Book Reviews

Latin America—Today and Tomorrow

Continuity and Change in Latin America. John J. Johnson, Ed. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1964. xiii + 282 pp. $6.75.

Change in Latin America is taking place so rapidly that it is difficult to keep up with it in thoughtful, printed words. The present collection of studies is one of the better recent attempts. Population growth of the area —about 3 percent per year—is higher than that of any other major area in the world. This, together with unresolved land-tenure problems, has caused thousands of former rural dwellers to try to crowd into the enormous and often filthy slums, the shanty towns that surround most of the large cities. New patterns of industrialization and economic organization struggle with old traditions of raw material and crop production, inadequate technical education, stratified social systems, and political customs often based as much on personalism as on principle and orderly practice. Editor Johnson sums up some of these problems in an excellent introductory chapter.

Thoughtful studies of eight functioning social types or significant segments of the population, each written by a North American expert, are then presented: the peasant (by Charles Wagley), the rural laborer (Richard N. Adams), the writer (Fred P. Ellison), the artist (Gilbert Chase), the military man (Lyle N. McAlister), the industrialist (W. Paul Strassmann), the urban worker (Frank Bonilla), and the university student (K. H. Silvert). In the final chapter R. P. Dore, a British sociologist, makes an interesting comparison between Latin America's problems and those of Japan. The variety of topics treated is wide, and in this review I can only make scanty remarks about each presentation.

Chase's chapter on the artist is the most compact and also the most comprehensive treatment of this subject that has come to my attention. He not only discusses aesthetic values, but ties the artists' activities to the social, economic, and political contexts in which they work. He points out that most present-day artists are against dictatorships of either the right or the left. Silvert finds that, contrary to some widely held opinions, the majority of university students are not radical or irresponsible. "Indeed, there is some reason for advancing the thesis that the student is at least temporarily a better citizen than his elders."

Peasants, as Wagley treats them, are rural workers who are attached to the land, either as owners of small plots or as share-workers on plantations. They have traditionally lived in communities made up of fellows of their own kind, rather removed from and neglected by the national system. Indian peasants have been more isolated than mestizos. Wagley discusses the problems involved in the inevitable absorption of peasants into national life.

Adams' "rural labor" includes not only agricultural workers but all who work or live outside the cities. Adams comes to some rather original conclusions in his analysis of the political and governmental influences in the organization of such workers.

The writer, as Ellison points out, has generally enjoyed greater prestige in the national system in Latin America than in the United States. Among other aspects, Ellison looks into the writer's part in "anti-yankyism" and in Marxist and other leftist movements. The Latin American military, especially the officer corps, has been both conservative and progressive. As McAlister says, the officers still play a quasi-political role in many countries. But they have also been agents for change, not only as military requirements themselves have demanded more science and better science, but also as the military has taken increasing interest in such modern developments as building roads and bridges, improving ports, and planning communities.

In such countries as Uruguay, Puerto Rico, and Mexico, Strassmann sees the Latin American industrialists only now emerging from the type of confused state from which their counterparts in the more industrially developed countries have already emerged. "Family firms, nepotism, paternalism, repression of labor, bribing of public officials, empires of fraud, panic before sizable reforms and sanctimonious acquiescence afterward" are still characteristic of much Latin American industrial life.

Urbanization of the worker, as Bonilla points out, has not produced the scale of upward social and economic mobility that the worker has enjoyed in the United States and Western Europe. If United States representatives are to be helpful in Latin American labor organization, they must make careful studies of the local and national situations and not rely solely upon the experiences of their own country.

Finally, in comparing Latin America with Japan, Dore finds that by 1870 the latter had rid itself of much feudalistic land holding and older economic organization, without giving up certain indigenous customs and institutions. In other words, Japan performed a sort of "do-it-yourself" transformation of its economy which Latin America has been unable to do. However, this was accompanied by a militaristic nationalism that, of course, caused troubles.

In many books of this kind, one finds one or more of the authors going off at odd angles from the central theme. Such is not the case in the present volume, which is a fairly consistent collection of contributions in consonance with its title.

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Statistical Images

Economic Growth in the West. Comparative experience in Europe and North America. Angus Maddison. Twentieth Century Fund, New York, 1964. 246 pp. $4.50.

This is a remarkably useful compendium of information about the comparative economic history of 12 or 13 countries of the Atlantic community, including the United Kingdom, the countries of the Common Market, the Scandinavian countries, the United