

CHANGING VIEWS OF BOLIVIAN POLITICS

- BOLIVIA'S MNR: A STUDY OF A NATIONAL POPULAR MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA.* By JAMES M. MALLOY. (Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, Council on International Studies, 1971. Pp. 55.)
- BOLIVIAN FOREIGN TRADE: HISTORICAL PROBLEMS AND MNR REVOLUTIONARY POLICY, 1952–1964.* By JAMES W. WILKIE. (Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, Council on International Studies, 1971. Pp. 39.)
- MY MISSIONS FOR REVOLUTIONARY BOLIVIA, 1944–1962.* By VICTOR ANDRADE. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976. Pp. 200.)
- THE BOLIVIAN COUP OF 1964: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.* By J. CALDERÓN. (Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, Council on International Studies 1972. Pp. 137.)
- BOLIVIA'S POPULAR ASSEMBLY OF 1971 AND THE OVERTHROW OF GENERAL JUAN JOSÉ TORRES.* By JERRY W. KNUDSON. (Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, Council on International Studies, 1974. Pp. 70.)

New information acquired by the social sciences is not, of course, simply cataloged and shelved next to "existing data." Instead, new facts force our interpretations of familiar data to evolve; what we thought we knew is often changed by new events or discoveries. In many areas of Latin American studies this process takes place quite gradually, but occasionally a sharper shifting of conceptual gears is needed. Since 1971, Bolivia has undergone or revealed social changes that seem to call for such a marked revision of ideas.

In relation to at least three major areas of Bolivian national life, explanations and assumptions that seemed comfortably established at the beginning of the 1970s seem well on their way to being discarded as the decade closes. First, nine years ago we felt quite sure that Bolivia's sweeping 1952 revolution, presided over by the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR), had in the main sought to reform and democratize the nation's politics. To be sure, the party had been overthrown by a coup in 1964, but many saw this decline as a failure of political technique, not as an abandonment of principle. The MNR's failure—in any case only a partial failure—was looked on as an honorable if socially costly defeat. Since 1971, of course, our view of the MNR's conduct (both early and late) has been radically altered by the party's cooperation with Banzer's violent coup and by MNR participation in his government for nearly three years. It now seems more plausible to argue that the 1952 revolution did not end in failure from the MNR's viewpoint; instead, the cementing of middle-class control under Barrientos and Banzer probably represented victory for a party basically rooted in Bolivia's dependent *burguesía*.

Second, few observers half-a-dozen years ago would have forecast any dynamic economic changes for the nation. With the exception of Richard Thorn's

insightful research,¹ the accepted wisdom was that the mining sector was played out and that the MNR's efforts at economic diversification had proven to be diffuse and inadequate. Since the 1970s began, however, and particularly since the world oil price revolution of 1973–74, the pattern and prospects of the Bolivian economy have changed quite radically. The burgeoning hydrocarbon sector may now finance needed investments in other production areas and in the services sector; diversified mining has had a considerable renaissance; and both of these developments have changed the character of politics, seriously weakening the *altiplano* region and the forces of organized labor.

Third, at the start of the 1970s Bolivia seemed destined for constant political instability. In the eight years leading up to 1972, Bolivia had experienced seven regimes, four unconstitutional changes of government, and one suspected presidential assassination. But the succeeding six years saw unbroken rule by Hugo Banzer's repressive and dictatorial regime, suggesting a long-term ascendancy of the conservative middle class. The 1978 Padilla coup (following Gen. Pereda's power grab by only a few months) may well move Bolivia closer to civilian rule based on elections. Yet those elections, involving largely veteran MNR politicians, may do little more than help legitimate the basically conservative formula inherited from Banzer.

All the publications reviewed here give evidence, in different ways, of the quantum changes that our assessment of Bolivian affairs is now undergoing. Some (the Malloy and Wilkie essays) represent more traditional interpretations, more or less amenable to current revision; one (the Andrade volume) views the events of past decades through the prism of Bolivia's recent social changes; and two (the Calderón and Knudson studies) look directly at recent political shifts, with different degrees of success.

In *Bolivia's MNR*, Malloy presents in succinct form the analysis he was developing a decade ago and which appeared in much more detail in his 1970 book, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.) The MNR, Malloy argued, represented a "cross-class (or, perhaps better, cross-sectoral) alliance aimed at removing situational blockages to development and reform" (p. 1). Once in power the party found itself caught, however, in a squeeze between the political need to distribute rewards and the economic need to conserve resources for investment. Unable to satisfy both demands, the MNR gradually alienated its own social backers and fell from power. The outcome might have been different, Malloy observes, if the Bolivian economy had not been so narrowly based on tin or subject to such fierce economic scarcity. The MNR's fall, however, was not seen as implying a completely pessimistic outlook: "The task of revolutionary destruction has been carried out but the more difficult dilemma of revolutionary construction remains unresolved. In this sense the revolution continues" (p. 48).

This is an insightful and adaptable analysis, which Malloy himself has elaborated and built upon in later writings.² His stress on the political role of economic scarcity, in particular, provides a basic clue to the roots of Banzer's durability in a period of sudden and unexpected economic boom. However, one wonders whether Malloy's overall analysis (along with that of most of us)

wasn't too heavily influenced by the MNR's "cross-class," group-oriented political strategy. In discussing Bolivia's pattern of development after the 1920s, for example, he remarks that below the tin-system elite "there were at least two separate stratification systems neither of which can profitably be discussed in rigid 'class' terms" (p. 9). Is this reluctance to use a class-centered model fully justified? Though subclass groups have often shown impressive autonomy in Bolivian politics, they may also align themselves in accord with class distinctions, thereby altering an apparently permanent "social structure." With the added advantage of hindsight, it now appears that the politically crucial split between the middle class and the worker/peasant majority in Bolivia has been hardening steadily since the mid-1950s. There probably *was* a time just after the April revolution when ambitious MNR leaders felt free to ignore class differences in forming political coalitions—but within a decade most of those leaders had come to serve as agents of the newly conservative middle class.

James W. Wilkie's *Bolivian Foreign Trade* also represents clearly the viewpoint of the 1960s on Bolivian affairs, essentially because its most recent data cover 1966. Wilkie, who has also published informative research on Bolivian public finance and the impact of U.S. economic assistance, here turns his attention to the evolution of Bolivian trade from 1929 until two years after Barrientos' 1964 coup. With an effective presentation of time series data, he describes the composition of Bolivia's imports and exports, as well as the shifting importance over time of different trading partners. He pays particular attention to the record of the petroleum sector, and to the relative weights assigned to imports of capital and consumer goods.

Wilkie's findings basically confirm assumptions that were already familiar at the time he wrote (1971). In the areas where the MNR's record to 1966 in foreign trade was not simply static, it was discouraging from the standpoint of development. Exports were diversified only slightly in the fourteen years after 1952; gains in the import shares of West Germany and Japan were the only important changes among trading partners; a chronic trade deficit set in after 1957. Wilkie's conclusion clearly seemed suited to the data he drew on: "The MNR experience shows that a developing country like Bolivia probably must learn to live with frustration in results of foreign trade policy . . . there is no easy way out and gains from foreign trade policy will come more slowly than any government anticipates" (p. 30).

It is certainly useful to have our old guesses about this data confirmed, and this study will be a useful source for other researchers. In particular, Wilkie's compilation and standardization of time series from a welter of sources must have been intricate and ticklish, and his work paid useful dividends. At the same time, a major limitation flows from the fact that the data end with 1966. The study includes, for that reason, only the very beginning of the hydrocarbon sector's rise to prominence in Bolivian foreign trade and public finance. Bolivian Gulf Oil Company's exports began in 1966, multiplying Bolivia's total crude shipments more than ten times over in a single year. By 1975, crude petroleum sales (estimated at \$114.5 million) accounted for 28 percent of all Bolivia's exports, and had quintupled in value in a half-decade.³

Obviously this major change puts the MNR's foreign trade record in a new light. When one takes 1970s data into account, the MNR's planners look a good deal more farsighted and developmentally capable than they did just after being pushed from power in 1964. Whatever one may think of the terms of the 1955 Petroleum Code, there might well be few hydrocarbon resources available to export now if the MNR had not somehow made exploration possible in the mid-1950s.

In this connection, Wilkie needlessly writes himself into a corner by implying that most trade-related consequences of the MNR's tenure would have shown up by 1966. "Although in the long run," he states, "it may be argued that MNR programs may have changed attitudes and policies which will require years to show up in the results of trade figures, such an assertion must stand the test of time" (p. 29). It seems, indeed, to have stood that test; it would be interesting, sometime in the future, to have Wilkie prepare a data set including the past decade, and speculate on the results in his usual balanced and capable fashion.

Victor Andrade's memoirs stress the dealings between the United States and the Villarroel and MNR regimes—but the book is also implicitly informative about the post-Barrientos era in which it was written. Andrade's account covers his three periods as Bolivian ambassador in Washington (1944–45, 1952–58, and 1961–62). In all three instances he had to negotiate from a position of weakness—trying to maximize the price of Bolivian tin during and after World War II, endeavoring to counter the anti-MNR propaganda launched by the Bolivian tin magnates, and seeking U.S. economic assistance for the inflation-wracked Bolivian economy in the 1950s. While Andrade discloses no startling new facts, his work is readable and straightforward, as well as personal enough to bring vividness to his accounts of diplomatic skirmishes. Individual antagonists or allies are often memorably sketched by Andrade. Some play roles familiar to us from other accounts (Milton Eisenhower as an early sympathizer of the MNR regime), while others are given attention for the first time (including Alan M. Bateman, a metallurgist and U.S. government spokesman who stubbornly opposed higher tin prices in the 1940s, and the unassuming Senator George Aiken of Vermont, a key congressional backer of surplus food shipments to Bolivia a decade later).

Most importantly, Andrade's book reminds us of a factor often forgotten in the current highly ideological analyses of inter-American relations: that is the margin for maneuver and influence that the United States' limited pluralism offers to perceptive Third World diplomats. In pressing his points, Andrade lobbied skillfully with the American press, the academic world, and with Congress; he was also quick to recognize that the many segments of the U.S. foreign affairs bureaucracy could be set against one another, if need be, to block unfavorable policies or rulings. This sort of diplomatic enterprise (including, though not in Andrade's case, lesser instances of South Korean-style corruption) helps explain why such relatively weak Latin American states as Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic have been better able to achieve their diplomatic goals in Washington than such theoretically more significant nations as Peru and Colombia. Cole Blasler, who edited, helped translate, and introduces Andrade's vol-

ume, has performed a useful service in thus underscoring the continued significance of the traditional diplomat in hemispheric relations.

At the same time, the stress and tone of *My Missions* indicate the degree to which Bolivian politics had changed by the time Andrade got around to writing his memoirs. The book devotes almost as much space to Andrade's short mission in the 1940s as it does to his much longer assignments following the MNR's revolution, and in both cases it tends to stress the ambassador's conflicts with various U.S. agencies. This seems an odd distribution of attention, considering that Andrade's major achievement was to help create a favorable U.S. attitude in the 1950s to a regime that might easily have been categorized along with the Jacobo Arbenz government in Guatemala.

Andrade's approach is more understandable, however, when one recalls that he came under attack (by Antonio Arguedas, among others) after 1968 for having been too close to the U.S. officials he sought to influence as the MNR's ambassador. Andrade wrote his memoirs, in part, to influence a younger generation of Bolivians who had come to look on his Washington efforts as nothing but *entreguismo*. He confronts this criticism directly, in relation to the 1955 Petroleum Code, and stoutly defends his past actions (if not his MNR colleagues):

I did not participate directly in any of the decisions involving the new petroleum policy. . . . If an explanation is to be made for the terms of the contracts . . . the legislators and members of the executive branch at that time must make it. . . . If I had disagreed with the new petroleum policy, however, I would have made my position known beforehand, and would have fought that policy both inside and outside the country. If I cooperated, it was because I was in agreement with the principles of the policy. What has happened since has not made me change my mind. (P. 184)

In the 1950s, Andrade's position on this and other issues was squarely in the middle of Bolivia's political spectrum; later political shifts have left him defending what is now a conservative viewpoint.

Many of the revisionist views that Andrade tries obliquely to refute are set out directly in J. Calderón's *The Bolivian Coup of 1964: A Sociological Analysis*. In this long and wordy essay, there are occasional very perceptive insights into the pattern of recent Bolivian political change, especially on the role of the MNR. Calderón comments, for example, on the MNR's ideology: "[Bolivia's] bourgeoisie captured the centralized state apparatus and, under the shield of a radical rhetoric, proceeded to acquire the wealth and property it wanted, and pushed for nationalism and capitalist industrialization. The ideology of the MNR shows the extent to which this was a screen. It was neither consistent nor did it fit with socio-economic realities" (p. 63). On the lack of directed social mobilization under the MNR: "The populism of the MNR has reproduced in its own way the old procedures based on personalistic clientele, and represents a compromise between mass techniques and traditional personalistic ones" (p. 85). And, summing up the Movimiento's political impact: "In the course of time . . . the MNR became the political channel of middle strata dominance over the lower classes. And since it had no older interests left to attack, it increasingly adopted a

defensive posture, as its members became the new intermediary bourgeoisie in charge of the production of the state and the newly promoted small industrial concerns" (p. 117).

The problem is that these useful reassessments are not backed up by any detailed presentation or analysis of facts. Each time the reader prepares himself for some careful exposition or review of data, he is met with either rhetoric or with a confused repetition of familiar events. To cite only the clearest example of this pattern, the essay's title is completely misleading: the text focuses on the MNR's whole period in power after 1952, not on the 1964 events; and even the broadest definition of "sociology" would not cover the diffuseness of Calderón's argument. Finally, adding to the reader's other burdens, the study is literally jammed with typographical errors, mistranslations from Spanish or misuses of English, misspellings, and general sloppiness. In one list of the names of twenty-six MNR leaders, for example, seven are misspelled and an additional twelve names lack the proper accents (p. 60).

One wonders, in short, why scarce resources were devoted to publishing this study, when far superior presentations of analogous viewpoints could be obtained by commissioning translations of works by Guillermo Lora or René Zavaleta. Very little written by these keen observers of Bolivian politics (or by others, especially Mariano Baptista and Sergio Almaraz) is presently available in English;⁴ perhaps an edited volume including works by these authors would be a useful future project for Cole Blasier and his coworkers at the University of Pittsburgh.

In contrast to Calderón, Jerry W. Knudson gives greater prominence to data than to analysis. His study provides a first-hand account of the deliberations of the short-lived Asamblea Popular, together with background on the politics of Bolivian labor and a short account of the 1971 coup. Knudson, who teaches journalism at Temple University and has long been interested in Bolivian affairs, shows throughout a keen eye for complete and accurate information and for the telling details that animate any narrative. He explains, for example, the distribution of seats in the Asamblea, by organization and by political leanings; he recounts the election of assembly officers, including names and circumstances; and he records the divisions of opinion produced in the assembly by the various issues it took up. Probably no better concise account of the Asamblea's proceedings could be found—enlivened, in the bargain, by such details as that Juan Lechín Oquendo disdained to raise his hand to be sworn into the assembly's presidency, and that the roof of Bolivia's Legislative Palace leaks terribly.

At the same time, Knudson's data seem both underanalyzed and somewhat misinterpreted. On the first point, one quite often wonders what the significance of a particular assembly episode might have been—what was revealed, for example, by the debates over the planned consolidation of Bolivia's universities, or by the question of how the "cooperativized" *El Diario* should be managed. The lack of a clearly etched viewpoint also leads Knudson to include data whose relevance to his basic study is not clear (for example, a five-page recounting of the 1967 San Juan massacre).

On the second point, when he occasionally sets out to draw lessons from

the wealth of material he has presented, the author lays rather too much blame for later events at the door of the Popular Assembly and its members. "Torres and the Marxist-Leninist ideologues with their inflated rhetoric," he writes, "merely exacerbated an already volatile situation and sent Bolivia reeling into one of the most repressive military governments in modern Latin American history" (p. 3). Certainly intemperate statements by Bolivia's socialist-minded parties helped to polarize political positions in mid-1971, and to make a right-wing *golpe* more likely. But greater balance is needed in Knudson's coverage. He doesn't put much stress, for example, on the fact that many labor leaders tried to restrain the "ideological left" during Asamblea sessions, or on the frustrating military veto that blocked any serious assembly efforts to recruit the peasants as backers for Torres. For most of Knudson's account, as well, the conservative *militares* are an offstage presence, whose motives go largely unexamined; they enter the action only to overthrow President Torres. Such unequal emphasis produces a paradoxical and inaccurate image: left-wing politicians appear as the chief culprits in the generation of a right-wing coup.

In a sense, the lopsided stress in Knudson's otherwise useful work is an indication of a much more generalized "blind spot" in many studies of Bolivia—we have learned far too little about the forces of conservatism. Both in Bolivia and abroad, most observers have concentrated on studying the left (out of fear or admiration) or the old reformist populists (usually with a guarded optimism). By contrast, virtually no one has paid any attention to the right, which was assumed to represent the enemy or (more commonly) simply the past. As a result, a great many important groups and individuals have been almost totally ignored: there is no historical or political study, even on a journalistic level, of Falange Socialista; there are only laudatory "campaign biographies" of René Barrientos, and almost nothing on his fascinating and opportunistic adjutant, Fernando Diez de Medina; most seriously, the literature on Bolivia's military is quite brief and superficial.

Most of the works under review here (along with some by this reviewer) share this blind spot, and it will need correcting. In relation to her level of social modernization, Bolivia experienced an "early" middle-class takeover twenty-five years ago; if she is now passing precociously into some form of bureaucratic authoritarianism, we should understand the strengths and weaknesses of that movement's major backers. If, for example, Knudson had as much information on the 1971 debates of the military high command as he does on the debates of the Asamblea Popular, his view of Banzer's coup might be markedly different. Though it will mean a major shift in scholars' attention, we need to find out a great deal more about the postrevolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces now in control, as Bolivia passes through the changes of this decade and heads for the 1980s.

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NOTES

1. See for example his essay, "The Economic Transformation," in James M. Malloy and Richard Thorn, eds., *Beyond the Revolution: Bolivia Since 1952* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), pp. 157–216.
2. Cf. Malloy's recent analysis, "Authoritarianism and Corporatism: The Case of Bolivia," in Malloy, ed., *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977). There Malloy describes Bolivia's class politics as a result of the interplay between external dependency and domestic patron-client relationships—two phenomena whose mutual relevance is too often wholly ignored.
3. International Monetary Fund, *International Financial Statistics*, April 1976, pp. 72–73.
4. A recent and welcome exception is: Guillermo Lora, *A History of the Bolivian Labour Movement 1848–1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).