

**McClintock, Cynthia. Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998.**

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Are revolutionary movements in Latin America dead? The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts in Central America and the (re)establishment of civilian democratic rule throughout the region, all suggest the end of revolutionary movements. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Zapatista challenge in Mexico and the reinvigoration of guerrilla movements in Colombia are cause for caution. As Cynthia McClintock makes clear in her comparative study of revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Peru, the region may face new revolutionary challenges in the post-Cold War period.

The book begins with a discussion of some of the major theoretical approaches to revolution. McClintock discusses those approaches that focus primarily on political variables, especially the nature of the state and regime type, and on economic variables, such as class conflict and relative deprivation. McClintock argues that one has to consider both political and economic variables, and especially the interplay between them, to understand the emergence and expansion of revolutionary movements. In addition, she incorporates into her model the organizational capacities of the movements and the impact of US policy on the relative success of revolutionary movements in Latin America. In applying the model to El Salvador and Peru, McClintock finds that "the reasons for the emergence, expansion and ultimate fate of the two revolutionary movements were different." (p. 11) In El Salvador, political exclusion by the military regime as opposed to economic deprivation was the principal factor behind the emergence of the FMLN. Moreover, the political opening during the 1980s combined with the large-scale US support for the regime, were crucial in preventing a successful assault on state power. According to McClintock, this pattern resembles the revolutionary trajectory of other Latin American countries during the Cold War. The Peruvian case, however, "may be the harbinger of new revolutionary patterns during the post-Cold War era." (p. 11) Unlike the FMLN in El Salvador, the Shining Path emerged and expanded within the context of a civilian democratic regime. By most standards, elections during 1980-91 were free and fair. Consequently, political exclusion was not the most salient factor in Peru. Instead, economic variables, including rural inequality and land scarcity, as well as the deepening economic crisis during the 1980s, provided the catalyst for revolution. Moreover, the US government's neglect of the revolutionary challenge in Peru and its minimal assistance to the Peruvian government may have facilitated the expansion of the Shining Path.

The rest of the book is organized in a straightforward fashion. Chapter 2 analyzes the differing organizational capacities of the two movements, and argues that both were on the verge of taking power at different moments in their evolution. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the relative importance of political and economic variables in explaining the emergence and evolution the two movements. In Chapter 5, McClintock assesses the varying impact of US policy, and in chapter 6 she incorporates original survey data from interviews with the revolutionaries themselves to bolster her argument. Finally, a

concluding chapter considers policy options for the US and other international actors in addressing future revolutionary challenges.

Although I agree with the general thrust of her argument, I do take issue with the author on a couple of scores. First, while McClintock does not neglect economic variables in the Salvadoran case, her discussion lacks historical perspective, focusing almost exclusively on the 1970s and '80s. As several scholars have argued, the expansion of non-traditional agro-exports in the 1950s and '60's contributed to the massive displacement of the peasant population in El Salvador.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the expulsion of 130,000 Salvadorans from Honduras after the Soccer War in 1969 and the growing inadequacies of the urban economy closed off the traditional escape valves for the growing landless population during the 1970s. Many of the peasants who would be mobilized by the FMLN in Chalatenango and Morazán had been displaced by the expanding agro-export economy. They rented or purchased subsistence plots on marginal lands while working as migratory farm labor for three to four months of the year. Moreover, a good number of these peasants were first mobilized by progressive elements of the Catholic church and participated in church-affiliated peasant organizations.<sup>2</sup> In Chapter 6, several of the FMLN members interviewed refer to the influence of progressive priests on their political formation and participation. Unfortunately, the church's role in mobilizing the peasantry in El Salvador is never made an explicit element of McClintock's overall argument.

Despite these shortcomings, the book represents the first comprehensive comparative treatment of two of Latin America's most important revolutionary movements. It is a valuable contribution to the literature and will be of interest to students and scholars of Latin American politics, as well as those interested in social movements and revolution.

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#### **Endnotes**

1. See Charles Brockett, *Land, Power and Poverty: Agrarian Transformation and Political Conflict in Central America*. 2nd. ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998).
2. Jeffrey Paige, "Land reform and Agrarian revolution in El Salvador," *Latin American Research Review*, 31, no. 2 (1996), pp. 127-39.