

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Organizing Dissent: Unions, the State, and the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico* by Maria Lorena Cook

Review by: M. Victoria Murillo

Source: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (May, 1999), pp. 512-514

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/157922>

Accessed: 30-06-2020 17:44 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Latin American Studies*

As the international situation deteriorated after 1936, Mexican foreign-policy decision-makers considered that a general war (the advent of which they could do nothing to affect) would present opportunities as well as risks. This consideration led them in turn to seek Mexico's advantage wherever it might be found. In the end, however, they accepted with equanimity a broader and deeper subordination to the United States than many Mexican nationalists of all ideological stripes could easily tolerate. (But tolerate it they would have to, under Avila Camacho: for the trade-off benefits of the US connection would be great, especially to conservatives, and the power of the institutionalised revolutionary state to exert its will formidable.) Schuler finds the immediate roots of the oil expropriation of March 1938 in the general economic crisis into which Mexico had fallen the year before. He argues that despite the excited rhetoric generated on both sides by the expropriation, the rapprochement between the USA and Mexico, which would culminate in *Avilacamachismo*, was already well in train by mid-1938. (Cárdenas, Schuler shows, was fortunate to time the announcement of the nationalisation of oil with the German *Anschluss* of Austria; the world's attention was turned elsewhere. Nor could the hapless British establishment in Mexico achieve a common front with the North Americans.) As to the reputed opportunism of Nazi Germany, Schuler demonstrates that the fascist states were too much in thrall to Royal Dutch Shell and Standard Oil to challenge the blockade organised by the latter powers and dominions. Indeed, it would appear that the German presence in Mexican thinking and planning, to which the book's title adverts, was rather greater before 1938 than after.

The book's first two chapters review at considerable length the Mexican actors – individuals and bureaucracies – in foreign-policy making and the state of relations with Mexico's important foreign partners. There follows an analysis of the crisis of 1937 and the revision of development strategy that emerged from it; a chapter on the nationalisation of 1938; a diffuse chapter on the hugger-mugger of propaganda and conspiracy (foreign and domestic) of the later 1930s; the foreign links pursued by the Mexican military in its quest for modernisation (the soldiers, according to Schuler, were easier pushovers for the North Americans than the civilians); and an excellently-presented analysis of the transition from Cárdenas to Avila Camacho and the US role in it. Schuler's research in Mexican, US, British, and German archives is exhaustive. The book is no joy to read, even by academic standards. Even so, it is a very important book, for it takes most seriously the capacity of the Mexican post-revolutionary elite to define and pursue (with great tenacity and skill) the nation's objectives in less-than-promising circumstances. And thereby corrects some long-cherished misconceptions. Friedrich Schuler is to be applauded.

Simon Fraser University (Emeritus)

RONALD C. NEWTON

Maria Lorena Cook, *Organizing Dissent: Unions, the State, and the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1996), pp. xvi + 359, £49.50, £17.95, pb.

Maria Lorena Cook provides an innovative and thoughtful analysis of the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE), the dissident movement that emerged between 1979 and 1982 within the monopolistic the

National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) in Mexico. Her book is a comparative study of teachers' movements demanding union democratisation in six states: Chiapas, Oaxaca, Morelos, Hidalgo, Guerrero, and the state of Mexico. However, she departs from most studies on democratisation movements within Mexican unions associated with the governing PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) because she uses the framework of social movement theory to explain the emergence and success of the CNTE. To overcome the dichotomy between resource mobilisation and identity-oriented paradigms in the literature on social movements, she proposes to adapt political process theory, devised for democratic industrialised countries, for the case of authoritarian Mexico. Using this theory, Cook explains the emergence and success of social movements by focusing on the relationship between their internal organisation and their political environment. Political opportunities explain the emergence of social movements. However, in authoritarian Mexico, opportunities are related to direct negotiation with the state and are short-lived because repression is more likely. Conflicts between the state and the union leadership provided a political opportunity for the emergence of dissident teachers' movements. These conflicts shifted the focus of the union leadership towards challenging state policies and reduced its attention towards internal dissidents. Meanwhile, the state was less willing to repress those who challenged the authority of union leaders and weakened their bargaining power. The 1979 policy of deconcentration of education provided this opportunity to regional movements of democratic teachers while facilitating their battle by shifting decision-making to the state level. Yet, when the conflict was over, the opportunity elapsed.

Although Cook claims that national and regional variation in the level of elite tolerance also influenced the emergence of social movements, she does not analyse states where these social movements did not emerge despite the political opportunity created by the union-state conflict to fully test her thesis. However, she presents variation in social movements' success, in terms of survival and legal recognition. She explains the success of teachers' movements only in Chiapas and Oaxaca by their cautious political approach, the maintenance of a broad base coalition, their ability to sustain mass support, their limited use of confrontational tactics, the weak presence of the official force controlling the national union, and their early development in the cycle of protest from 1979 to 1982. Thus, legal recognition obtained by the teachers' movement in Oaxaca and Chiapas facilitated their survival and gave them a structural advantage for the new cycle of protest that would emerge in 1989.

However, legal recognition created new strains. After the social movement won control of local union structures, leadership and negotiations with state officials turned into important strategic resources that complemented mobilisation threatening to cause accountability problems. To avoid the bureaucratisation of the movements (and the threat of local union decertification), dissident teachers created an informal structure parallel to that of the union that permitted rank-and-file control of leaders. Therefore, internal democracy, the original goal of the movement, turned into a survival strategy that permitted the combination of effective negotiation and mobilisation. Cook's analysis of the double role of democracy both as a goal and as a strategy addresses an unsolved paradox of political science in terms of political representation. Although she cannot answer whether participatory democracy can be extended beyond social movements into

larger and more durable organisations, she makes us think about the relationship between democratisation and social movements. She also points out to the effect of political liberalisation in accentuating political and strategic divisions within the democratic teachers' movement. Furthermore, her description of female household obligations in the context of a strategy involving meetings of more than 14 hours and union assemblies that moved from one place to another, points to the possible bias of participatory democracy in the context of a non-democratic civil society. Overall, this is a careful empirical study of the teachers' dissent movements in Mexico that successfully adapts political process theory to the Mexican context and provides important theoretical insights on the relationship between social movements and democracy.

Yale University

M. VICTORIA MURILLO

Gary Prevost and Harry E. Vanden (eds.), *The Undermining of the Sandinista Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), pp. x + 226, £45.00, hb.

This is an important and well written book bringing together six authors who deal effectively with the impact and erosion of the Sandinista revolution since the late 1980s. The central theme throughout is somewhat ironic. The Sandinista democratic experiment induced increased popular participation in the society and yet the regime sought legitimacy through two sets of elections based on more representative procedures. Moreover, even though the party lost in the 1990 elections, the popular organisations were increasingly marginalised in the last years of the regime, and yet it is these groups that perpetuated the benefits of the revolution after the defeat, albeit with considerable strain.

The five contributions deal in turn with the status of the revolution after setting up the gains of the Sandinista reforms. Democracy, both electoral and participatory, and the political economy are treated effectively. The impact on women who always bear the brunt of the defeat far more than their male counterparts is analysed in the context of the transition, and finally the resistance to erosion of the popular organisations is treated as testimony to the endurance of the revolution. The structure of the book is therefore straightforward and the arguments are to the point: democracy can neither be conducted nor contained through the electoral process. More could have been made of the argument that the prospects for democracy are severely constrained by the international economy. To be sure the effects of the neo-liberal backlash are analysed throughout and the results are detailed and depressing. But, more questions could be asked about the 'prospects for democracy' (David Held) within a globalised economy. That is, there is an important anomaly between the pervasive effects of the free market and its relationship to political systems constrained by the nation state. The questions of legitimacy, constituency, and consent are of paramount importance in such conditions.

If the book is situated within the literature on globalisation, its precise findings are still important. Prevost's analysis of the erosion of the Sandinista revolution demonstrates above all the importance of the power base in popular democracy. Despite the electoral loss and the FSLN strategies since 1990, they are now considered a part of the problem rather than the solution. Radical change, should