

The weakness of Erickson’s approach is not revealed in this prediction but in the assumption that corporatist approaches *explain* the relative powerlessness and passivity of labor in the modern history of Brazil. Corporatist solutions were tried earlier in Chile and later in Ar-

gentina. In both countries they met with very different results from those achieved in Brazil, different in terms of the growth of working-class consciousness and organization (especially in Chile) and in fostering capitalist accumulation (especially in Argentina). Are such differences in timing and outcome a result of cultural traditions (as Erickson must assume) or a function of the meaning for class consciousness and working-class organization of the unique structure and distinct developmental success of dependent capitalist evolution in Brazil?

The other books under review are more modest contributions to the field. That some of these works were published at all perhaps owes more to the intrinsic importance of, and growing interest in, the subject matter than it does to the quality or timeliness of the ways that it was treated. Among the more useful of these studies are the papers of a 1974 conference sponsored by the Colegio de México, the Social Science Research Council, and the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales compiled by Rubén Katzman and José Luis Reyna and published five years later as *Fuerza de trabajo y movimientos laborales en América Latina*. Although the contributors include some of the most able social scientists working in Latin American studies, for the most part they are so severely constrained by the limitations of the literature they survey that their success in suggesting new conceptual approaches and vital areas for further research is limited. There are exceptions to this generalization. Elizabeth Jelin contributes an excellent discussion of the elements of working-class consciousness along lines developed in her pathbreaking *La protesta obrera* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1974). Silvia Sigal and Juan Carlos Torre offer a provocative comparative analysis of ways structural conditions in peripheral industrialization can explain differences between the historical evolution of the Latin American and European labor movements. Nevertheless, although most of the articles contain useful interpretive insights, most of the contributions depend on a modest number of well-known secondary works to rework the now familiar ideas of dependency, marginality, populism, and the importance of the state. It is hard not to conclude that the resources expended on this project would have been better employed in funding primary research on Latin American labor.

Blanca Silvestrini de Pacheco's *Los trabajadores puertorriqueños y el Partido Socialista, 1932–1940* is a Spanish translation of the author's 1973 doctoral dissertation at SUNY, Albany. It describes the relationship between the Federación Libre de Trabajadores and the Socialist party during the decade of the Great Depression. Paradoxically, as sectors of the Puerto Rican working class such as sugar workers became more organized and combative during this period, the Socialist party grew increasingly conservative and reformist, a trend the author affirms is a consequence of the Socialists' electoral alliance with the conservative

Republican party and the alleged *empleomanía* of the leaders of the Socialist party. The study relies on primary sources and illustrates the wealth of material available on the working class in Puerto Rico during the 1930s. The reverse is true of Luis Navas' dissertation, *El movimiento obrero en Panamá*, now in its second edition. Navas devotes the bulk of his work to constructing a Marxist framework for a study of railroad and canal workers, but his study is devoid of primary research and based instead on fragments of information gleaned from a few secondary works.

Ideology and Social Change in Latin America, edited by June Nash, Juan Corradi, and Hobart Spalding, Jr. is carelessly put together and no longer fulfills the claim on its dust jacket to offer "original articles . . . on topics that are relatively unworked, such as working-class organization, populism and U.S. labor imperialism." The contributions by Nash, Spalding, and Erickson have been superseded by their book-length studies reviewed in this essay. Other contributors have either published their articles elsewhere or have worked out their ideas more systematically in other published works. Nevertheless, Patrick V. Peppe's pithy contribution, based on survey research among unionized industrial workers in Santiago in 1968–69, is a powerful critique of the conventional idea that the industrial working class in modern Latin America lacks revolutionary potential. Finally, Carlos M. Rama's highly personal and episodic *Historia del movimiento obrero y social latinoamericano*, first published in Montevideo in 1967, provides insight into Latin American intellectual history of that period, but as a survey of the Latin American labor movement it has lost what utility it had as a short, readable, ideological corrective to more thorough works by Alexander, Poblete Troncoso and Burnett, and Alba. All of these works have now been superseded by Spalding.

The more limited usefulness of these last studies only underscores the importance of the empirical, methodological, and conceptual contributions by Spalding, Lora, and Nash, and, to a lesser extent, Roldán and Erickson. Spalding's survey provides a solid benchmark both for teaching and for future work within the field, while Lora and especially Nash reveal a conceptual and methodological path for Latin American labor studies appropriate to the historical terrain of the region. By focusing on the historical role of workers in the export sector, by creatively combining—whether intuitively, as with Lora, or consciously, as with Nash—the strongest elements of Latin American structuralism and Marxist analysis, by maintaining one foot in those human, literary, and moral concerns we call the humanities, Lora and Nash have set a fine example and high standards for future work in the field. Contemplating their work, one is led to concur with Judith Evans' recent obser-

vations on the field of Latin American labor studies: "results positive; prospects, promising."⁹

NOTES

1. "Research on the Urban Working Class and Organized Labor in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile: What is Left to Be Done? *LARR* 9, no. 2 (1974):115–42.
2. Peter Winn, "Oral History and the Factory Study: New Approaches to Labor History," *LARR* 14, no. 2 (1979):130–40; Eugene F. Sofer, "Recent Trends in Latin American Labor Historiography," *LARR* 15, no. 1 (1980):167–76.
3. The book, a published version of lectures delivered in 1978 at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, includes, in addition to Skidmore's essay, another major essay by E. Bradford Burns entitled "Culture in Conflict: The Implication of Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," and a critical introduction by Richard Graham.
4. *LARR* 15, no. 1 (1980):167–82.
5. A discussion of the significance and promise of this new conceptual approach is Charles W. Bergquist, "Latin American History in World Perspective: A Dissenting View," in Georg G. Iggers and Harold T. Parker, eds., *International Handbook of Historical Studies: Contemporary Research and Theory* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).
6. Early, archetypical expressions of the two currents within the dependency approach are Osvaldo Sunkel, with the collaboration of Pedro Paz, *El subdesarrollo y la teoría del desarrollo* (México: Siglo XXI, 1971) and André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review, 1967).
7. I have attempted to apply this approach in some detail to the history of Argentina and Chile in "'Bourgeoisification' and 'Proleterianization' in the Latin American Periphery: Working-Class Politics in Argentina and Chile Compared," paper given at the Third Political Economy of the World System Conference, The Braudel Center, May 1979.
8. Nash has published two autobiographies drawn from these same materials. Juan Rojas and June Nash, *He agotado mi vida en la mina* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1976) and *Dos mujeres indígenas: Basilia* (México: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1976). The first has now been put on film, *I Spent My Life in the Mines* (Bolivia, 1977). A third informant for Nash was Domitila Barrios de Chungara, whose *Let Me Speak!*, originally published in Spanish, is now available in English (Monthly Review, 1978).
9. "Results and Prospects: Some Observations on Latin American Labor Studies," *International Labor and Working Class History* 16 (Fall 1979):29–39.