

# LATIN AMERICAN CONTRIBUTION TO MARXIST THOUGHT

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The diffusion of Marxism in Latin America received an initial impulse with the formation of socialist and communist political parties during the first decades of this century (Liss, 1984). The official Marxism which espoused in Latin America was Eurocentric and Marx's few, ill-informed, and superficial writings on Latin America (which have been collected in Marx and Engels, 1975) did not help (Lowy, 1980). The recognition of Marx's break with his eurocentrism as revealed in his writings on Ireland, China, Turkey, and the Russian commune, among others, has appeared late. Jose Arico has done much by means of his writings (1980) and editorial work in propagating Marx's changed position on the peripheries of capitalism. Various generations of students throughout the Spanish-speaking world have learnt Marxism from the Chilean Marta Harnecker who has written the popular Marxist textbook (1969). Her brand of Marxism is a structuralist-Althusserian one.

The first Latin American Marxist who began to read Marx from a Latin American perspective was Jose Carlos Mariategui (1971, originally published in 1928). His writings were the first major challenge to official eurocentric Marxism in Latin America which in turn paved the way to a Latin American Marxism (Franco, 1981). Mariategui's analysis differed from official Marxism in a variety of ways. He rejected the deterministic as well as the social democratic revisionist strands in Marxism, and argued that the development of capitalism in Latin America differed from the classical European model in that it did not eliminate pre-capitalist social relations of production and only intensified the domination of imperialist monopoly capital. Imperialist capital was linked to, and profited from, pre-capitalist relations. Furthermore, Mariategui saw no scope for the development of an autochthonous or independent national capitalism as the national bourgeoisie in Latin America was unable and unwilling to perform the progressive role it played in Europe. In his view the socialist revolution could not wait until capitalism had fully developed.

Mariategui was also one of the first Marxists who highlighted the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. He held that the indigenous peasant communities could form the germ of the socialist transformation in the

Peruvian countryside. His pioneering analysis of the Indian issue challenged the prevailing view that the 'indigenous question' was a racial and cultural one, arguing that it was instead rooted in the land tenure problem. In short, Mariategui foreshadows some of the central issues of, and debates within, Latin American Marxism articulating a position which from today's perspective is sometimes labelled as Neo-Marxist or national Marxist.

Despite the pioneering writings of Mariategui it was not until the 1960s that official Marxism (whose principal guardians were the Communist parties) began to lose its dominance, being challenged by the Cuban revolution and the rise of Neo-Marxism. This new Marxism in Latin America made a major contribution to the theory of revolution and transition to socialism, to the analysis of internal relations of exploitation and domination through, among others, the conceptualisation of internal colonialism, to Marx's theory of population through the concept of marginality, to the debate on modes of production, and above all to the theory of imperialism by means of the dependency theory.

A key contributor to the theory of revolution and transition to socialism is Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, the most legendary Latin America Marxist (Losy, 1973). He was a revolutionary fighter in Cuba and elsewhere ('the heroic guerrilla'), a Marxist thinker, as well as a policy maker in the Cuban revolutionary government. In his theory of revolution for the Third World he stressed the need for armed struggle and the importance of the peasantry. He argued that the insurrectionary guerrilla group (the *foco*) is the catalyst which would bring about all the necessary objective and subjective conditions for the revolution. Similarly, with regard to the transition to socialism, he argued that it was necessary to forge a new consciousness (create the 'new man') which in turn would accelerate the development of the productive forces, and not the other way round as held by orthodox Marxists. For Guevara, material incentives were secondary to moral incentives in the building of the new society. It is of interest to note that Mandel sided with Guevara in Guevara's debate (1969) with Bettelheim on the transition to socialism.

With regard to internal colonialism Gonzalez Casanova (1969) finds that many of the factors which defined a situation of colonialism between countries also exist *within* some independent Third World countries. It is this similarity which prompted him to coin the term

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'internal colonialism' when referring to the latter. The analysis of internal colonialism challenges the dualism of modernization theory and criticizes the orthodox Marxist theory for its failure to explore the links between class, ethnicity and region. At first colonial and class relations appear intermixed, with the former being dominant. With the subsequent development of capitalism, class relations increasingly entered into conflict with colonial relations. Internal colonialism, by maintaining ethnic divisions, impedes the development of class relations as ethnic consciousness overrides class consciousness (Stavenhagen, 1969).

The Marxist view on marginality originated as a critique of the modernization view on marginality and as a debate within Marxist theory. Nun (1969) created a new category - 'marginal mass' - which he differentiated from the Marxist concepts of 'relative surplus population' and 'industrial reserve army of labour'. Likewise, Quijano (1974) proposed the concepts of 'marginal labour' and 'marginal pole of the economy' and wrestled with their relationship to existing Marxist categories. Quijano and Nun pinpoint the problem of marginalisation as originating from the increasing control of foreign capital over the process of industrialisation in Latin America accentuating its monopolization. Nun argues that the penetration of multinational corporations into Latin America has created such a large relative surplus population that part of it is not only afunctional but even dysfunctional for capitalism. This part of the relative surplus population does not perform the function of an industrial reserve army of labour as it will never be absorbed into this hegemonic capitalist sector, even during the expansionary phase of the cycle, and therefore it has no influence whatsoever on the level of wages of the labour force employed by the hegemonic sector. Thus, in Nun's view, a new phenomenon unforeseen by Marx has emerged in the dependent countries. For this reason he feels justified in coining a new concept, i.e. 'marginal mass'.

Quijano's and Nun's theory of marginality has generated a lively debate largely from a Marxist perspective (Kay, 1989). The discussion has centred on three major issues: (i) the extent to which the marginality concepts differ from Marx's industrial reserve army of labour; (ii) the contribution of marginals to the process of capital accumulation and their articulation to the dominant mode of production; and (iii) the relationship between marginality and dependency. With regards to (i) the critics query the need for new concepts and hold that existent Marxist categories are adequate. With regard to (ii) they argue that the marginals' contribution to capital accumulation is far greater than suggested by the *marginalists* who are criticized for underestimating their significance for the reproduction of capitalism. The critics also put greater emphasis on analysing the social relations of production

of the marginal sector which they characterize as being largely non-capitalist but functional for capitalist accumulation. Finally, with regard to (iii) they stress that marginality depends as much on internal as external factors.

In dependency theory at least two key positions can be differentiated: reformist and Marxist. The reformist dependency approach is best seen as a further development of the Latin American structuralist school originating in CEPAL (the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean or ECLAC). Within the Marxist dependency camp are the writings of Ruy Mauro Marini, Theotonio Dos Santos, Andre Gunder Frank, Oscar Braun, Vania Bambirra, Anibal Quijano, Edelberto Torres-Rivas, and Alonso Aguilar, among others. The emergence of a Marxist theory of dependency arose out of a realization that Marx never fully considered the colonial and post-colonial societies. While the classical Marxist theory of imperialism addressed the new stages and aspects of capitalism, it was mainly concerned with the imperialist countries and had little to say about the underdeveloped countries, a gap which the Marxist *dependentistas* sought to fill. Furthermore, they are critical of the classical theories' progressive view of capitalism in Third World countries. For these reasons the Marxist *dependentistas* are sometimes referred to as neo-Marxists.

Amongst the Marxist dependency writers Marini (1973) has made the most systematic theoretical effort to determine the specific laws which govern the dependent economies. Marini's central thesis is that dependence involves the over-(or super-) exploitation of labour in the subordinate nations. This over-exploitation of labour in the periphery arises out of the need of capitalists to recover part of the fall in the profit rate as a consequence of unequal exchange. In turn this over-exploitation of labour hinders the transition from absolute to relative surplus value as the dominant form in capital-labour relations and the accumulation process in the periphery, thereby underpinning their dependence. According to Marini the circuit of capital in dependent countries differs from that of centre countries. In dependent countries the two key elements of the capital cycle - the production and circulation of commodities - are separated as a result of the periphery being linked to the centre through the over-exploitation of labour. Production in the Third World countries does not rely on internal capacity for consumption but depends on exports to the developed countries. Wages are kept low in dependent countries because workers' consumption is not required for the realization of commodities. Thus, the conditions are set for the over-exploitation of labour.

Let us now look at the most famous writer on dependency. Frank's main contribution to dependency analysis



occurs before he actually uses the term dependence (1967), but is found in his central and well-known idea of 'the development of underdevelopment'. Although the concept of dependence is best-known to an English-speaking audience through the work of Frank, he is a reluctant and short-lived *dependentista*. In retrospect Frank's writings can best be considered as belonging to the world-system perspective. Thus it would be a mistake to consider him as the dependency writer *par excellence*.

The book by Cardoso and Faletto (1979) is considered by many as the key dependency text, but it is a matter of debate to what an extent it can be situated within Marxism. They seek to explore diversity within unity of the various historical processes, contrary to Frank's search for unity within diversity. Dependence is not regarded simply as an external variable as they do not derive the internal national socio-political situation mechanically from external domination. Thus, they do not see dependency and imperialism as external and internal sides of a single coin, with the internal reduced to a reflection of the external. They conceive the relationship between internal and external forces as forming a complex whole and explore the ways in which they are interwoven. In contrast to some other dependency writers, such as Frank and Marini, Cardoso does not regard dependency as being contradictory to development and to indicate this he coins the term 'associated-dependent development'.

Cueva's analysis (1976) provides an entry-point into the discussion concerning the Marxist nature of the Neo-Marxist dependency perspective. He regards their writings as non-Marxist. Furthermore, he does not believe in the existence of a dependent mode of production and regards orthodox Marxist theory as adequate for analysing Latin America. In denying that any specific laws of development are operative in the Third World, Cueva challenges the very core of dependency analysis.

The debate over the feudal or capitalist nature of Latin America's mode of production acquired a new life with the publication of Frank's book on Latin America (1967) in which he boldly and assertively argues that Latin America has been capitalist since the European conquest in the sixteenth century. The ensuing debate bears similarities to the Marxist polemic on the transition from feudalism to capitalism whose main protagonists were Dobb and Sweezy. The most influential critique of Frank is made by the Argentinean Ernesto Laclau (1971) who castigates Frank for overemphasizing the importance of exchange relations while ignoring production relations. In Laclau's view "the pre-capitalist character of the dominant relations of production in Latin America was not only not incompatible with production for the world market, but was actually intensified by the expansion of the latter" (1971, p.30). The significance of Frank's intervention was mainly political. By arguing that capi-

talism was the cause of Latin America's underdevelopment and responsible for its continuation, he challenged the orthodox Latin American communist parties, who argued that Latin America was still feudal and therefore the popular forces should support the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary task which, in turn, would advance the socialist revolution. For Frank, and the Marxist *dependentistas*, the Latin American bourgeoisie is only perpetuating the development of underdevelopment and therefore, following the example of the Cuban revolution, capitalism itself has to be overthrown as only socialism can eliminate underdevelopment.

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