

### C. 3: Analyzing Revolutions in Latin America

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May 8, 2009

#### Introduction

Most North American students and a majority of academics of development become enamored at some point with the idea of revolution as a way to remake Latin America for the good of the poor majority. We have pointed out that exclusion is one of the most important driving forces in Latin American history, and revolution promises a quick, once-and-for all fix to the problem.

The idea behind a revolution is thus inevitably attractive; it means cleaning out the establishment and starting a “new” form of government. Unfortunately, as we will see in our analysis, revolutions almost always fail in providing a government for the good of the majority, and, when they do succeed, they surface with a number of unforeseen and often lamentable consequences. Still, given the slow pace of gradual reform in Latin America, revolution will continue to look attractive to those who can not wait or do not see the possibilities for meaningful reform. Interestingly, we can apply the same criteria for any quick, if illegitimate (in means), change, even if a backwards one, such as a reactive military coup. This is a point that young (foreign) revolutionaries unfortunately miss, that process can be as important as purported outcome.

#### A Typology of Revolutions in Latin America

Revolutions are an integral part of Latin American history. They have occurred from the pre-colonial time to the present day. We can recognize several distinct categories of revolution in Latin American history.

-1- Indigenous Revolution- This type of revolution includes everything from the Tupac Amaru revolts of the early Spanish colonial rule to the Zapatistas today. Indigenous revolts surround the desire for greater autonomy and control of local resources, particularly land, by indigenous partisans. With the notable exception of the Zapatistas, none of these rebellions has ever succeeded, and as we discuss later, the Zapatistas have had a mixed success at best. However, we should note that there are a number of ongoing struggles among indigenous groups. These seem to fit less in the category of revolution and more in social movement, so we shall touch on them in that chapter.

-2- Populist Revolution- There are a number of cases of modernizing military coups that could be considered revolutions in political behavior. These would include the middle class revolts of Peron in Argentina, and Vargas in Brazil. The populist dictator promises to redistribute wealth while maintaining high economic growth. Unfortunately, the redistribution has been less in the form of permanent assets, and more in the form of short-term income redistribution, with the result that as economic problems are encountered, the experiment ended, usually in a military coup, sometimes in a democratic transition (eg Ibañez in Chile), with economic stagnation and dissatisfaction. A more

interesting, and perhaps more promising modern version of this trait is found in the democratic populists, such as Fujimori in Peru and Chavez in Venezuela.

-3- Military Counter-Revolution- Most military coups before the period of populist dictatorships were of the caudillista and conservative type. The military was the main vehicle for gaining power and establishing a central government. Latin American militaries are also seen as having close ties to the conservative classes of society, including the Catholic Church. However, with the rise of the Radical parties in the 1920s, elements of the military began to show progressive ideas, reflecting the growing strength of the middle class in all social institutions, as well as intellectual borrowing from events abroad (the rise of fascism and communism). The culmination of the progressive military would occur in the socialistic revolutions, which we will discuss below, and in the 1968 Peruvian military coup. It is notable that the military is the linchpin behind Castro, Chavez, and Morales' power, and played a crucial role in the counter-coup to restore Chavez in 2002. However, the majority of military actions after the populist dictatorships were and have been to prevent socialist parties or guerrillas from taking power. The wave of coups in the 1960s and 1970s was directly related to fighting socialist guerrillas in Latin America, and, unfortunately for progressives, generally succeeded in wiping them out as serious challenges for military takeover of the state. The dismal political, economic, and human rights record of the military governments wiped away the pretence that central planning by them could lead to stable politics and economic growth. Thus, a military coup in most Latin American countries, whether of the Conservative or progressive variety, seems less likely now than ever in history.

-4- Socialistic Revolution- As we discussed in the previous chapter, by the 1920s, Communist and Socialist political parties had started appearing in conjunction with the new unions of workers. At the same time, the successful construction of Communism in the Soviet Union provided an important inspiration for revolutionaries everywhere, including Latin America. Even as the early euphoria of international imitative revolutions died out, the Soviet Union continued to support revolutionary movements in the region. The success of the Cuban socialistic revolution in 1959 marked the apex of this strategy, but until the Sandinistas won power in Nicaragua in 1979, was not repeated. Even today, the remaining leftist guerrillas, such as the FARC in Colombia and the Shining Path in Peru, vaguely claim socialism as their end goal. There also remain small political parties who identify themselves with the left, though their tone of violent revolution seems considerably muted. The rhetorical stance of President Chavez in Venezuela, including the inevitable trips to Cuba, demonstrates that socialism as a principle of equality, rather than a reality of state monopoly over the means of power and wealth, still holds appeal to some Latin Americans.

### The Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution really sets the table for all 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutions in Latin America, and the reverberations of its effects are still felt in politics in the region today. The Mexican Revolution was the first successful socioeconomic revolution in Latin America, but also included the innovations of anti-imperialist nationalism, official

land reform, indigenous rights, and a unique solution to the problem of caudillismo. We may scoff at the idea of the decidedly conservative forces now represented by the “institutional” revolutionary party (PRI) in Mexico, but we should recall that the PRI’s origins go back to 1917, even before the Communist revolution in Russia. Though some suggestions for further reading are provided in the selected bibliography at the end of this chapter, we will not go into details here. Instead we highlight some of the more interesting features of the Mexican system for Latin American issues here.

The immediate source of the Mexican Revolution was the desire to overthrow Porifio Diaz, a dictator, who ironically had come into power under the slogan of effective suffrage, no re-election. Diaz did not take long to ensure that no one would succeed him as he consolidated control of the country. In fact, Diaz had some elements of national progress in mind, when he invited foreign investors to come into Mexico, with the idea that they would build up infrastructure and provide export markets. However, these changes in the economy only exacerbated the political and economic exclusion of the majority, who saw none of the new quick wealth of the nation reach their hands. Ironically, a professional class was bolstered by Diaz’s rapid economic growth policies, and helped to eventually undermine the regime.

The revolution itself was symbolized by its five great leaders, Madero, Villa, Zapata, Calles, and Obregon. These leaders symbolized the elements of the Mexican revolution that form its lasting legacy. Madero represented a continuation of the reformist Constitutional Liberal tradition that we discussed in regard to Bolivar. This tradition was brought to a head in Mexico by Benito Juarez in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but had lost ground with the rise of Diaz. However, we could still say that the strong references to the Mexican Constitution produced by the Revolution show that the document itself holds more than symbolic value. The legacy of Juarez, then, continued in the sense of the need to create a legal framework for a new order, and referring to that framework for justification of future political actions, which was quite unusual in Latin America at that time. Pancho Villa, the bandit icon, is revered in Mexico precisely because he effectively taunted the U.S. from his hideouts in Northern Mexico. In pushing for greater regional autonomy, he is a distant precursor to the sense of difference and politics that exist between Northern and Southern Mexico today. More importantly, Villa symbolizes the strong anti-imperialism and anti-US feeling that fires much of Latin American political passion, even today. Anti-imperialism was embedded in the new Mexican Constitution in the form of an explicit claim for all rights to the subsoil, including minerals. This backlash to the Porfirista arrangement culminated in the nationalization of the oil fields by President Cardenas in 1930, a nationalistic and anti-imperialist move that was imitated, sooner or later, by the region over the next decades. Emiliano Zapata is an even greater contemporary icon for his support of indigenous rights and representation, and land reform for the impoverished groups of the South. The Zapatista rebellion, which we discuss in the last chapter, directly claims Zapata’s symbolism. Zapata’s concerns were included in the form of recognition of indigenous rights and in terms of setting up the communal and controversial ejido land system for indigenous farmers.

In a symbolic sense, the Mexican Revolution thus marked the beginnings of a claim to an independent cultural, political, and social identity in Latin America. As we discussed in c.1, the Mexican Revolution led to official sanctioning of the artistic movement known as *indigenismo*, which reflected an embrace of the pre-colonial past, and the claim to the creation of a new synthetic culture. In Mexico itself, this new creation was symbolized in a political sense by the creation of the PRI, which represents the contribution of Obregon, and even more so, Calles' leadership. The PRI became a unique animal in Latin America, in pushing the military out of political affairs, in setting up effective rules for bloodless succession, and in the attempts, however, feeble and gradualistic, to slowly include marginalized elements of Mexican society. Unfortunately, as the organization took place through the party apparatus into functional groups, such as labor and industry, over time, an inevitable sclerosis of the institutions took place. Like the elements of anti-imperialism, nationalism, and *indigenismo*, these aspects of consolidation through political parties were reproduced in a weaker form in other Latin American countries, such as Venezuela, and in a different form in military bureaucratic states, in other areas, in the 1960s. The seeming brilliance of consolidating decision-making within a single party, the military, or tight coalition of parties ("pactismo") inevitably seems to end in a *clientelismo*, whereby the sense of national purpose is lost in the need to serve increasingly corrupt patron-client networks. While this is certainly an improvement over the *caudillismo* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the institutions it sets up do not completely solve the problem of succession, and certainly do not function efficiently.

As the revolutionary party became "institutional" in Mexico, the momentum for creating a new synthetic healthy Latin American identity was lost in the labyrinthine machinations of one party bureaucratic rule, even as the wider implications of Revolution continued to reach throughout the region.

### The Cuban Revolution- The False Prophet

Considering that the Mexican Revolution was in 1917, there was an inevitable sense of disappointment at the lack of further successful socioeconomic revolutions in the region. Certain revolutionary movements, such as Aprismo in Peru, the trienio period in Venezuela, and the Socialist Marmaduke Grove government in Chile, showed flashes of brilliance that were short-lived as the military, acting on behalf of an array of conservative forces, easily quashed them. In a sense, these movements took two bifurcating directions over the long run. In the case of APRA, the trienio leadership of Betancourt and Caldera, and a number of other cases, including a wide variety of Christian communitarian and corporatist movements, the radical sheen was gradually worn off, and the parties became mainstream reformist movements. Over time, even the elements of reform seem increasingly tepid among the heirs of these early movements.

The second basic direction was towards one of increasing radicalism, generally based upon a Marxist analysis. Going back to the 1930s, the Soviet Union had supported radical Marxist movements through a series of international meetings, and through ideological and material means. In general, the Soviet Union favored a popular front strategy through much of the post-World War II period as opposed to a revolutionary

one. By popular front, we mean the encouragement of a consolidated platform between the left and the center, generally in electoral terms. There were several pecuniary reasons for this. The first is that immediately after the Russian Revolution, Western forces had landed men and otherwise supported the counter-revolution. Whereas the initial euphoria expected a wave of imitative revolutions by “the proletariat” throughout the world, as with the French Revolution, any initial spread effect was effectively limited, revolutionary forces were generally weak, and conditions were not in the same extreme crisis state as Russia’s in 1917. Given its isolation, the Soviet Union moved towards a consolidation of buffer territories with the usurpation of Eastern European territory after World War II, and moved towards support of the more cautious popular front strategy elsewhere. It was not until the Communist Party under Mao won in 1949 that any major new Communist Revolution succeeded. Efforts to create revolution in other areas not only failed, but created an even stronger opposition in the U.S. and its European allies. With this new phase of the Cold War beginning in the 1950s, the revolutionary strategy was pushed forward, with the dramatic results of superpower confrontation by proxy, most dramatically in Korea and Viet Nam.

During this period of active support of revolutions, the Cuban Revolution managed to succeed. Like other successful revolutions, the Cuban Revolution took place during a crisis of the establishment. Fulgencio Batista was a brutal dictator, whose corruption, repression through the secret police, and basic ineptitude in terms of governance had worn out support throughout the middle and upper classes, and even elements of his main external supporter, the U.S. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century writings of Marti, followed by the Spanish-American War of 1898, culminated into a growing anti-imperialism directed against the U.S. was a strong element of Cuban national discourse. The U.S. had interfered repeatedly even as Cuba gained independence, and U.S. interests dominated Cuba’s economy, which was based primarily on sugar.

Like most other revolutionary leaders, Fidel Castro came from the elite. He was born in 1926 in the Oriente (Eastern) part of Cuba. His father was a successful agricultural (sugarcane) landowner, ironically enough, and helped to put Castro through law school. Castro’s devotion to Marxism was not at all apparent in his initial involvement with anti-Batista elements, which had a wide middle and professional class base. Nor did he have a clear guerrilla strategy, though this was the claim in hindsight. In fact, the first attempt at an overthrow was an abysmal failure, as Castro and a small group of other men attempted to seize the Moncada barracks, anticipating a widespread rebellion would ensue. With the failure, Castro was sent first to jail and then into exile, where he was tacitly supported by the Mexican government in his efforts to train an army. Castro’s army itself was not well-trained, and highly limited in number, with only about 15 at one point. Adopting a position in Cuba close to Castro’s hometown in Santiago was a decision of necessity, as the terrain allowed the group to avoid capture, which in any case was not an initial priority for Batista. Batista was more worried about an overthrow from within or from a democratic movement than a fledgling group of bandit revolutionaries in the remote part of the island. Still, to Castro’s credit, he kept his tight group together, and marched triumphantly into Havana with only 1000 colleagues, but as the symbolic leader of the nation in 1959. There can be little doubt about the

widespread support of the overthrow of Batista or the disappointment when Castro became a dictator. Castro's usurpation of the press, his closing down of political parties and activities, and his use of the military to repress and exile opponents, has been interpreted in 2 ways. The first is that such steps are "necessary" in order to preserve the Revolution from internal and external enemies, such as the US. Every speech Castro gives evokes the constant threat of invasion and so the need for tight control. The second is that this is just a front by Castro to hold onto his power. Regardless, the US embargo has provided fuel for Castro's fire, and most likely slowed down the possibility for change.

Castro did engage in widespread expropriation of both Cuban and U.S. properties, the latter of which had widespread support. With an incredible sense of timing, he was able to parlay the failure of the half-hearted and inept (no air cover provided) U.S. invasion of the Bay of Pigs into creating a regional folk hero status for himself, something that had never been achieved before. Castro's seizure of property provided initial resources for widespread literacy and health programs by the state, that helped to create the idea of the Cuban Revolution as the newest model for the region to follow. However, Castro's revolution was based on a house of sticks. The Cuban Revolution depended heavily on subsidization from the Soviet Union. While Castro attempted to become a regional exporter of revolution, with active and significant support for a wide variety of causes, including later ones in Africa, his patron did not really approve as it moved closer to the détente phase of the Cold War. The Soviet Union showed time and again, in the compromise during the Cuban Missile Crisis, in the failure to support the Arbenz or Balaguer leftist governments in Guatemala and the Dominican Republic, or Allende in Chile, that it was unwilling or unable to confront the U.S. in its own backyard in any significant area outside of Cuba.

Cuba's inability so far to diversify its economy towards autonomy and away from dependency, as well as the poor, if equitable, standards of living of its population after 50 years of experimentation have reduced its appeal as a direct model to be followed. Nonetheless, Castro's message of anti-imperialism continues to create strong echoes throughout the region. Nor is the Revolution really consummated in the sense of the uncertainty of who or what will succeed Castro. Even supporters of the Revolution have pointed out that Cuba has not achieved the levels of true social mobility, as both gender and race continue to matter in Cuba. The lack of institutionalization is understandable as the Communist Party consolidated power as the personal instrument of Castro. Secondly, the Cuban economy has struggled since the Revolution with periods of exhortation and collectivization followed, as was the case in the Soviet Union and China, by poor harvests and continuing hardships. As in the other countries, but to a much lesser degree, Castro has also been pragmatic, allowing European and Canadian ownership and tourism to bring in much needed money, and allowing for limited pockets of private entrepreneurship. More important still is the heavy reliance on remittances from the US to keep the economy afloat; ironically most of the flow comes from Miami! On the other side, Cuba has correctly been noted for its achievements in health and basic literacy, programmes that have been partly exported to other developing regions.

If Cuba is no longer a model for LA, what is? This is a question still in play. For impatient revolutionaries, the fact that other countries such as Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Chile, have improved their socioeconomic conditions in a less dramatic fashion, and without the political repression or economic stagnation, is not inspiring. In the cases of Uruguay and Chile, the period of military rule economic growth and equity have improved following difficult military dictatorships, however, it is strange that Costa Rica, with no military, has never caught the eye of outsiders, perhaps because it does not share the same gift of anti-American rhetoric that is so endearing to Cuban romanticists.

### The Sandinista Revolution- Last Gasp of Socialism?

From 1959 to 1979, the Cuban Revolution inspired guerrilla movements without success throughout the region. Indeed, throughout the region, repressive military governments seemed to have defeated leftist armed insurrections by the mid-1970s. In 1979, the success of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua re-opened a new wave of revolutions in the region. Like the case of Cuba, the Sandinistas came to power amidst a strong sense of crisis and opposition against a reigning and corrupt dictator. Also, as in the case of Cuba, the U.S. had weakened support of its client dictator, Somoza, and pushed for reforms. Unlike Cuba, the Sandinistas had a long history of struggle against the government, dating back to Augusto Sandino, their inspirational leader from the turn of the century. The Sandinista movement historically was more of an anti-imperialist than a Marxist one, and enjoyed a widespread middle-class base at the time of the revolution.

When the Sandinistas came to power, it became clear that they intended to reproduce the successful elements of the Cuban Revolution. As in Cuba, the U.S. had a long history of interventions, including several invasions, of Nicaragua, and anti-imperialist sentiment is a strong element of the Nicaraguan mindset. Nicaragua was also a highly unequal agricultural economy, with strong dependency on a few agricultural crops (primarily coffee). However, the conditions during 1979 were completely different from those of 1959, when the Cuban Revolution and Castro's Marxist claims took the U.S. and the middle-classes by surprise. Obviously, Nicaragua is not an island and so was subject to continual pressure on its borders. This time, the U.S., first under Carter, and then under Reagan, steadily increased pressure on the Sandinistas, eventually openly funding guerrilla resistance who had a safe haven in Honduras (ironic repetition of the facts in Vietnam). Second, the Soviet Union was in the midst of its own conflict in Afghanistan and otherwise suffering from economic atrophy, and so quite unwilling and unable to provide aid to the Sandinistas. Third, as in the case of the Cuban Revolution, the initial expropriations of various properties, primarily those of Somoza, provided initial resources and impetus for socioeconomic reforms, but no lasting base of resources was created.

Therefore, the Sandinistas were able to engage in progressive land reform and create laudable literacy and health campaigns, but found themselves unable to move forward. Like Castro, as the initial sheen of the Revolution wore, and economic hardships kicked in, support for the regime began to decline, though support for the guerrillas, known as the Contras, remained tepid. To his credit, Daniel Ortega, though

lacking the charisma of Castro, voluntarily agreed to hold elections in order to stave off legitimate claims by the U.S. that the regime was undemocratic. Also to their credit, the Sandinistas voluntarily gave up power when they lost the election. It is an interesting twist of history to note that the Sandinistas are now colluding with the other leading political party, UNO, to keep out third party contenders. In any case, the socioeconomic reforms initiated by the Sandinistas seem to have atrophied as the economy has been in a tailspin under both Sandinista and opposition forces. Ortega's personal scandals did not help matters in terms of maintaining the Sandinistas' image as a progressive force with new ideas for Nicaragua. Once in office, a series of opposition leaders, despite nominal support from the US during the campaigns, have proved to be disasters in term both economic management and political corruption once in power. At the time of this writing, Ortega has been reelected, but promises both solidarity with Chavez and to be moderate to the US. Like the situation in El Salvador, the generation or more of continual violence has died down, but no solution has been found for dealing with the underlying polarization based on inequality, particularly land concentration and weak social mobility, and a generation of violence that has moved from civil war to violent crime.

Common Traits of Latin American Revolutionaries

Table 3.1 below demonstrates that there are interesting patterns among some of the most important Latin American revolutionaries. Examining these patterns might suggest to us what elements are needed for a successful revolutionary movement.

**Comparing Modern LA Revolutionary Movements**

Country	Leadership	Nature of Revolution	Constituency	Outcome
APRA (Peru)	UC,intellectual	assassination & elections	organized L, indigenous	repressed, but reforms
Bolivia	UC,intellectual	coup w/police help	L-miners	brief but serious reforms
Cuba	MC, activist	guerrilla war	limited anti-govt.	revolution
Chile	MC, activist	contested election	L, parts MC	mil. coup
Nicaragua	MC, activist	guerrilla war	Peasant	revolution, but compromise
El Salvador	FMLN, no caudillo	guerrilla war	Peasant	electoral agreement, some gains
Mexico	Zapatistas, no caudillo	guerrilla warfare; international appeals	regional, peasant & indigenous; intl. intellectuals and sympathizers	standoff, some de facto autonomy

UC= Upper Class; MC= Middle Class; L= Labour

Compiled by Anil Hira

The above table and our case studies show us that, contrary to the romantic ideals of a mass and spontaneous insurgency, revolution in Latin America has involved deliberate and sustained efforts over long periods of time before success was achieved. Moreover, in each case, the revolutionary leadership has an advanced education and almost always middle or upper class roots, as is the case historically with the American, Russian, and to some extent the French Revolutions. In the cases of successful

revolutions, including Cuba and Nicaragua, there was a strong middle and some elements of upper class support for the revolution, at least until the rebels came into power. We also see that the revolutions as well as their counter-revolutionary foes have had strong ties to external patrons- the U.S. and the former Soviet Union provided much of the resources needed to sustain both sides of the conflict. The two cases of electoral revolutions, namely Chile and Nicaragua, did not lead to sustained redistribution, which would raise the question of whether a Latin American revolution can succeed without strong control of the nation's armed forces. Revolutions seem to achieve unity on anti-imperialism, but less so on redistribution. Once in power, it appears, similarly, that expropriation of foreign property is a much more likely and easy target than redistribution along class lines. The question of electoral effectiveness is starting to reopen now with the prominent election of leftist Lula in Brazil, the recent ballot box success of the FMLN, and the electoral support of Chavez in Venezuela, Ortega in Nicaragua, Correa in Ecuador, and Morales in Bolivia. We will have to wait to see if the new left wave produces any redistribution.

It is important to note that the "lessons" of successful revolution via guerrilla warfare seem to be lost inevitably lost on young students who tend to glorify wholesale change in the abstract, reflecting the yearnings of a new generation. However, the human and economic costs of 30 years of struggle in Latin America were incalculable, not only in terms of missed opportunities, but in tragic human costs. As Mao, Che, and other famous theorists point out, there may be important preconditions necessary for a successful revolution. These would include an acute crisis of the ruling establishment; a solid rural base of support for guerrilla actions; favorable terrain that allows for the constant hit and run tactics; reliable and quick lines of communication within the rebel group; access to the enemies strategy and communications but not vice versa; use of the media to embarrass the enemy and reduce his use of tactics without being subject to the same scrutiny, and use of the media to create a legendary, (eg Robin Hood) heroic status for the guerrillas; and an organization that is responsive to quick changes in strategy, yet independently diffuse enough that if one cell or the leadership is captured it will not affect the organization. Unfortunately, Che himself did not follow his basic precepts in his disastrous foray into Bolivia, where he was finally captured.

One could also suggest a la Hannah Arendt, that there is a sign that the nature of revolutions in Latin America is changing over time. We can see from the table that revolution, such as the American and Glorious Revolutions have been a reflection of intra-elite strife. However, as the modes of production (industrialization) took hold, as Barrington Moore suggests, there is clearly a growth in the support of a revolutionary labour movement, which is the backbone of the efforts towards socialism, not only in Latin America, but internationally, though the strengths of such movements seems to have peaked at different times in different areas and with different results. Obviously, the social welfare state, created as Polanyi describes as a way to "save capitalism" during the Great Depression, never really took hold in Latin America, with some limited exceptions. When we turn to the FMLN and Zapatistas, and even the FARC and Shining Path, discussed later, reflecting the innovative nature of the Chinese from the Russian Revolution, there is a much stronger base in rural areas, an emphasis on agrarian reform,

and the use of arguably more effective guerrilla tactics over time. Moreover, the Zapatistas have added another layer of innovation in terms of their claims to non-hierarchical decision-making. Not only is their spokesperson *sub*-comandante Marcos (a well-educated leader who claims not to be the leader), but they have attempted to be more inclusive in their decision-making. More importantly, as noted above they have limited claims, based on regional autonomy, rather than calling for a widespread national, international, or class-based revolution. Whereas in the Middle East, terrorism is the new revolutionary answer to systems of domination, social movements such as the Zapatistas and the MST (discussed in the later chapter on Brasil) could be harbingers of a new type of “subversive” activity in Latin America. It is interesting to note that those rebelling against modern systems of power, whether in the Middle East or Latin America, are quite adept at using the most up-to-date technology in promoting their cause.

### Conclusion- The Future of Revolutions in Latin America

As we will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, the post Cold War environment is completely distinct from the period in which both the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions took place. There is no longer a struggle between capitalism and avowed communism, and there is no Soviet Union to provide resources for revolutionary challenges. Indeed, many of the remaining revolutionary struggles, such as those in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Chile, as well as Nicaragua have ended through a combination of defeat and compromise to accepting a democratic process. The most interesting new revolutionary figure in the region is Hugo Chavez, but he was and remains a democratically elected leader, and he has not carried through on any serious redistributive reforms. In the following chapters, we take a look at some of the new revolutionaries in Latin America, including Chavez, the Zapatistas, the FARC of Colombia, and the MST (Landless Movement of Brazil).

We would not care to dismiss all chances of revolution in the future. The underlying conditions of poverty, volatility, and repression remain in the region. With the right combination of conditions, a revolutionary movement could gain strength again in the region. However, two key obstacles remain. The first is a steady stream of resources, which used to be provided, albeit haphazardly, by the Soviet Union. Narcotrafficking seems too corrupting of the rebel movements, (after all, it is a highly capitalist venture) thus far to serve leftist causes. The Zapatistas have received considerable support both moral, and to a lesser extent, financial, from international sources, but clearly not enough to sustain any major success against the Mexican government so far. The second condition is a general ideology, once served by communism or socialism, around which large groups of the population, particularly the middle and working classes, could rally. Such a plan would have to be a plausible and pragmatic alternative to current policies, as well as have idealistic elements that could inspire the population. Unfortunately, no such paradigm has arisen, at least not yet. Last but not least, it is important to note that the track record of revolutions is not all that inspiring. Though rebellion is a natural product of teenage years, and most combatants and zealots fall in this age group, it is natural to become more skeptical of grand causes

and “silver bullets” as one studies history more closely. Indeed, the glue that seems to hold revolutionaries together is hatred of a common enemy and sharing a dream-like faith in an ideal that has a cultural status. What we see is that when revolutions do succeed, the glue falls apart and infighting ensues, and there are few practical plans for actually realizing the ideal, whether it be socialism or some other goal. The history of successful revolutions is littered with the same concentration of power and violation of human and civil rights that they are supposed to restore. Revolutions have historically created an even greater concentration of power and use of repressive means, albeit among a new state-based elite. As is well-known, the easy targets of expropriation of foreign property over the long-run and social service campaigns lead to an initial explosion of euphoria and imitation, however over the long-run revolutions have not found a way to create sustainable growth that would raise living standards. Thus equity and growth remain as intractable problems after the revolution, the same as before, on top of more open intra-society violence and conflict, rather than resolved conflict. Finally, since most revolutions dismiss democracy as “bourgeois,” they often do not have any clearly defined plan for succession of leaders. Thus revolutions in the end may reflect a natural and ongoing response to injustice, but they have far from proven that they are an effective solution to it.

Key terms: revolution (literal meaning); indigenous vs. populist vs. socialist vs military revolution; Thermidorean reaction; golpe de estado; counter coup; progressive military

Discussion questions:

What if one of the other Mexican revolutionary leaders had won?  
What caused the Mexican revolution to go awry? Why is called the perfect dictatorship?  
What did it accomplish?

What makes for a revolutionary leader? What is the motivation, background, and push?  
Is the capability in battle the same as one after victory? What happens when revolutionaries get old? What is the relationship between the revolutionary leader and followers?

Why does the military seem like an attractive vehicle for revolution?

What are the key aspects of successful guerrilla warfare? If you were planning a revolution, how would you do it? What would you need? How would you assess your chances for success?

Is the outcome of all revolutions one of disappointment? Why or why not? What would be needed to preserve a revolution?

### Suggested Exercises

Revolutions are of great interest to young students, and often one of the most interesting attractions to studying Latin America. One good exercise would be to look to some of the theoretical writing on revolutions, such as *On Revolution* by Hannah Arendt, and then to see to what extent such these theories explained specific cases in Latin America. Another way to approach this question would be to have students create an essay comparing two revolutions in Latin America, or to compare a Latin American revolution with those outside the region. Students often find the lives of revolutionary leaders, such as Che, particularly fascinating. However, a closer examination of their lives can help to bring the icon down to earth. Similarly, juxtaposing the goals and ends of a revolution with what actually happens afterwards is a sobering exercise. Perhaps one of the more interesting exercises is examining the usually quite deep historical roots of struggles for justice, such as attempts to end slavery, so that a revolution can be seen as the apex of a long-build up of efforts rather than a spontaneous and inevitable eruption of sentiment. Again, it is always helpful for students to look at primary documents and sources on particular revolutions, in order to get beyond the hype, to the day-to-day obstacles and puzzles that both successful and would-be revolutionaries confront.

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Skocpol, Theda, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*. NY: Cambridge U. Press, 1994.

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<sup>1</sup> Revolution may be the most used term in political science and history. I have tried to include just a few works here that may not be so obvious to students.

Wright, Thomas C., *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, Westport: Praeger, 2000.