

Latin America: Revolution and Reaction

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Table 1: Table1

1. Introduction

The arrest in 1998 in London of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet raised questions about whether Latin America needed to seek justice of the abuses of the 20th century or move ahead. Latin American countries in the 20th century have been part of the developing world, though their Western political and social structures set them apart from Asia and Africa. Since 1945, Latin America has dealt with struggles over economic development, social justice, and the rise of new social groups. Despite broad shifts in politics and the economy, the region remained remarkably unchanged.

1. Latin America After World War II

1. 1. Introduction

After 1945, economic growth was accompanied by revolutionary agitation, which led to intervention by the United States. Authoritarian reformers dominated the immediate post-war period. The overthrow of Juan Perón in Argentina led to decades of military government, culminating in the violent repression and defeat in war with Britain.

1. 1. Mexico and the PRI

In Mexico, the PRI's dominance of Mexico was undercut by corruption and lack of social development. A revolutionary group, the Zapatistas, appeared in 1994. A free-trade agreement with the United States brought mixed results. Finally, the PRI lost the presidency

in 2000 to Vicente Fox, who promised clean government.

1. Radical Options in the 1950s

1. 1. Introduction

By the 1940s, there was substantial political demand for reform in much of Latin America. Democratic governments successfully carried out reforms in Venezuela and Costa Rica. Others turned to models of Marxist revolution. As political democratization, economic development, and social reforms began to fail in most parts of Latin America, more radical solutions to ongoing problems were sought. Governments that attempted to move too swiftly were often met by resistance from the military.

1. 1. Guatemala: Reform and United States Intervention

The first nation to attempt more radical reforms was Guatemala. In 1944, President Juan José Arevalo instituted a new constitution, initiated land reform, and instituted civil rights for laborers. To fund internal reforms and an education system, Arevalo's government imposed an income tax. Attempts to nationalize economic resources brought Arevalo's government into conflict with the United Fruit Co. of the United States. The program of economic nationalization advanced under President Jacobo Arbenz, elected in 1951. As Arbenz's program became more aggressive, the United States imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions. In 1954, a CIA-assisted military coup unseated Arbenz. The pro-American military government that followed revoked many of the reforms previously made. When no further reforms occurred, a guerrilla movement emerged in Guatemala.

1. 1. The Cuban Revolution: Socialism in the Caribbean

Cuba was economically more advanced than Guatemala but remained dependent on an export economy closely tied to the markets of the United States. Growing differences between a relatively wealthy urban sector and an impoverished rural economy provoked political dissent. Fulgencio Batista had ruled Cuba between 1934 and 1944. He had proposed reforms, including a democratic constitution. When he returned to power in 1952, he was less interested in reform than in maintaining power. In 1953, a rebellion under Fidel Castro failed. When released from prison, Castro fled to Mexico, where he reorganized the resistance to Batista with the help of an Argentinean revolutionary, Ernesto (Ché) Guevara. In 1956, Castro and Guevara invaded Cuba. After two years of guerrilla resistance, they successfully ousted the Batista government. Instead of reestablishing the democratic constitution of 1940, Castro proclaimed a Marxist state complete with centralized economic planning. All economic resources were nationalized. When relations with the United States were severed in 1961, Castro's government became increasingly dependent on support from the Soviet Union. Social reforms under Castro were extensive but often at the expense of individual liberties. Attempts to move beyond an export economy dependent on sugar have fundamentally failed.

Latin America: Revolution and Reaction

Some other Latin American nations chose to model revolutions on the Cuban example.

1. The Search for Reform and the Military Option

1. 1. Introduction

Although revolutions occurred, most often they left the underlying social and economic problems unchanged. In the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, military governments became prevalent in Latin America. The search for political stability led to single-party rule (Mexico), and increasing roles for the Roman Catholic Church and Christian Democratic parties (Chile and Venezuela), as well as the active intervention of the Church in the search for social justice through liberation theology.

1. 1. Out of the Barracks: Soldiers Take Power

By the 1960s, Latin American military leaders believed that they were professionals best equipped to resolve problems of political instability. Concerned about the success of the Cuban revolution, the military began to seize direct control of governments. Military coups, often with the compliance of the United States, overthrew governments in Brazil (1964), Argentina (1966), Chile (1973), Uruguay (1973), and Peru (1968). Military governments were supposed to be above political partisanship and produce economic stability. Military governments most often consisted of presidencies assisted by organized bureaucracies. Such governments were often brutally repressive. Military economic policies sought to crush labor movements, develop new industrial strength, and promote the building of the infrastructure. In most cases, social problems were scarcely addressed. All military regimes were nationalistic. The nationalism of the Argentine government led to a confrontation with Britain over control of the Falkland Islands in 1982.

1. 1. The New Democratic Trend

In many parts of Latin America, the military began to restore civilian governments in the 1980s. In some areas, such as Peru, guerrilla movements continued to oppose democratization. In Nicaragua, the elections of 1990 produced a democratic government under Violeta Chamorro, but the revolutionary Sandinista party continued to exist. The United States intervened to end the military rule of Manuel Noriega in Panama. Economic stability in Latin America continued to be threatened by mountains of foreign debt, high inflation, low standards of living, and increasing levels of criminal activity. Despite problems, democratization of political systems continued in the 1990s.

1. 1. The United States and Latin America: Continuing Presence

In terms of economic presence and diplomatic pressure, the United States remained the greatest external force in Latin America. Puerto Rico became a protectorate of the United States. Elsewhere in the Caribbean, the United States intervened directly whenever it

believed its interests to be threatened. There were more than 30 interventions before 1933. In Central America, the level of investment by U.S. corporations was so high that the region also experienced a high level of military intervention. Those who opposed U.S. intervention or who attempted to nationalize resources were branded Communists or bandits. In Nicaragua, Augusto Sandino led resistance to U.S. influence until his assassination in 1934. Intervention in Latin America was often followed by the establishment of puppet governments, derisively referred to as Banana Republics, friendly to the United States. Intervention helped to spread nationalist movements in Central America. After 1933, the United States introduced the Good Neighbor Policy, but intervention was renewed after World War II on the pretext of containing communism. U.S. programs, such as the Alliance for Progress, attempted to provide economic aid as a means of raising standards of living and reducing radical movements. Little significant development occurred as a result. In the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. intervention was somewhat less flagrant. President Jimmy Carter signed a treaty returning the Panama Canal zone to Panama. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush pursued more aggressive policies in Latin America, including the overthrow of Manuel Noriega in Panama.

1. Societies in Search of Change

1. 1. Introduction

Social conditions in Latin America changed only slowly, but some reforms did occur. Population distribution and growing urbanization was a major factor. Major problems related to ethnicity and gender continue to exist.

1. 1. Slow Change in Women's Roles

Gender equality was a goal more than a reality in Latin America. In most nations, women did not receive the right to vote until the 1940s and 1950s. Males excluded women from political life out of fear that their traditional associations with organized religion would make them conservative. In response, women formed organizations and suffrage associations that slowly resulted in enfranchisement. Once admitted to political parties, women found that they were excluded from real influence. Only in some few cases, such as the election of Perón in Argentina and Eduardo Frei in Chile, did women play critical roles. Just before World War I, women began to enter the industrial labor force, where they worked for lower wages than their male counterparts. Women tended to join anarchist, socialist, and other labor groups as part of the unskilled labor force. In service sectors and some market economies, women have risen to positions of prominence in Latin America, but more significant economic roles did not imply greater social status. By the 1990s, the position of women in Latin America was closer to the West than other areas of the world.

1. 1. The Movement of People

Latin America: Revolution and Reaction

After 1950, the population of Latin America rapidly outstripped that of North America. Internal migration caused by low employment rates and political flight has always been a factor for population mobility. Migration from Latin America to the United States, often illegal, was similar to the movement of workers from southern Europe and Africa to the industrialized nations of Western Europe. Many immigrants fled from political repression. Movement from rural areas to the cities is also an aspect of population mobility in Latin America. By the 1980s, about one half of the population was urbanized. Urban economies have not been able to absorb the influx, so massive slums are characteristic of Latin American cities. Lack of employment has prevented recent immigrants from identifying with urban workers.

1. 1. Cultural Reflections of Despair and Hope

Latin America remains predominantly Catholic and Hispanic with admixtures of African and Indian cultures. Latin America has produced many world-famous authors, poets, and artists. Indigenous cultures and the plight of the poor are common themes in Latin American art and literature. Repelled by the failure of reform and the continuation of social and economic problems, authors of the 1960s turned away from reality to the fantastic and the absurd.

1. Global Connections: Struggling Toward the Future in a Global Economy

Latin American continues to struggle for economic growth, social justice, and political stability. Attempts at radical reform have brought some changes, and Latin America remains ahead of much of the developing world. Globalization brings new challenges but also exacerbates older problems. The influence of the United States has altered the cultural landscape. At the same time Latin America has become a major contributor to global culture in art, film, and music.