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Ã?ngelo Segrillo. *RÃºssia e Brasil em TransformaÃ§Ã£o: uma breve histÃ³ria dos partidos russos e brasileiros na democratizaÃ§Ã£o polÃtica [Russia and Brazil transformed: a brief history of Russian and Brazilian political parties during political democratizat.* Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras Publishers, 2005. 251 pp. R27.90 (paper), ISBN 978-85-7577-175-4.

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Different Beginnings, Similar End-Situations, or: Comparative Politicsin the Periphery of Capitalism

This book is at the same time two things: a comparative description of the history of the birth and development of multiparty political systems in both Russia and Brazil (with a naturally much longer time span considered in the analysis of the Brazilian case); and a normative analysis, based on various theoretical models, of how both systems fare in terms of developing a "mature" democratic polity. I think the work copes far better with the first, historic-descriptive, task, than with the second, normative, one–to the point of rendering the two halves of the work almost contradictory to each other.

But then, in what terms should the reading of this work be recommended to an English-speaking public?- When analyzing post-communist politics from an Anglophone viewpoint, one will almost unwittingly try to frame one's analysis in terms of describing the lesser or greater ability of the national political system to "adjust" to a "mature" and "stable" pattern of political competition on American/Western European lines, by which is meant namely the ability of the system to represent various societal interests by means of a stable ideological spectrum which then establishes a stable pattern of transaction between various particular interests. In both the Russian and the Brazilian case, what is conspicuously lacking is exactly this stable pattern of party competition, in that the paramount role of state apparatuses renders party systems ideologically fuzzy and organizationally amorphous. The fact that we have in both cases (very) different historical backgrounds suggests that the scholar ought to pay attention to the similarities in present circumstances: Brazil and Russia are large peripheral countries that, after a long period of state-led industrialization, have fared rather poorly economically and socially under conditions of market-friendly globalization. The fact that Professor Segrillo has chosen to concentrate his comparison on the endpoints of both processes, instead of their departure-points, is in my view one of the strengths of his book.

After a short introduction, the second chapter of the book outlines the history of Russian political parties; after offering the briefest possible account of the pre-1917 period and the development of the Bolshevik one-party system, it settles down to a detailed description of the post-Soviet period. Unfortunately, the need to be descriptive makes most of the chapter tough reading, as we soon get lost into the "alphabet soup" of Russian political parties. True, the author provides a list of acronyms at the very beginning (pp. 9-10), but it is about as serviceable as a list of characters in the beginning of a Russian classic novel; the reader soon becomes bogged down in a "which-is-which" game. As in novel-reading, the ready advice is to concentrate on the general flow and to forget details. When we reach the description of the 1992-1993, "second wave" period, we find a triangular situation, with a clear Left-Right cleavage: the former composed by the various Communist formations, the latter by the nationalist-rightist ones–both opposing a center that includes Boris Yel'tsin's supporting base as well as his "loyal opposition"–"those who had always fought the forces of the 'Left-Right opposition' in Yel'tsin's favor, but who, with the deepening of the economic and social crisis in 1992, had begun to demand a reevaluation of the methods used to introduce Capitalism in the country" (p. 37). This gradual rapprochement between the dissatisfied center and the "irreconcilable opposition," boiling down to a clash between the executive and the legislative, led to the shelling of the Russian Parliament on October 4, 1993.

October 1993 is a watershed to Segrillo because it presents an apparent paradox: Yel'tsin's establishment of a quasi-authoritarian presidential regime without a corresponding clear-cut ideological basis of support, as the

adjustment of Russian capitalism to the claims of "national interest" meant the demise of an ideological center. Conversely, the leftist opposition saw the emergence of a clear leading force: Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), which, by appealing to all interests suffering from the post-traumatic disorder of the introduction of Russia into capitalism, could aspire, in Zyuganov's words, to benefit from the "snowball theory." Since that party's presidential candidate had garnered around 40 percent of the votes in the second electoral round, even in the Red Scare conditions of the 1996 presidential elections, this "'ascendant surge' allowed them to count on a greater future victory" (p. 57). But that was not to be: on the contrary, during the transition from Yel'tsin to Vladimir Putin, the latter's adroit manipulation of the Chechen question allowed him to "steal" into the CPRF's "national interest" platform. With the subsequent economic development during the Putin era, the CPRF increasingly lost electoral ground on the issue of Russia's national interests. But then, the plight of the CPRF was almost the same as that of the ideological liberal center (Yabloko), the center's purely parliamentary character and consequent absence of mass activist support notwithstanding.

Besides the leftist CPRF and the liberal Yabloko, there is also in Russia another important ideological party, Vladimir Zhirinovskii's rightist (neofascist) Liberal Democratic Party of Russia; but the fact is that, as far as concrete political leverage is concerned, all such ideological players fade before "physiological" (a term of Brazilian political slang meaning, roughly, pork-barrel-friendly) formations such as Putin's Unified Russia, the inchoate formation conjured out of Putin's electoral needs. As Segrillo writes, in the way of a summing up: "According to [Russian] law, the president does not have to be affiliated to a political party [and therefore stands] above 'minor' party disputes.... Many of the most voted parties are created in the eve of elections only to support a candidate to President or Prime Minister, frequently disappearing from the scene after fulfilling this task.... The servile character of the parties, as mere tools of presidential support, amounts to a constant state of flux, where parties are created and disappear according to the ruler's whims" (p. 91).

This leads to an important conclusion: in the Russian conditions, the relative weight of a party formation does not depend on the *concrete social interests* on which it relies, but on its access to the state apparatus, i.e., its power of political leverage, as expressed by its connections to the executive.

The third chapter of the work tries to explain this apparent paradox by providing a comparison with the Brazilian case. Nothing could be more removed from the Russian case as far as initial conditions are concerned. The Brazilian party system developed in the mid-nineteenth century into a constitutional monarchy around which developed what was most of the time a game of Cox-and-Box (i.e., winner-takes-all) for each succeeding cabinet between two rival coteries, the Liberals and Conservatives–a simple means of managing a more or less "equitable" spoils system. As the monarchy lost its nationwide sway over the landed elite, this gave way to the more decentralized give-and-take of regional landowners' oligarchies of the Early Republic (1889-1930). However, this closed polity, with the onset of industrializing pressure, did not "open" into a developed party system, but was further confined in the institution of the strictly *non*-party Vargas dictatorship (1937-1945), which "intended to unsettle by force the equilibrium between agrarian and industrial interests and at the same time to deal ... with the organizing of the working class as such ... by mean of corporatist trade-unions" (pp. 107-108). The re-democratization of 1945 instituted a multiparty system, which, however, had at its core the bureaucratic apparatus of the Vargas era as expressed in the loose alliance between the Vargoist top-brass Social-Democratic Party and the minor unionist bureaucracy of the Brazilian Labor Party, opposed by both an ideological Right (the National Democratic Union) and an ideological Left (the Brazilian CP). The radicalization of the 1960s led to the 1964 military coup, which instituted a modernizing military dictatorship (1964-1985), also on a nonpartisan basis, under a bipartisan facade. Ultimately, with the 1985 re-democratization, we have an increasing fragmentation of the party system under increasingly neoliberal governments, with the Left, now having as its core the Workers' Party, apparently doing what Zyuganov's CPRF in Russia failed to do–"snowballing" into the presidency, but then eventually building a parliamentary support apparatus based on "a slimy agreement with the leadership of the heterogeneous Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement" as well as with other "chameleonic" supporters (pp. 127-128). In other words, from the most different historical starting points, Brazil and Russia entered the twenty-first century, in spite of equally critical social problems (concentrated income distribution, scrapping of important parts of the industrial base, rampant criminality, etc.) as something like ideologically fuzzy formal democracies where the survival of all kinds of authoritarian remnants do not prevent the maintenance (in varying degrees) of the outwards ele-

ments of a liberal democracy ...

That descriptive task accomplished, Professor Segrillo tries to find in chapter 4 a theoretical framework for developing an explanatory model dealing effectively with the two cases. As far as actual results are concerned, however, Professor Segrillo tends to fall into the old trap of mixing up the descriptive with the normative; therefore he falls short of offering a common explanation for the present similarities between the Russian and Brazilian party systems, instead of it portraying the two countries as a kind of twin monstrosity, a common case of political freakishness. He tends, if only for a start, to favor Latin America scholar Scott Mainwaring's implicitly normative model (*Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization* [1999]) that sees the hallmark of a consolidated party system as being the "rooted-ness" of political parties in the web of societal interests (p. 174). In both Russia and Brazil, this situation obtains only in exceptional cases, namely the Workers' Party in Brazil and the CPRF in Russia. Both of these parties have been unable to translate social influence into political power as such. But then, Segrillo must ultimately explain the conundrum of these two political systems that are outwardly ideological but in practice function on a thoroughly nonideological, pork-barrel basis. Therefore, in the final excursus, Professor Segrillo falls back onto, firstly, a cultural explanation, by quoting (on p. 181) Richard Pipes' *Russia under the Old Regime* (1974) about "patrimonialism" as the bane of the Russian (and, by approximation, Brazilian) body politic; secondly, he leans in the opposite direction into a kind of residual Marxism, quoting Vladimir Lenin's *State and Revolution* (1918) about the unimportance of political forms as opposed to the *class* character of the bourgeois state (p. 202ff). Both of these explanations would make the entire study ultimately irrelevant: if the fault of both systems lies in their defective cultural basis, or if both are the same as far as relevant issues are concerned, then why study their concrete historical evolution?

Instead of somehow abusing Comrade Ilitch's work, I would propose to accept that present-day Brazil and Russia are undoubtedly bonafide bourgeois states, on the same footing as the United States, Japan, or the United Kingdom. However, simply to state that would mean to echo Comrade Josef Stalin, who, sometime in the late 1920s, said that "the general features of capitalism are the same for all countries"–a quote found in Leon Trotsky's *The Permanent Revolution.*[1] True enough, but, as Trotsky remarked back then, the capitalist economy existing as a global whole, the *specific positions* held in it by a particular society and body politic, can be quite different. This is especially true when we think of a divide between a *core*, where the role of the state apparatus is, in principle, to upheld the "rule of law"–that is, to provide minimal conditions simply for capitalist accumulation to reproduce itself unhampered–and a *periphery* (to which both Brazil and Russia belong), where the state must of necessity "shield" society from the consequences of the process of accumulation in the core–consequences which are mostly *not* of the periphery's own choice or decision. Hence, in all peripheral societies, the autonomy of the state from "civil society"–or, better, the actual dependency of the latter on the former, the necessity of capitalist interests to support themselves on the state apparatus in order to shield themselves minimally against economic uncertainty, something that applies to all peripheral countries in the present setting–irrespective of what "the snows of yesteryear" were in each particular case. This is the general conclusion Professor Segrillo fails to draw.

But then, it is perhaps in this perplexity that the main merit of Professor Segrillo's work resides, in that he fails exactly to propose setting actual reality to rights by conforming it to an *ex ante* normative model–something, unfortunately, that makes much of the present episteme in the core's academic milieu. This is why an English translation of this work should be highly recommended–if we were to surmount the problem of translating and publishing a work whose interest to an English-speaking public would be mainly for graduate students and scholars interested in comparative analysis.

Note

[1]. Leon Trotsy, *The Permanent Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), quote on p. 147.

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