



Kevin A. Young, ed. *Making the Revolution: Histories of the Latin American Left*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xvii + 302 pp. \$99.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-108-42399-1.

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On November 10, 2019, the Bolivian military “requested” that President Evo Morales vacate the presidency, which he did. After initially fleeing to Mexico, Morales settled as an exile in Argentina. This coup d’état, which came in the aftermath of contested elections and mass mobilizations, repeated a familiar dynamic in Latin American history of armed forces ousting democratically elected officials from office. Yet in the aftermath of the November events, those on the political left in Bolivia and beyond debated how to properly understand what had happened. Some pointed to popular opposition to Morales’s presidency, during which social movements have confronted the limits of his extractivist policies, as evidence that it was in fact not a coup. Others emphasized the role of the armed forces in “requesting” Morales’s resignation as clear evidence of a non-electoral removal from power, underscoring how there have frequently been levels of popular support for such undemocratic actions. These debates, which played out as events unfolded, centered on the relationship between social movements, left electoral strategies, and state power. They also involved questions of indigeneity and the nature of representational politics. According to some, President Morales’s ouster may mark the definitive end of the so-called pink tide in Latin America. Today

the prospects for the left in Latin America are sobering.[1]

In this context, the new edited volume *Making the Revolution: Histories of the Latin American Left* is a welcome contribution for understanding the left’s past but also its potential futures. Covering the broad sweep of the twentieth century in ten different countries, *Making the Revolution* offers a detailed portrayal of a diverse and heterogeneous left. The contributors, whether senior or up-and-coming historians, share a scholarly and political agenda of thinking through the left’s engagement with questions of gender, race, and indigeneity. This has an enormous analytical yield. Taken together, the chapters provide a rich and nuanced understanding of struggles against inequality in nearly all its forms in the region. The volume constitutes a resounding riposte to narratives of the “left’s class reductionism” (p. 2). The essays emphasize the significance of alliance and coalition building, personal or affective relationships, and the politics of solidarity in left organizing. The authors are at their best when paying attention to the processes of revolutionary organizing, emphasizing the quotidian practice of left politics more than official leaders or party discourses.

In his introduction, Kevin A. Young offers a four-part periodization to think through this history. Young identifies the first period as the years im-

mediately following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the rise of Communist parties throughout the hemisphere. The second period centers on the years of the popular front through the post-World War II era. Margaret Powers's chapter on the US Communist Party's relationship with Puerto Rican nationalist organizing demonstrates the internationalism of this period and the significance of personal relationships in solidarity activism. The 1959 Cuban Revolution anchors the third period, which was shaped by the popularity of new left ideas and third-worldism. Finally, Young offers the 1970s and 1980s and the renewed revolutionary ferment in Central America as the fourth period of the century.

Michele Chase's chapter on the 1959 Congress of Latin American Women is a highlight of the volume and demonstrates the utility of its analytical focus. The congress, held in Santiago, Chile, was part of longer-standing, Old Left internationalist organizing. Examining Cuban participation at the congress in the aftermath of the 1959 revolution, Chase moves beyond simplistic narratives of state co-optation of women's rights activism, either by the Cuban postrevolutionary state or by Soviet allies. By analyzing the multiple tendencies within women's rights organizing in Cuba, Chase demonstrates the depth of the political scene and uncovers popular participation of Cuban women in the congress itself. In Santiago, participants called for the recognition of the unique experiences of black and indigenous women, a history that interrupts typical chronologies of feminism in the Americas. Chase also excels at analyzing the Cuban delegation's formal proclamations during the congress, citing Vilma Espín's declaration that Latin American women were sisters in "the pain of limitless exploitation" (p. 176).

Another highlight of the volume is Betsy Konefal's profile of Maya-K'iche activist and revolutionary Emeterio Toj Medrano and his involvement in the Guatemalan Civil War. Focusing on Toj's political formation, joining Catholic Action organizing

efforts and ultimately collaborating with the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, Konefal examines the crucial relationship between indigeneity and revolutionary politics in Guatemala in the 1980s. In one of the more dramatic moments of a brutal civil war, Toj was kidnapped by the army in 1981. Tortured and forced to denounce his revolutionary activity on the radio in Spanish and his native K'iche, Toj remained true to his principles. Through his choice of words and tone, he subtly conveyed in K'iche that his denunciation was forced and insincere. Konefal's deft analysis demonstrates how indigeneity was a crucial component of the revolutionary struggle in Guatemala and informed both "insurgent and counterinsurgent strategies" (p. 241). These, along with chapters on Aymara-speaking Bolivian anarchists (Young and Forrest Hylton), women activists in the Salvadoran Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Diana Carolina Sierra Becerra), and Afro-Caribbean workers in Cuba (Barry Carr), all demonstrate a variegated and vibrant political tradition while making specific interventions into national historiographies. As Young succinctly puts it, "These studies suggest that the familiar distinction between class and identity movements distorts the way that many activists understood their own efforts" (p. 6).

In a volume that collectively draws our attention to the rich history of left theoretical and organizational work in Latin America, and specifically questions of gender, race, and indigeneity, the omission of a chapter on Brazil is a notable weakness. The Brazilian left's long history of engaging in such questions would have had much to contribute. Nonetheless, the volume's chronological and geographic breadth are its strengths. It will be a valuable resource for students and scholars of the region as well as those interested in imagining more equitable futures in the Americas. *Making the Revolution* will no doubt serve as a touchstone for young scholars interested in charting more nu-

anced and engaged histories of the continent's left and struggles for liberation in Latin America.

Note

[1]. While the electoral realm remains challenging for the Latin American left, mass demonstrations in Chile and Ecuador have revived long-standing traditions of protest.

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