

## SNIPERS IN THE KITCHEN

### *State Theory and Latin America's Left Cycle*

**T**HE QUESTION OF state power is one of the most complex issues for emancipatory politics. Even when popular parties with redistributive agendas have won electoral majorities and gained, in principle, access to the governmental levers of power, they face a host of obstacles in implementing their campaign promises. They do not enter into full possession of the state, as if it were a new home: the rooms may be booby-trapped, the stairs barricaded; there may be snipers in the kitchen—shooters who are unseen because they are taken for granted, and all the more effective because unseen. As Lenin reminded Kautsky, even if they have been ejected from office, ‘the exploiters’ still retained many practical advantages: money, property, superior education, knowledge of the ‘secrets’ of rule, norms of organization, close connections with higher officialdom and so forth.<sup>1</sup> In liberal democracies, enormous pressures can be brought to bear upon radical administrations, whether at municipal, state or federal level. The mainstream media, the judiciary, the intelligence services, opposition parties may all come into play, with scandals whipped up out of trifles, judicial harassment, dirty tricks or political manoeuvres—and this even before market pressures are taken into account. If we are not to become trapped in a permanent state of melancholy, we need a careful analysis of the state’s enormous capacity for reaction in defence of capital’s interests.

These questions are central for an assessment of the cycle of left governments in Latin America that opened with Chávez’s victory in Venezuela in 1998—followed by the advent of Lula in Brazil, Néstor Kirchner in Argentina, Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. The end of the cycle might be dated to the 2015 victory

of Mauricio Macri in Argentina, followed by the victories of Sebastián Piñera in Chile and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. But at the time of writing this political landscape remains fiercely contested, with new rebellions against neoliberal orthodoxy in Chile and Colombia, counter-revolution in Bolivia, successive attempts to overthrow Maduro in Venezuela and new victories of the centre-left in Mexico and Argentina.

A rich literature has analysed the roots of this experience in the crises of the neoliberal model that erupted across the continent in the late 1990s—foreshadowing those that would strike the advanced-capitalist heartlands from 2008—and its coincidence with the China-led commodity super-cycle. In one of the landmark texts of the upswing, the Brazilian strategist Emir Sader set Latin America's markedly leftist political response to this conjuncture in the context of the continent's long tradition of popular revolt.<sup>2</sup> Since then, further work has focused chiefly on subjective issues: studies of social movements, protests and trade unions, both continent-wide and at country level. Of these, one of the most original contributions—from the Chilean scholar, René Rojas—set out to explain the limits of the 'pink tide' governments in terms of the structural weakness of the popular classes in Latin America, after decades of IMF programmes, in contrast to the militant workers' organizations of the 1960s, crushed by the full weight of the 1970s military dictatorships.<sup>3</sup> So far, however, there has been little cross-country comparative analysis of the recent left governments' experience with state power.

### *The problem of method*

What conceptual underpinnings would such a study require? Theorizations of state and inter-state orders have been a staple of political thought, often enough—in Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Hegel, Weber, Lenin, Gramsci, Mann, Tilly, Fukuyama—responding to the crises, wars and revolutions that have marked the emergence and life-span of the modern state. Collating half-a-dozen or more contemporary perspectives,

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, 'The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky' [1918], *Lenin's Collected Works*, vol. 28, Moscow 1974, pp. 104ff.

<sup>2</sup> Emir Sader, 'The Weakest Link: Neoliberalism in Latin America', *NLR* 52, July–August 2008.

<sup>3</sup> René Rojas, 'The Latin American Left's Shifting Sands', *Catalyst*, vol. 2, no. 2, Summer 2018. See also the country-level studies collected in Eduardo Silva and Federico Rossi, eds, *Reshaping the Political Arena in Latin America: From Resisting Neoliberalism to the Second Incorporation*, Pittsburgh 2018.

Bob Jessop's work offers a conceptual tool-box to help address the task. An English writer in the broader new-left tradition, Jessop's early contributions focused on Marxian and Poulantzian theories of the state; he has taught in the sociology department of the University of Lancaster since 1990, following a 15-year stint teaching government at Essex. His most recent book, *The State: Past, Present, Future*, summarizes nearly forty years of study.<sup>4</sup>

The approach Jessop proposes does not set out a general theory of 'the state'—that is, an explanation that would comprehend its origins, laws of motion and course of development, without reference to other kinds of inquiry. He argues that the polymorphism of this mechanism of rule—instigated in Mesopotamian palaces, scholar-bureaucracies, complex chiefdoms, city-states, early modern absolutist monarchies, colonial and post-colonial transplants, party-states, capitalist liberal-democracies—and its multiple, changing contexts suggest, rather, the need for a combined method of comparative-historical case studies and conjunctural analysis. The object, then, is not 'the state' but modern 'states', of which the primary determinants are, as Weber said, territory, population and apparatus of rule—to which Jessop would add the 'state idea'. But these cannot be understood without reference to the broader system of competitive political forms—multi-national empires, militarized theocracies, feudal baronies, tribal confederations, lawless zones—within which modern states fought their way to dominance; to the discursive and coercive strategies through which they secure the population's consent; and to the successive inter-state hierarchies in which they have combined.<sup>5</sup> International structures of wealth and power have acquired a new salience for nation states in the age of globalization, Jessop notes, introducing non-accountable forms of control—multinational companies and banks, supra-national bodies—capable of penetrating their social structures. At the same time, economic might is more than ever linked to media power, with its capacity to promote and inform specific cultural values, and to surveillance technologies. There is no doubt that states are capable of exercising a greater degree of social control today than could have been imagined twenty years ago.

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<sup>4</sup> See Bob Jessop, *The State: Past, Present, Future*, Cambridge 2016; previous works include *State Power*, Cambridge 2008, and *The Future of the Capitalist State*, Cambridge 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Jessop, *The State*, pp. 5, 7ff. This essay will leave open the possibility of an intermediate order of analysis that would combine general considerations of a specific form of the state with a study of concrete local cases.

Following Nicos Poulantzas in *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), Jessop argues that a state is not a neutral instrument or passive tool, offering equal constraints and opportunities to all social actors; nor should it be conceived, as in much mainstream political science, as disembodied from the broader society over which it rules. Instead, as the Greek political scientist suggested, the formal-institutional constitution of a state—its apparatus, modes of representation, governing ideas—reflects a historical crystallization of the balance of social forces in its home territory and beyond. For Jessop, adopting Gramsci's terms, this material condensation represents the interests of the dominant bloc, the victors of past social struggles—of capital over labour, men over women, whites over blacks and indigenous peoples, the centre over the periphery. But the state compact is also marked by the compromises struck with broader class and regional forces, and the discursive forms or 'hegemonic visions' with which it wins the consent of the governed and projects its own goals as the national interest. It is in this sense that Poulantzas's 'admittedly enigmatic' formulation, 'the state is a social relation', should be understood. Its mode of operation has built-in biases—Jessop calls this 'strategic selectivity'—reflecting the interests of the dominant bloc; the liberal-democratic state is thus both representative and hierarchical. Yet the underlying balance of forces is subject to change, through shifts in the economy, social developments or the impact of external forces, potentially throwing the state into crisis and challenging its operatives to respond and adapt.<sup>6</sup>

In this view, it is not 'the state' that acts; rather, the powers of a state are activated by changing sets of leaders, officials and politicians located within different state institutions, often acting in response to external pressures, reflecting the domestic or international balance of forces. At the same time, the institutional matrix of the state apparatus itself—the core legal-political-coercive complex: executive, legislature, judiciary, bureaucracy, intelligence services, armed forces and so forth—is a heterogeneous assortment, the distribution of powers varying within it. The relative weight of executive and legislative branches, the superordinate role of powerful ministries (Finance, Interior), the accountability (or corruption) of the bureaucracy, rivalries between intelligence services

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<sup>6</sup> Jessop, *The State*, pp. 86, 53–6. By 'social forces' Jessop intends not only contending classes but also regional, racial, religious or ethnic groupings, all in turn cross-cut by gender.

or security forces, are likely to reflect relations outside the state as well as narrow institutional outlooks and jealousies. To act coherently, the state apparatus as an ensemble needs to be unified by a guiding set of ideas—a state project, in Jessop's terms—which provides it with an overall orientation and shapes the forms its 'strategic selectivity' will take. This project is distinct from, and narrower than, the hegemonic visions by which the dominant bloc aims to unify the broader social formation behind its rule and which serve to legitimate state power. Modes of representation—electoral systems and political parties, but also the 'ideological apparatus' of the media, education systems and established religions—are the crucial transmission belts for the reproduction and contestation of its rule.<sup>7</sup>

This perspective, which Jessop dubs the strategic-relational approach, suggests a dynamic, multi-faceted concept of state forms, whose operations need to be grasped in the context of the broader economic and social shifts within its core territory, and in the wider world-market and inter-state systems of which it is a part. It offers a rubric through which to examine state power in a more rigorous and comparative manner. Looking back at state theorizations produced over the last thirty years, our outlook today should be more radical and less optimistic. This approach may help to inoculate us against both optimism and pessimism, allowing us to operate instead on the basis of a hopeful realism. When they enter government, radical political forces that propose a new project for the country will inevitably come into conflict with established interests operating within the state apparatus. Lacking organic connections to the existing structures of economic, ideological and political power, they will have difficulty governing if they lack the necessary tools to counteract the 'strategic selectivity' of the state. They need to avoid the temptation to use the same channels that a conservative government might establish—for example, networks of corruption, or the criminal-coercive forces of the deep state—not only because this would morally discredit their project, but because the other necessary institutions that might tacitly support conservative corruption and coercion, such as the courts, the legislature and the media, will not be in place.

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<sup>7</sup> Jessop, *The State*, pp. 66, 68–9, 56, 84–5, 86–9. One of the principles propounded by Samuel Huntington and his colleagues in their Trilateral Commission report, *Crisis of Democracy* (1975), was the need to reduce the ideological content of the main political parties.

To analyse the practice and outcomes of Latin America's left governments in relation to their states, we will need to sketch the historic processes of state constitution in each case, and then to examine the balance of forces that brought the new lefts and centre lefts to office, the hegemonic visions they proposed, their record in mobilizing state projects and the forms of resistance or in-built 'strategic-selective' bias they encountered during the changing conjunctures of their time in government. Needless to say, in the space of an essay such an investigation can only be schematic. Analyses of state power often run the risk of attempting total recall, but we should remember the lesson of Borges's story, 'Funes the Memorious', in which the eponymous hero's prodigious memory prevents him from thinking. An exhaustive examination may produce a clear starry night in which it's impossible to discern the constellations. What follows, then, will be telegraphic in the extreme, focusing solely on the major cases of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and Brazil, set in comparative frame. Much of importance will inevitably be omitted. Nevertheless, since it seems that these questions have not yet been asked of the 'pink tide' experience, it may be useful to set down some provisional answers, in the hope that others will expand and correct them.

### *Processes of state formation*

Beyond their apparent similarities and the synchronous waves that have marked the continent's history—wars of independence from the 1810s, oligarchic stabilization from the 1870s, crisis and populist insurgency from the 1930s, military dictatorship from the 1960s, conjoint democratization and neoliberalization from the 1980s, economic crises and left turns from the 1990s—the foundational compacts of Latin American states reveal as many contrasts as commonalities. Firstly, to use Jessop's initial determinants of territory, population and governing apparatus, across the vast and varied topography of the continent, and the differentiated social structures of the pre-Columbian populations, centuries of Spanish and Portuguese imperial domination imposed contrasting models of rule. While this legacy divided the Hispanic Andean Highlands and the Southern Cone from Lusophone Brazil, the patterns of Argentina's state formation also differed from the Andean-Caribbean countries considered here, even more than the state-development paths of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela have differed from each other. That said, an examination of South American states must start with the 19th-century matrix from which they emerged.

The terminal crisis of Spain's Latin American empire was triggered by the French Revolution and Napoleon's conquest of Madrid; the enlightenment ideals and liberal constitutions of Philadelphia and Cadíz provided models for the presidential republics that would emerge, but Bolívar and his comrades were operating in a different social landscape. In the high Andes, Spanish rule had been built upon the conquest of a complex urban civilization that had no parallel in New England; the operative principle was incorporation through subjugation, with intermarriage to further the work of the Church—as opposed to exclusion and genocide in the US. Military coercion was in constant use to subdue the large native populations and force them into the mines or onto the haciendas of the *criollo* elite, and *mestizo* sons could find a career path in the private militias of the great landowners. These layers played a central role in the prolonged wars of independence against residual Spanish-royalist forces and in the subsequent half-century of internecine warfare that demarcated the new nation-states' territorial boundaries.

At their foundation, then, the new states married the political forms of the liberal enlightenment to the authoritarian structures of Bourbon Spain's imperial rule, excluding the indigenous populations. The constitutional model was the unitary presidential republic, comprising a strong executive with wide-ranging powers of veto and decree; a weak congress, institutionalizing oligarchic rule through restricted suffrage; a weaker judiciary, servant rather than overseer of the state, on the Roman model; constitutional privileges for the Church and Army; a disproportionate military budget, funded by taxes imposed on foreign trade or extorted from the indigenous populations. In Jessop's formulation, the Andean states represented a crystallization of past struggles—the Spanish conquest, liberation wars—that offered no compromise to the indigenous masses, while opening the double-edged opportunity of a military career to the growing *mestizo* layers. With the exploited ground down by the whip and the sword, the main political divisions were between the exploiters themselves: regional *caudillos* attempting to seize the presidential palace; bitter strife between anti-clerical liberals and hard-line conservatives, reproducing the ideological rifts opened by the French Revolution. In Jessop's terms, these divides also signalled the contradiction between the unitary command structures assumed by Bourbon Spain's intendancy system and the localism imposed by the isolated haciendas, far-flung towns and impenetrable terrain, which made the journey between Potosí and La Paz, Guayaquil and Quito, or Valencia and Caracas a hazardous undertaking. The Church was the

only ideological apparatus that aimed to reach the entire population; the output of liberal journalists and intellectuals in the cities was restricted to the Spanish-speaking elites.

World-market forces abetted the consolidation of these rickety oligarchic states in the second half of the nineteenth century. As large landowners discovered a new role as exporters of primary products to the dynamic industrial-capitalist economies of the northern hemisphere, they found the means (foreign credit) and the motivation (usually under Liberal presidents: Guzmán Blanco and, initially, Juan Vicente Gómez in Venezuela, Eloy Alfaro in Ecuador, Ismael Montes in Bolivia) to strengthen and modernize the national infrastructure—roads, ports, railroads, theatres, universities. The inter-state system they entered was still largely composed of imperial monarchies, including that of the British hegemon whose loans funded the Latin American countries' insertion into the world market as specialist cash-crop and mineral exporters.

State formation in Argentina involved yet another configuration of territory, population and institutional apparatus. Lacking precious metals and thinly populated, the Rio de la Plata region and the immensity of the Pampas were of secondary importance to the Spanish crown, which belatedly bestowed a vice-royalty on these southern zones (covering present-day southern Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina) in 1776. The imperial yoke weighed more lightly here and rural labour—landless *mestizo* horsemen and *campesinos*—enjoyed a degree more autonomy than the indigenous peons of the Andes. Buenos Aires had already developed an informal role as a contraband port, smuggling bullion, meat and hides and trading with the Dutch and British; vice-regal status allowed the city to collect customs dues, an enviable source of wealth. Buenos Aires was in the forefront of the War of Independence and saw a popular urban uprising against the Spanish authorities in May 1810; but there was scant cultural identity or material infrastructure to connect this future 'Paris of the Americas' to the faraway mission towns and *estancieros* of the northwest interior, where *criollo* notables looked rather to the imperial centre in Peru. Powerful provincial landowners refused to endorse the *bonaerenses'* 1819 Constitution for a unitary, modernizing Argentine Republic, with a strong central executive and a congress selected in proportion to the provinces' populations; they rallied their private *gaucho* armies to fight for regional autonomy from Buenos Aires, within an Argentine Confederation.



The clash of these 'hegemonic projects', in Jessop's terms, was fought out in on-off intra-elite civil wars that would run for forty years, with Britain arming the Buenos Aires liberals. Yet both the federalists—notably Juan Manuel Rosas, the immensely wealthy landowner-dictator who dominated the country from 1832–52—and the unitarians, Bartolomé Mitre (1862–68) and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1868–74), author of the immortal *Facundo*, a damning socio-literary portrait of the brutal, charismatic *caudillo* of Rosas's ilk, concurred in building up the Army to pursue wars of extermination against the indigenous inhabitants and punitive border conflicts with Argentina's neighbours. An oligarchic constitutional settlement took shape, step by step, on the basis of amendments to the 1853 Constitution, which stipulated a powerful president, chosen by a province-based electoral college, and a Congress also weighted towards provincial control through the indirectly elected Senate. By 1880, with Conservatives ensconced in power, the port-city had been detached, as federal capital, from the control of the powerful governor of Buenos Aires province, and port taxes flowed to the national Treasury. Yet by this stage, the shifting balance of social and economic forces—above all, the immigration of millions of workers from the Mediterranean countries—that would eventually challenge the Argentine oligarchy's rule was already well underway.

By contrast to these Hispanic republics, Brazil was launched as an imperial monarchy, its independence declared by the Bragança prince who would soon be crowned Emperor Pedro I. While Spain's vast regional vice-royalties fractured into a dozen smaller states, the sprawling Lusophone possessions, some 3 million square miles, maintained a precarious unity. The relations of territory, population and state apparatus were also *sui generis*. At the start of the 19th century, Portuguese and Luso-Brazilians made up barely a sixth of the colony's 3 million inhabitants, while the native Tupi had to a large extent been absorbed through coercive inter-marriage. The bulk of the population was of African descent: slaves, on whom the ports, plantations and domestic service depended, their numbers increased by tens of thousands of new arrivals every year, plus a substantial stratum of free black artisans and workers with their own Afro-Brazilian culture; for the elite, *haitianismo* would remain an ever-present fear.

The 1808 flight of the Portuguese Court to the safety of Rio, as Napoleon's Army closed in on Lisbon, brought with it the tattered

trappings of absolutist rule. But this would not suffice to unify the disparate agricultural-export zones established under Portugal's captaincy system—northeastern sugar mills, pasturelands in the far south, gold and diamonds in Minas Gerais, precious timber from the Amazon basin—nor to reconcile the powerful landowners and provincial elites (governors, notables, military officers) to loss of control over the forces of order and patronage networks in their home regions. The upshot created an instability at the heart of the state, as the balance of forces between centralists—the Palace, the Army, wealthy Rio merchants and state officials—and federalist oligarchs swayed this way or that. The 1824 Constitution, drafted by the Palace, delegated both executive and regulatory power to the Emperor, who named the Senate and could dissolve the Chamber of Deputies. A two-tiered electoral-college system for the Chamber allowed a relatively wide suffrage in the first round, extending to artisans and small traders—though the electors thus chosen, who in turn selected the deputies for the province, were restricted to the ranks of notables and officers. Successive provincial rebellions—some mutating into mass social uprisings—were put down by force of arms.

By the 1880s, growing confidence in sectors outside the Emperor's circle—politicized urban workers, whose campaigns helped push through the abolition of slavery in 1888; the Army, hardened by Pedro II's serial wars against Uruguay and Paraguay; the booming coffee regions of the centre-south—generated new support for republicanism. Yet when the federalists gained the upper hand after Pedro was deposed by the military in 1889, they imposed an even more restricted franchise. Under the 1891 Constitution of the United States of Brazil, the federal government was controlled by the most powerful states, the presidency alternating between São Paulo and Minas Gerais. This was the oligarchic order that the Revolution of 1930 would overthrow, under the leadership of Getulio Vargas.

### *New forces, new forms*

External economic shocks—the 1929 Crash and Great Depression—would deliver the *coup de grâce* to most of these oligarchic state formations. The insertion of their economies into the world market as dependent agro-exporters to the US and Europe—coffee from Brazil, meat and wheat from Argentina, cocoa from Ecuador, tin from Bolivia—meant that the

fall in commodity prices hit them hard. But other external and internal shifts had already sapped their foundations. The inter-state system had undergone a seismic shift with the rise of an anti-capitalist big power after the Bolshevik Revolution; the US would soon gear up for leadership of the Cold War. Domestically, new social forces had come of age with the economic development (immigration, foreign investment) overseen by oligarchic rule: nascent labour movements, politicized intermediary layers, the rise of socialist, communist, anarchist and radical-nationalist parties, dissident currents in the armed forces.

In different forms and with varying tempos, radical regimes across the continent issued in a new state compact, partially side-lining the landowning classes held responsible for the country's woes, and drawing in the new working classes to initiate import-substituting national development: Vargas in Brazil, Perón in Argentina, Bolivia's 'military socialists' in the late 1930s and its MNR-led Revolution in 1952; in Ecuador, more patchily, the attempts by young officers and their allies to wrest fiscal control away from the Guayaquil plutocrats in the 1920s and 30s. The consequences—rising class struggle, the mobilization of agricultural workers—were unintended. The example of the Cuban Revolution showed where they might lead. The oligarchs' response was implemented by Army commands, stiffened by US training. Military dictatorships seized power in Brazil (1964–85), Argentina (1976–83), Bolivia (1971–78) and Ecuador (1972–79).

To a striking extent, the dictatorships' cautious transitions to liberal democracy would replicate, if with a wider suffrage, the constitutional form of the oligarchic states: a presidentialist republic; a senate dominated by conservative landed interests; the armed forces never far from power. The external and internal contexts of Latin America's new democracies had changed dramatically. Their debt-laden insertion into the world market was now governed by powerful institutional forces, monitoring the implementation of Washington Consensus policy—above all, privatization of state assets. Within the institutional complex of the state, the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance were given new heft. This reflected a global-domestic balance of forces that privileged the interests of free-flowing finance capital and discounted those of labour. But the upshot was to tar the governing liberal-democratic parties with the disastrous financial blow-outs, IMF austerity programmes and dire social outcomes of the 1990s. This, then, was the overall context in

which the new left governments came to power. It remains to examine their state strategies.

*Venezuela: bolivarismo armed*

Venezuela's precocious development as an oil state set it on a somewhat different path to the other Andean countries. By the 1920s, oil rents from the foreign companies pumping the Lake Maracaibo region overshadowed traditional agricultural exports and converted the landed oligarchy into a financial-rentier elite, with interests far beyond the country's borders. Though briefly attempted, import-substituting industrialization was never a viable strategy for a petro-currency state. Instead, Venezuela was tightly integrated into the US market for oil, while its entrepreneurs became salesmen and franchise-holders for US companies, importing cars, clothes and culture for an urban middle class prospering on public-sector employment and whitened by post-war immigration from Italy and Spain. Darker-skinned labouring classes swelled the informal economies of the urban periphery. From 1958, the political system was run by a pair of parties, the centre-left Acción Democrática and centre-right COPEI, who colluded to exclude the left while they alternated in the Presidential Palace and dominated Congress, showering oil rents on their supporters, supplemented by foreign loans when these declined. As the oil price bottomed out in the 1980s and 90s, this neo-oligarchic system entered a deep crisis, exacerbated by IMF demands for state cut-backs and revelations of presidential corruption on a massive scale. By the late 90s, the general poverty rate was 86 per cent, and extreme poverty 65 per cent; under AD and COPEI administrations alike, riots and protests were met with police bullets.

This was the context in which Hugo Chávez was swept into the Miraflores Palace with 56 per cent of the popular vote—a conjuncture that saw the elites weakened and discredited, but the mass of the population disorganized. The state machinery—Congress, the judiciary, state governors' mansions, police and PDVSA, the semi-privatized oil conglomerate—was packed with supporters of the AD-COPEI system, while the armed forces were more fragmented, as the career of Col. Chávez showed. The international balance of forces was, of course, US-led; but for Venezuela this was mitigated to some extent by Cuban support and the possibility of loans from Russia and China, semi-detached from the Washington system. Rejecting IMF orthodoxy, and vowing an immediate campaign

against poverty, Chávez propounded the vision of a Bolivarian revolution that would replace the pale-skinned partidocracy with an inclusive polity, incorporating the *mestizo* majority. The invocation of Bolívar also indicated an international dimension of south-south solidarity, as a defence against the global predominance of Washington and the IMF.

Chávez took a root-and-branch approach to the political apparatus, signing the decree for a referendum on constitutional reform on the very day he took office, 2 February 1999. Drafted by an elected assembly, Venezuela's 1999 Constitution was the first to be affirmed by a popular vote. It strengthened the executive and a new branch of 'citizen' power at the expense of the legislature, which was reduced to a unicameral assembly, elected on a modified first-past-the-post system, with its powers of impeachment transferred to the voters through the mechanism of a recall referendum; popular organizations were allotted a role in nominating Supreme Court judges and the National Electoral Commission. Yet in 2001, when Chávez and the new Assembly proposed a raft of laws on land reform, social security and allocating a proportion of oil revenue to social programmes, they ran into stubborn resistance from other parts of the state and its social allies: the armed forces, PDVSA management, the Employers' Federation, TV channels, the old political elite, with tacit backing from the State Department and its sister organizations. In 2002 the *chavistas* defeated a military coup through mass mobilization and survived an oil shutdown and capital flight.

The new state compact that emerged from these struggles was a curious hybrid. In intensive, behind-the-scenes dealings, Chávez and his comrades retired or paid off hardline military commanders. The rest of the Army was brought in, upgraded and won over to the Bolivarian project, the higher ranks acquiring a significant economic stake in the regime—not least, access to the currency-control and exchange-rate mechanisms originally introduced as temporary measures during the 2002–03 PDVSA lockdown. Second, as oil prices rose, and with Cuban help, Chávez bypassed the state to set up new projects in the poorer neighbourhoods: *misiones* offering food kitchens, healthcare, education and vocational skills and cut-price supermarkets, often with military assistance. After 2006, the government poured money into 20,000 community councils, neighbourhood assemblies charged with prioritizing new public works—with mixed results. These attempts were hampered by lack of skilled personnel and administrative expertise, worsened after 2007

when Chávez fell out with former cadres of Causa R, Venezuela's main left grouping, and switched to a policy of '21st-century socialism'—ad hoc nationalizations, in the absence of a coherent industrial strategy, worker-management or investment plan. Foreign policy, by contrast, proved relatively easy to re-gear. Caracas took the lead in regional integration, uniting Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Honduras and half a dozen further Caribbean island states in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA). Projects for a regional currency, the sucre, a monetary fund, the Banco del Sur and a radical Latin American TV channel, *Telesur*, were set in motion.

In sum: Chávez and his team succeeded in overcoming or bypassing the 'strategic selectivities' of the Venezuelan petro-state, in conditions that had seen the collapse of the old political elite. Resistance lay outside the state, in the student movement and US-backed opposition. The regime's contradiction lay in Venezuela's dependent relation to the world market, which it was unable to master. Once oil prices started to fall, the exchange-rate mechanism—already a sump of corruption—enforced grotesque distortions on the flow of imports, creating a criminalized black market and a price-controlled legal economy racked by shortages, beyond the wit of Chávez's hapless successor to repair.<sup>8</sup>

### *Bolivia: decolonization?*

Less populous and much poorer than Venezuela, Bolivia's ethno-geographic divides were starker and only partially 'modernized': a small group of wealthy, light-skinned agribusiness and banking families at the apex, their fortunes based in the eastern lowlands around Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the old colonial towns or the Zona Sur district of La Paz; intermediary layers of *mestizo* workers and a nascent indigenous petty bourgeoisie (truckers, traders, construction and real estate) in the informal economies of newly urbanized zones like El Alto; at the base, a bedrock of Andean subsistence farmers. Notwithstanding the popular upheaval of 1952, the state that emerged from the Banzer dictatorship in the 1980s reproduced the oligarchic features of the 19th century in liberal-democratic form. The powerful Senate gave a weight to the conservative eastern regions out of proportion to their populations. The

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed account see Julia Buxton, 'Venezuela After Chávez', NLR 99, May–June 2016.

Congress functioned as a de facto electoral college, with responsibility for picking the president if none of the multiple candidates achieved an overall majority. Party coalitions—MNR, ADN, the formerly left MIR—colluded to select wealthy scions of the agro-financial elite, typified by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. This layer closed the Andean tin mines, a historic centre of worker militancy, then proceeded to enrich itself by selling off state assets—gas, oil, telecoms, electricity, railways, water.

The unintended upshot was to change the balance of social forces, as the IMF-backed privatization programmes provoked the mass mobilizations of the gas and water wars, led by sections of Bolivia's long-excluded indigenous majority, now uniting behind the Movimiento al Socialismo. Evo Morales's 2005 presidential victory at the head of MAS was thus backed by a stronger mass organization than Chávez had possessed, seasoned by years of militant protests and *bloqueos* that had dominated the TV news, driving out two presidents, and facing the bullets of Sánchez de Lozada.<sup>9</sup> Externally, he could count on varying degrees of support from left governments in Caracas, Havana, Buenos Aires, Brasilia and Quito. At the same time, though morally and politically discredited, the Bolivian ruling caste had not undergone a debacle on the scale of Venezuela's petro-elite. Secure in its regional strongholds, it still controlled the Senate and five of the nine regional prefectures after 2005, as well as the media and the banking system.

Morales's strategic vision was derived from the 2003 October Agenda of the mass movement. Describing Bolivia's political edifice as a Spanish-colonial relic, comparable to apartheid, this called for an elected Constituent Assembly to design the state anew—as Morales put it in 2003: 'We want to re-found the country, politics, democracy, with our own hands'—for the re-nationalization of Bolivia's hydrocarbon wealth and for Sánchez de Lozada to be brought to trial for the massacre of protesters. In office, the Morales government swiftly negotiated more advantageous contracts with the foreign gas companies and awarded a large pay rise to the Army, offering officer training to broader indigenous layers and education programmes for new recruits. Its attempts to stamp out extortion and corruption in the national police force resulted in a mutiny; the government backed down, but the opposition seized the

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<sup>9</sup> See Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, 'The Chequered Rainbow', NLR 35, Sept–Oct 2005.

chance to forge tighter links with the police. State bias in the bureaucracy also operated against Morales's newly appointed ministers, many from indigenous backgrounds, and a good proportion of them women. A new public water company was plagued by inefficiency.

The most concerted resistance focused on the political system. In a two-year struggle over the new constitution, the conservative opposition alternately besieged and boycotted the elected Constituent Assembly, insulted its indigenous female President, mobilized secessionist movements in the eastern regions, launched a vociferous, red-herring campaign to move the capital to Sucre and used its control of the Senate to impose a two-thirds majority vote on every article in the Constitution. The outcome was a compromise. Rhetorically, the Constitution proclaimed a plurinational republic based on social rights and respect for indigenous culture, with the chequered-rainbow *wiphala* to fly alongside the national flag. Substantively, land reform was neutered so that it didn't apply to existing holdings. The disproportionate Senate was retained, with four senators for each of Bolivia's nine departments, regardless of population. The electoral system favoured Morales in the short term, but—with a strong first-past-the-post component and congressional seats topped up according to the size of the President's vote—it produced a lopsided representation of the vote that could equally benefit a right-winger. In concentrating powers around a charismatic president, it intensified MAS's dependence on Morales; a hostage to fortune, given that he was constitutionally limited to two terms.

The resulting state compact was a temporary accommodation. With meaningful land reform blocked, agribusiness could focus on expanding soy production for the insatiable Chinese livestock market, while the traditional elite waited out Morales's time in office, chafing at the self-confident presence of a new indigenous middle class in the city centres, as rising gas revenues fuelled a construction boom. Meanwhile the militant alliance behind MAS fractured into sectoral interests, some incorporated into the increasingly complacent regime, others alienated from it as growth slowed down. Using the judicial machinery to override a 2016 plebiscite that opposed an extended term limit for Morales, the government revealed its weakness. Though Morales won the first round of the 2019 presidential election—the Organization of American States' investigation found no problem with the official outcome, only



with the unofficial ‘quick count’—the political balance had tipped against him.<sup>10</sup> The opposition could rely on substantial institutional support within the state—police, prefectures, constitutional court, ultimately the military high command—and mass protests outside it, swiftly hegemonized by the far right, as well as backing from the OAS and White House for Morales’s ouster. In brief: through its successive electoral majorities the Morales government achieved a partial reform of the state, channelling resources to the poor and transforming Bolivia’s official culture. But it met with significant institutional resistance, which—to some extent hamstrung by its own mistakes—it was unable to circumvent or conquer.

### *Ecuador: left-technocratic modernization*

For Ecuador, like Bolivia, the restoration of formal democracy after the corrupt military dictatorship of the 1970s went hand-in-hand with soaring interest rates and IMF tutelage. Despite the ferocious infighting of the Ecuadorian political elite, riven by regionalist rivalries and personalized party machines, each successive government implemented the same policies as the last, culminating in the devastating economic crisis of 1999, after which the centre-left Mahuad administration adopted the US dollar as Ecuador’s national currency, tying the country’s fortunes to interest rates set in Washington DC. As in Bolivia, protests against this self-serving elite brought new forces into play: in the mid-90s, indigenous organizations from the Amazon, the central highlands and the Pacific coast forged a broad confederation, CONAIE. Between 1996 and 2005, mass protests and voter dissatisfaction saw the ejection of seven presidents, none finishing their term and four facing charges of corruption. Yet the anti-neoliberal forces—indigenous groups, transport workers, students, soldiers, neighbourhood networks—were also fragmented. CONAIE sponsored an electoral front, Pachakutik, which won eight seats in the 2003 election and entered the government of a supposedly radical colonel, Lucio Gutiérrez—who, once in office, turned coat and began applying the strictures of the IMF, only to be ousted by a popular uprising in 2005, leaving the Pachakutik leadership split and demoralized.

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<sup>10</sup> For details of the OAS report, see Guillame Long, David Rosnick, Cavan Kharrazian and Kevin Cashman, ‘What Happened in Bolivia’s 2019 Vote Count? The Role of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission’, CEPR, Washington DC, November 2019.

Rafael Correa would not succeed in uniting these forces—the pro-Gutiérrez wing of Pachakutik opposed him from the start—but neither did he capitulate to neoliberal norms. Unlike Chávez or Morales, Correa was an intellectual with a University of Illinois PhD in economics. An outsider on the political scene, he had written papers for Gutiérrez’s short-lived successor and on that basis was invited to become Minister of Economics, where he made a mark with the public by standing up to the IMF. The Alianza PAIS he founded with labour economist Ricardo Patiño to fight the 2006 presidential election was a loose coalition rather than a party, and its congressional deputies were prone to cross the floor. By comparison to Chávez or Morales, Correa governed as a technocrat. Yet his programme was drawn from the popular movements: an end to neoliberal policies; an elected Constituent Assembly drafted a new pluri-national constitution, enshrining indigenous rights and national sovereignty over natural resources, and rejecting foreign military bases. The electoral system for the new, unicameral National Assembly combined FPP and open-list PR districts; clashes between legislature and executive would be resolved by a ‘mutual death’ clause—that is, a general election.

In contrast to the constitutional struggle in Bolivia, Correa’s administration ran into resistance after the new Constitution had been democratically affirmed, when it came to implementation. Attempts to restructure public administration fell prey to bureaucratic in-fighting. Re-nationalization of water works was blocked in Congress by indigenous demands that local communities alone should oversee them. In September 2010, an attempt to limit the medals and bonuses automatically handed out to police—originating from Congress, not the Carondelet Palace—was met by police and air-force mutiny, occupying the National Assembly and international airports at Quito and Guayaquil, and spreading to provincial cities. Correa was briefly held hostage when he went to address the rebel officers, then rescued by the military and his supporters. The following week, the government announced a police pay rise.

More surprising was Correa and Patiño’s success in re-gearing the Ministry of Finance and Economics, which now brought the Central Bank under democratic control, deploying its reserves as a bulwark against the 2008 financial crisis, and instructed domestic banks to repatriate some 60 per cent of their assets. Patiño instituted an audit of the national debt, opening the books to uncover the lending terms international banks had

extracted from the country's leaders since 1976, unilaterally cancelling those deemed illegitimate and negotiating the rest down by two-thirds. Debt payments had consumed 40 per cent of Ecuador's national budget, triple the sum spent on social welfare; that proportion was now reversed, and the IMF sent packing. Public spending was channelled into roads, schools and hospitals, with the aim of realizing the constitutional rights to free universal healthcare and education; between 2005 and 2015, poverty levels fell from 42 to 25 per cent. A sovereign economic policy was matched by diplomatic independence, under Patiño's stewardship from 2010. Ecuador was a front-rank member of ALBA and the other institutions of the Bolivarian alliance and offered refuge in its London embassy to Julian Assange, whose Wikileaks revelations included reports on the US Ambassador's dealings with the Ecuadorian media.<sup>11</sup>

Ecuador did not revert to a sovereign national currency and was hit doubly hard by falling oil prices and a strengthening dollar in 2015–16, partially mitigated by loans from China. By that stage, Correa's Vice President Lenin Moreno was running to succeed him. In office, Moreno lost little time in reverting to the *status quo ante* of privatizations, PPS and public-sector cuts, welcoming the IMF back to Quito—to be greeted by rioting protesters in September 2019. In sum: Correa's government faced substantial political opposition, from both right and left—the banking-media magnates, who assailed him from the start, and sections of CONAIE. Some of this was reflected in institutional resistance. Yet Correa was able to mobilize a more capable economic team than Chávez had; for as long as they remained in office, they had some success in steering state policy in a more equitable direction. But again, electoral dependence on a solitary charismatic and committed figure ensured that this would be short-lived.

### *Argentina: left-peronism renewed*

In Argentina, a wealthier and more urbanized society than Bolivia or Ecuador underwent an economic collapse even more dramatic than Venezuela's. As joblessness soared and groups of unemployed *piqueteros* threw up roadblocks to demand better government support, the Menem (1989–99) and de la Rúa (1999–2001) administrations stuck stubbornly to IMF prescriptions, ultimately corraling voters' savings accounts to

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<sup>11</sup> See the interview with Rafael Correa, 'Ecuador's Path', NLR 77, Sept–Oct 2012.

defend the peso-dollar peg. At the height of the crisis hungry families, the *cartoneros*, were scouring Buenos Aires suburbs for cardboard to sell. Popular mobilization here was as energized as in Bolivia, though at their peak Argentina's *barrio* assemblies, communal kitchens, barter clubs, worker-run factories and counter-cultural interventions probably spanned a wider social range. Most alarming for the Argentinian elite, their target was the political leadership as a whole: the famous cry of the pan-banging crowds mobbing the Casa Rosada was *¡Que se vayan todos!*—out with them all.

The crisis of the two-party system brought into question the legitimacy of the presidentialist state that had emerged from the 1976–83 military dictatorship. As an electoral machine, the stronger of the two was the Justicialist Party, launched by Perón in 1945 with the backing of the CGT trade unions as a national-popular force that would divert agricultural profits to domestic industrial growth, in opposition to oligarchic liberalism. But the JP had undergone an opportunistic conversion: entering office at the height of the post-dictatorship hyperinflation, Peronist leader Carlos Menem had packed the Supreme Court with yes men and used emergency powers to push through a neoliberal agenda that temporarily swept all before it—embracing the programme of international capital that the JP was founded to oppose. Reversing the tentative steps taken to bring the Junta to justice, he released the torturers from jail. Ten years later, as the economy crashed, voters repudiated Peronism's rotten remains and brought the liberal coalition headed by de la Rúa's Radical Party to power—chasing him out, when he proved no better, in the general uprising of December 2001.

It fell to the JP-controlled Congress to nominate an interim president to oversee the peso's devaluation. Eduardo Duhalde was an old-school politician from Buenos Aires province, where in many districts the JP party machine was virtually amalgamated with the state, trading benefits for votes down to block level. But the Peronists were bitterly split, with three JP candidates running against each other in the 2003 election, including Menem himself. Néstor Kirchner, little-known governor of the Patagonian province of Santa Cruz, had the dubious advantage of Duhalde's support; far more than Correa—let alone Chávez or Morales—Kirchner was an insider, an adept of the party system.

Once in the Casa Rosada, however, Kirchner broke decisively with what had gone before. He denounced Menem's disastrous adoption

of a programme that privileged giant conglomerates and international creditors—‘vulture capitalism’—over domestic needs. In a series of electrifying announcements, he sacked nearly half the military high command, implicated in the crimes of the Dirty War, and urged Congress to annul the laws that protected them from justice. Fifty-two federal police commissioners were dismissed and a campaign set in motion against criminality and corruption in the force. He channelled popular revulsion at Menem’s cash-for-votes Supreme Court with a call for impeachment and opened candidates to scrutiny from civil-rights bodies. He initiated a re-nationalization of the water companies, postal services and railways, extended subsidies for public transport, fuel and food, and expanded benefits for unemployed heads (*jefas/jefes*) of households, drawing *piquetero* leaders into the programme’s administration. Macro-economic policy would be based on the principle that interest payments to foreign creditors must not jeopardize domestic growth: ‘We will not pay down the debt at the cost of Argentines’ hunger and exclusion’, Kirchner told Congress in March 2004. He rejected the IMF’s demand for a rise in utility rates and insisted on lower fiscal targets, balancing domestic growth rates. With foreign bond-holders Argentina stuck firmly to its offer of 30 cents to the dollar on outstanding debt, to which a majority grudgingly agreed.

Kirchner’s strategy for overcoming institutional resistance was to take to TV to explain the obstacles confronting him, the pressures from special interests. In the moral and political vacuum left by Menemism’s collapse, he succeeded briefly in embodying the hopes of the popular mobilizations in the project of a sovereign and accountable state, based—to use Jessop’s Gramscian terms—on a new class bloc. Kirchner’s confidence and authority was grounded in part in his experience as governor of Santa Cruz, a sparsely populated province with a substantial public-sector workforce, funded largely by local taxes on hydrocarbon extraction. But it also drew on the resources of left Peronism—and in this sense, the bankruptcy of Argentina’s political class was not as complete as Venezuela’s. Kirchner’s was not a pioneer project, of the sort that Chávez, Morales and even, to some extent, Correa were attempting. Instead, he aimed to rebuild the domestic industrial base and public-sector services, drawing in the trade unions and the self-organized unemployed—a renewal of the classic Peronist strategy.

Uniquely for an advanced-capitalist economy, the early years of Argentina’s post-crisis recovery saw a strengthening of the organized

working class. Growth was led by labour-intensive sectors: metal manufacturing, construction, textiles; while a majority of new jobs were informal, nearly a third of them were in formal employment. Compared to the US, where the top 1 per cent monopolized all the gains of the recovery, in Argentina 60 per cent of new growth went to the richest 30 per cent, and 40 per cent to the rest. Unionization rates had plummeted under Menem, falling from 65 to 32 per cent between 1990 and 2000; they rose to 37 per cent by 2008, and were over 45 per cent in manufacturing, construction and transport. The outcome was a modest growth in pay and a rise in industrial disputes.<sup>12</sup>

Yet as the recovery strengthened and the popular mobilizations subsided, or were incorporated into the administration, the norms of Argentinian capitalist society reasserted themselves and the limits of Kirchner's project came into view. Although he took a clean broom to the most compromised institutions, Kirchner attempted no root-and-branch renovation of Argentina's traditional federalist state, on which the JP largely depended for its clientelist reach. This system gave a great deal of political power to elected provincial governors, who were responsible for drawing up the closed party lists for congressional elections organized on the basis of the D'Hondt proportional-representation model, which privileged the largest party blocs. At the same time, the federal centre was in charge of provincial funding, opening the way for quid pro quos. In the 2005 mid-term elections this provided a huge boost for Kirchner's allies, but their support didn't hold when the radical class alliance generated by the crisis began to come apart and the liberal opposition renewed its traditional denunciation of Peronism's favouring a lumpen working class.

Succeeding her husband at the end of 2007, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner aggravated the fracture—undoubtedly on Néstor's advice—when she hiked agro-export taxes to 44 per cent. Cast as a radical-Peronist move against 'the oligarchy', this galvanized a new alliance between farmers and the wealthier sections of the urban middle class, while the left distanced itself from the machine politics of a resurgent Peronism, its ranks still replete with Menemites, and the growing wealth of the ruling couple. As a radical force, *kirchnerismo* had dissipated long before its namesake's

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<sup>12</sup> For the data, see Maristella Svampa, 'The End of Kirchnerism', NLR 53, Sept–Oct 2008; Cecilia Senén González, Bárbara Medwid and David Trajtemberg, 'Union Membership in Argentina: A Theoretical and Methodological Debate', MTESS paper, Buenos Aires 2009.

premature death in 2010 assured his place in Argentina's pantheon. To summarize: in the crisis conditions of 1999–2003, Kirchner's administration mobilized Argentina's traditional reformist resources to re-cast the state project on anti-neoliberal—that is, national-sovereign developmentalist—lines. Its degree of success can be measured in part by the disasters that befell Mauricio Macri's 2015–19 attempt to restore the *status quo ante*, resulting in the Peronists' return.

### *Brazil: a pro-poor inflection*

Though harsh enough—high urban unemployment, wages decimated, soaring debt and interest payments, deep currency devaluation—Brazil's neoliberal crisis in the late 1990s was not as dramatic as that of Argentina or Venezuela. There were no popular uprisings against privatizations or austerity, as in Bolivia and Ecuador, nor any regime crisis or collapse of the party system. The PT had been forged during an earlier period of industrial militancy and already governed a string of cities, including Porto Alegre, where it had introduced participatory budgeting; the 2002 election was Lula's fourth attempt to win the presidency. The balance of forces was not propitious; though Lula defeated Cardoso's successor by 61 to 39 per cent, the PT won less than a fifth of seats in Congress, dominated by deputies from the small-town interior and parties of the centre right. The state it presided over was in many respects a linear descendent of Pedro II's, though transplanted to the light and air of Oscar Niemeyer's Planalto. The 1988 Constitution tilted power towards Congress and the state governors, with their own military police. Large PR electoral districts and open-list voting favoured well-publicized (and well-funded) candidates over parties. In contrast to Argentina, no steps were taken after the dictatorship to bring the torturers to trial; the Supreme Court went as far as to call the amnesty law the foundation of Brazilian democracy.

The PT had once fought to change the state, mobilizing alongside the broader opposition to the dictatorship for direct elections—'Diretas Já'—but by 2002 it had adapted to Brazil's political norms. As he entered office, Lula's strategic vision was conciliatory: modifying his passionate appeals to the oppressed, he adopted the slogan 'Peace and Love' and signed a pro-market 'Letter to Brazilians'. For two years his government stuck to the harsh IMF programme bequeathed by Cardoso, as growth stuttered and unemployment rose. In the vain hope of securing Brazil a UN Security Council seat by pleasing Bush and

Chirac, the PT government re-equipped the Army and dispatched it to Haiti to crush shanty-town resistance after the US had removed the elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. To pass legislation through Congress, Lula's fixers resorted to paying the venal 'interior' deputies \$7,000 a month for their votes. This was in line with the PT's pragmatism. 'To govern is to negotiate', Lula explained in *A Verdade vencerá* (2018). 'You make an agreement with who's there in Congress, whether they're robbers or not.'

In 2005 the monthly payments scandal was blazoned across the press, for the most part rabidly hostile to the PT. But Lula now took to the campaign trail and shifted left. The economy picked up, boosted by iron-ore and soybean exports to China, and the PT began a programme of raising living standards for the poor—Bolsa Família, household credit, minimum wage, old-age pensions—and expanding education. Encouraged by Kirchner's success in Argentina, Lula's speeches now contrasted the pro-poor PT approach to Cardoso's unpopular privatizations, even though his own government focused more on increasing private income than improving public services. He swept the 2006 presidential election with 61 per cent; his ratings would be nearly 80 per cent when he passed the baton to Dilma in 2010. Without openly confronting Washington, he took a more independent line on regional integration, developing warm relations with the other left governments, and joined fellow BRIC leaders in calling for a non-dollar global reserve currency after the 2008 financial crisis. New oilfields off the coast opened the prospect of dazzling wealth for Brazilians, managed by the public-private energy giant Petrobras. From a position of apparent strength, the PT at last secured a Congress majority by sealing a coalition with the opposition PMDB, at the price of several ministries and congressional posts.

Yet the PT's strategy of peaceful and pragmatic adaptation left it with no defences when its political enemies took the opportunity to mobilize state institutions against it, as the economy worsened after 2013. The judiciary, investigating Petrobras corruption, concentrated—as *Intercept's* revelations would show—on putting Lula in jail, even as judge Sergio Moro and prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol noted off the record that they lacked any incriminating evidence. In office the PT had never tried to organize its enormous voter base among the poor—the 40 million it helped escape from poverty; now it was outmatched on the streets by



million-strong demonstrations captured by the far right. Led by Dilma's PMDB Vice-President, Michel Temer, and with the backing of the Army chiefs, the Congressional majority turned against the executive and ousted Dilma in April 2016, pending the Senate's impeachment trial of her. The Supreme Court overturned Lula's constitutional right to habeas corpus and increased his pre-trial jail sentence on appeal from nine to twelve years, only reversing course when the evidence against Moro's *modus operandi* became too blatant to ignore.<sup>13</sup>

In sum: with bitter irony, the PT's conciliatory strategy towards the state had by 2019 contributed to the worst political outcome in Latin America, with Lula in prison and the hard-right Jair Bolsonaro in the Alvorada Palace. Bolsonaro's background lies in the murky realm where coercion, law and money collude: the paramilitary police and sub-state militias of Rio de Janeiro province, the forces that have targeted and killed outstanding popular leaders like Marielle Franco.

### *Results and prospects*

Within the overall left cycle in Latin America, each of these five strategic practices has been distinct. In Venezuela, an attempted military coup was defeated by mass mobilization and government-army relations were reversed, to produce armed *bolivarismo*. In Bolivia, a mass anti-colonial movement in office. In Ecuador, a scientific left-modernization project. In Argentina, Peronist labourism re-energized. In Brazil, the attempt at a pro-poor accommodation with the system. In political terms, their outcomes can be assessed on the basis of sheer durability—a classic state criterion—and socio-economic effect. On the first count, the radicalism of Chávez's project has paradoxically proved the most effective, outlasting all the rest. The latest OAS attempt to buy off the military command and install the unelected opposition leader Juan Guaidó in the Miraflores fizzled out in May 2019. 'Do they take us for mercenaries?' one top officer asked. Yet the socio-economic outcomes have been dire. The regime's determination to impose exchange-rate controls in conditions of oil-market and import dependency—and against the advice of all major left economists—proved disastrous. Venezuela's rulers have

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<sup>13</sup> See Pablo Gentili, ed., *Golpe en Brasil: Genealogía de una farsa*, Buenos Aires 2017; Carol Power et al., eds, *Crónica de una sentencia anunciada*, Buenos Aires 2018.

allowed it to become the demonized reference point—the epitome of a counter-hegemonic vision—for the forces of conservatism.

In terms of socio-economic progress, perhaps the greatest advances have been seen in Bolivia and Argentina; but in both countries, the lack of durability—due to personalism in La Paz, and to a fragile class coalition in Argentina—has put those gains in question. At the time of writing, a violent counter-revolution is being waged by the right in Bolivia, under the temporary stewardship of Jeanine Añez, whose virulently racist and reactionary gestures have alarmed even the OAS. In Argentina, Macri's attempt to re-impose full-bore neoliberalism has ended in electoral wipe-out, with CFK and her former chief of staff Alberto Fernández returning to power.

In analytical terms, it may be useful to examine the left governments' operations across the four dimensions of what Michael Mann has called 'infrastructural power': law, coercion, money, knowledge. Law here can be taken as referring to the legislature and the judicial system, mobilized against Dilma in Brazil, but also to the constituent process itself, which can serve—as in Venezuela in 1999—as a political education process. Coercion denotes the military and security forces and their intelligence wings, at national level; but the imperial power of the US has not been absent from this story: placated and promoted by Lula's dispatch of the Brazilian Army to Haiti; intervening from above through the OAS and other offices in Bolivia and Venezuela. Money here refers firstly to the world market and the international financial institutions, which always penalize social spending and so reinforce dominant-class bias.

Knowledge in this context has two distinct though related meanings. The first involves administrative and political expertise, an area where Latin American states' selective class biases are most apparent, shaped by a 200-year history of social hierarchies that endow a select few with access to education and prestige, powerful family networks, grasp of legislative processes, social access to the military high command and, not least, the symbolic capital of knowing how to speak, act and dress as the bearer of an elitist subjectivity. State functionaries may have both an *esprit de corps* and their own personal, party or regional agendas; they pass easily through the revolving doors between top ministerial positions and the penthouse suites of the private sector. Radical governments in Latin America have had serious difficulty in recruiting a new type of public servant, who grasps the novel role of a popular-democratic state.

The second meaning of knowledge here refers to the ‘common sense’ of generally accepted ideologies; it involves the power to construct a narrative that makes the selective biases of law, coercion and money seem legitimate. In societies deeply saturated by the images and meanings of the audio-visual media, the latter controls enormous power in setting the agenda and selectively presenting information. Who controls the apex of these hierarchical media conglomerates—proprietors, directors, CEOs—controls the message. The invisible hand here is not that of the market. A silent orchestra tunes its instruments, figuring out what melodies are required—though thinking too perhaps of who might hire or fire them, request a paid favour, invite them to lunch or for a vacation with sexual favours included at some glamorous beachside location. Democratic invention requires, as Gramsci knew, a different common sense, a new education and novel forms of leadership and popular identity. For this, radical governments require access to new media and autonomous critical thought.

Law, coercion, money, knowledge: command of all four dimensions is the prerequisite for the effective use of the state’s ‘infrastructural power’. In Venezuela, *chavismo* has succeeded so far in maintaining the support of the Army and initially commanded the constituent and legislative processes—powers lost in the 2016 National Assembly election. But the expertise the state could muster was increasingly weak and it has signally failed to administer the realm of money. In Bolivia, the right-wing opposition fought the MAS government to a halt in the constituent process, and retained the loyalty of the Fort Benning-trained high command—though it required the intervention of the OAS to oust Morales. Yet MAS did achieve some successes in the field of money—funnelling hydrocarbon taxes to the urban and rural poor—and that of culture, which will not be soon forgotten. In Ecuador, the Correa government rallied an impressive amount of expertise to audit the debt and so control the realm of money; an effective response to corporate media lay beyond its grasp, as did the armed forces. In Argentina, Kirchner succeeded up to a point in cleansing the judiciary of corruption and imposing the rule of law on amnestied military torturers. (The fate of Julio López, a worker due to give evidence against a notorious Buenos Aires police chief, head of a secret detention centre under the Junta, showed where these limits still lie.) If there was less advance in the realm of knowledge—the media dominance of the Clarín conglomerate remains inviolable—Kirchner also stood up to the IMF, demonstrating some command over the realm of money.

In Brazil, with the largest, oldest and most broadly dispersed ruling class on the continent, relying on habits of deference ingrained through centuries of slavery, the PT governments struggled to assert control in any of these four dimensions. Yet even in Brazil, where progressive advance has suffered the continent's worst defeat under Bolsonaro, the legacies of the left cycle have not all been swept away. Attempts to restart the neoliberalization programme have generated rounds of protest from Argentina to Ecuador. As Nicos Poulantzas argued in *State, Power, Socialism*, the transition to socialism 'cannot end with the taking of state power, but must extend to the transformation of the apparatus of the state'.<sup>14</sup> To this we may add: with the permanent presence of the citizenry in the streets, so that the strategic leap of the elites (once they've lost the tip of the pyramid) from one sector of the state to another—from the judiciary to the church, the police to the military, the constitutional courts to the upper houses of parliament, the universities to the media—in order to block democratic change, can be foreseen and decisively defeated.

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<sup>14</sup> 'But it does require, always, taking state power': Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, London 2000, p. 166.