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0521430321 - Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War,
1944-1948

Edited by Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough

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The aim of this volume is to establish that the period between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War (1944–5 to 1947–8), hitherto neglected, represents an important conjuncture in the political and social history of Latin America in the twentieth century. The volume contains, besides an introduction and a conclusion by the editors, case studies of eleven of the twenty Latin American republics.

Despite differences of political regime, different levels of economic and social development, and different relations with the region's hegemonic power – the United States – there are striking similarities in the experiences of the majority of the Latin American republics in this period. For most of Latin America it can be divided into two phases. The first, coinciding with the Allied victory in the Second World War, was characterized by three distinct but interrelated phenomena: democratization, with a relatively high level of middle class and working class participation; a shift to the Left, both Communist and non-Communist; and unprecedented labor militancy. In the second phase, coinciding with the onset of the Cold War and completed almost everywhere by 1948, labor was disciplined by the state and in many cases excluded from politics; Communist parties almost everywhere suffered proscription and severe repression; reformist, “progressive” parties moved to the Right; the democratic advance was for the most part contained, and in some cases reversed. An opportunity, however limited, for significant political and social change, as well as for the first steps perhaps toward a Latin American version of social democracy, was lost. Instead, the institutional and ideological foundations were laid for Latin America's postwar “model” of economic growth without equity within a context of, at best, fragile and intermittent democracy.

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Preface

This book has its origins in Leslie Bethell's interest in the historical fragility of democracy in Brazil, in particular his interest in the transition from the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas to a limited form of democracy in 1945–6, and in Ian Roxborough's interest in the Mexican model of state-sponsored labor unions, which included an interest in the so-called *charrazo*, the intervention of the state to prop up a conservative union leadership in 1948. A historian and a sociologist, academic colleagues and friends, discovered almost a decade ago that they were both interested, initially for different reasons, in the history of Latin America during the period from the end of the Second World War to the beginning of the Cold War.

Comparing what we knew about Brazil and Mexico and drawing on our (limited) knowledge of other Latin American countries during the years 1944–8, we came to the conclusion that despite differences of political regime and different levels of economic and social development, there were striking similarities in the experience of a number, perhaps a majority, of Latin American republics, and that a period generally recognized as critical in the history of most other regions of the world in the twentieth century represented a more significant conjuncture in the political and social history of twentieth-century Latin America than had hitherto been recognized. Moreover, although Latin America's participation in the Second World War had been only marginal (in military terms at least), and although Latin America was not at first a focal point of conflict in the Cold War, the nature, and more importantly the outcome, of the postwar conjuncture was determined in Latin America as elsewhere not only by the changing balance of domestic political and social forces but also by the impact of the rapidly changing international context.

As a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., during the spring and summer of 1987, Leslie Bethell not only further pursued his research on Brazilian democratization

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at the end of the Second World War, but also initiated a new research project on Latin America's role in the post-Second World War political (and economic) international order. At the same time, Ian Roxborough continued his work on Mexican labor history during the 1940s, consulting material in the national archives in Mexico City, London, and Washington, D.C.

In an article published in the *Journal of Latin American Studies* in February 1988, we offered some preliminary reflections on the 1944-8 conjuncture in Latin America. For most of Latin America, we argued, the immediate postwar period could be divided into two phases: the first, coinciding with the Allied victory in the Second World War, was characterized by democratization, a shift to the left (both Communist and non-Communist), and unprecedented labor militancy; the second, coinciding with the onset of the Cold War and completed everywhere (except in Guatemala) by 1948, was characterized by the assertion or reassertion of state control over labor, the proscription and repression of Communist parties, and the containment – and in some cases reversal – of the advance to democracy. An opportunity, however limited, for significant political and social change in Latin America had been lost.

In the meantime, we had begun to invite other historians and social scientists to contribute case studies of the immediate postwar experience of particular Latin American countries (apart from Brazil and Mexico) to a volume we now planned to edit. Many of the chapters in this book were first presented as papers at a conference we organized, with financial support from the Nuffield Foundation, at the University of London Institute of Latin American Studies in October 1987. We also organized a panel on political change in Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War at the Latin American Studies Association meeting in New Orleans in March 1988, and a conference comparing the impact on Latin America of the Second World War with that of the First World War at the London School of Economics in February 1989.

By this time we had come into contact with an even wider range of scholars working on related themes. For example, in December 1987 and December 1989 we both participated in conferences on Latin America in the 1940s that were organized by David Rock at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In March 1988 and April 1989, Leslie Bethell participated in meetings on the export of democracy as a theme in U.S.–Latin American relations in the twentieth century organized by Abraham F. Lowenthal at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Ian Roxborough presented papers at a conference on Communist parties in the 1940s organized by Geoff Eley of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in November 1989 and at a conference on the Cold War organized by Alan Hunter at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in October

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1991. In one way or another at all these conferences we were able to test our ideas on the nature and significance of the postwar conjuncture in Latin America.

Many of the contributors to this volume commented on the chapters of their colleagues. We are especially grateful in this respect to James Dunkerley, Steve Ellner, and Laurence Whitehead. In addition, the following colleagues indirectly contributed to the volume at various stages with both their ideas and their encouragement: Alan Angell, David Collier, Ruth Berins Collier, Paul Drake, Valpy Fitzgerald, and Rosemary Thorp.

At the New York office of the Cambridge University Press, Katharita Lamoza was production editor and Kerime B. Toksu was copy editor. The index was prepared by Kathryn Torgeson. For her assistance throughout the preparation of this book, we should especially like to thank Hazel Aitken, Leslie Bethell's secretary at the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London during his term as Director (1987–92).