SOCIAL JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA
DILEMMAS OF DEMOCRACY AND REVOLUTION

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This is a <u>very</u> rough draft; Comments are welcome,
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Few phrases capture more emotion(s) or empower(ed) more people than the term "social justice." Claims for social justice are rarely problematic and have historically managed to cut across the left-right political spectrum conventionally invoked for the last several hundred years, although, as will be discussed below, such demands are most commonly associated with leftist political projects. Regardless, attainment and respect for social justice has proven to be another matter entirely; arguably one of the more intractable challenges confronting modern politics. In practice, what we might construe as, to borrow a perhaps infelicitous phrase, actually existing social justice has resisted easy definition and proven far more difficult to implement than to importune. Nowhere is this more evident than in 20th Century Latin America and the Caribbean.

Clarion calls for what might be reasonably heard/read as social justice–we will get to the sticky definitional issue of what exactly this rather handily bandied about if vague term means just below--can be found in Latin America and the Caribbean for some five hundred years at this point; it is not unreasonable to assume that such calls were heard even earlier.[1] Nonetheless, the advent of the Mexican Revolution–the first great socio-political upheaval in a century rife with them–marks the start of a period in which demands for social justice and debates over its constitution and implementation in the region have been thick. Social justice has been a vision, a goal, a prescription, a commitment–often controversial, always contested, ever coveted.

Considering the last fifty years of the 20th Century, social justice demands have been the common bond among an array of processes from Guatemala's democratic interregnum (1944-54) through the revolutionary movements that followed the success of the Cuban revolution (1960 on, including Peru 1968), from the emergence of a Latin American and Caribbean interpretation of liberation theology (articulated at Medellin in 1967) through the social movements (mid-1970s on) which began to lay claim to rights for the poor, for women, for the disappeared, for the indigenous, and even for the environment and which appear to have hastened the resurgent (perhaps nominal) democracies of the late 20th Century. While these democracies, whose legitimacy derives at least in part from the gross human rights abuses and economic excesses at

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[1]With regard to the former, in 1519 the indigenous chieftain Enriquillo led an uprising in Hispaniola against the *encomendero* (property holders who were essentially the slave masters of the indigenous people under the Spanish *encomienda* system designed to reward expeditionary leaders) who had been given control over him (Castro, 1999: ii). With regard to the latter, it merits mention that despite the temptation to present indigenous peoples as good and wise and benevolent, all of which they undoubtedly were, they could also be bad and stupid and malevolent: the Inca developed one of the most socially and politically sophisticated societies in the world, a welfare state (of sorts) that predated Europe's experimentation with such by more than five hundred years, their relatively young empire was also denoted in part by a proclivity for invading and conquering; the Aztecs/Mexicas created an empire during the 14th-16th centuries marked by their complex agricultural economy as well as their conquests and politico/religious practices, which featured mass human sacrifice; and the Maya, related Native American tribes, were highly developed in an array of areas but warfare played a key role and the powerful found reasons to use human sacrifice throughout their culture. Each were once upon a time the super power of their world; it is thus reasonable to assume that various people may have cried for social justice within and against these societies well before badly behaved Europeans showed up.

the expense of the immiserated and impoverished–the immense majority of people in Latin America and the Caribbean--have made social justice claims central, so have those same poor and marginalized people whose lives reflect little of the supposed commitment–new found or old--to social justice.

Defining Social Justice

The timeless ideals of justice, liberty, equality, opportunity, and freedom (from fear, from hunger, from disease; of assembly, of speech, of religion) remain powerful and compelling in a world where many, perhaps most people's daily lives reflect none of these. Social justice is a broader concept than its constitutive components–any list of which is likely to be inconclusive and contested--and gestures at the general unifying factors that in a number of places over several centuries have undergirded the movement for a fairer, less oppressive society that offers an equality of opportunity and the basic rights; most such demands have been rooted not only in relatively simple economic claims for a fair or more equitable distribution of wealth but also in more profound moral concerns for the treatment of people. Hence no definitive definition of social justice will be proposed here but rather a working definition meant to capture the implications and ramifications of such claims.

Keeping social justice broad allows for various discourses, few if any of which can be usefully subsumed by some meta-discourse, to be given voice. Writ large, social justice seeks to reflect a reality which is good for all and for each (since these seem to be dialectically related) and that is enabled by the fair distribution of a society's benefits and responsibilities. Central to this is a shift from change focused on systems or specific institutions to a focus on the needs of individuals, albeit individuals embedded in a community and dependent upon collective resources; people often derive much of their emotional, psychological, and cultural sustenance from their communal identities, perhaps none more so than those for whom life is a constant struggle.[2]

What are those needs? Air, water, food, sleep, protection from the elements (perhaps including medical care to prevent disease?), and protection from physical abuse. While love and respect are perhaps more controversial aspects, and obviously even more difficult to appraise, presumably some measure of these must be relevant to any useful and meaningful calculus of a person's well-being.

And, to borrow from Thomas Paine, such needs are a matter not of charity but of justice; given our "equal ownership of the Earth," we should all be granted an "unconditional endowment when coming of age" (Van Parijs 1998:16[3]). As will be developed below, when such exigencies are put off on charity they run the risk of increasing rather than decreasing the need for social justice applicable to all. This seems particularly likely when, as is noted by Mayer (1998:24), the help available is only from small, often homogeneous groups–family, churches, et. al.–whose notions of what is fair or appropriate must be accepted by the vulnerable, hence reinforcing their very vulnerability and forcing them to accept the definitions and proscriptions of the wealthy and

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[2]See here, for example, classic works by Geertz (1973), Scott (1979), and, with particular regard to Latin America and the Caribbean, more recent efforts by Anderson (1994).

[3]Van Parijs (1998:16) cites Paine's *Agrarian Justice* (1796) as the source of the phrase "Justice, not Charity."

the powerful. Hence the plea and place for the state and an attendant modern welfare system to break the once firm (nefarious?) link between socio-economic power and the individual's dependence on the kindness of strangers.

Cries for freedom, social justice, and dignity–and variations thereof–have resonated across Latin America and the Caribbean for at least five hundred years. As noted above, there is rarely much argument about the principles of social justice; the debate, for lack of a better term, is over the application of these principles. Almost five centuries ago, Bishop Bartolome de las Casas, Bishop of Chiapas, Mexico (commonly known as the "Apostle of the Indians" or "The Defender of the Indians" and in the last hundred years often invoked by Catholic social justice advocates as an early pioneer of social justice), articulated those basic tenets with great simplicity: "the natural laws and rules and the laws of the rights of peoples are common to all nations, Christian and gentile, and of whatever sect, law, color, and condition they may be, without any difference" (de las Casas 1552.:vol I, p. 117).

Yet Brazilian Archbishop Dom Hélder Câmara, the "Red Bishop of Recife," rather succinctly summed up the dilemma of implementing such principles in language reflective of the Cold War mentality which dominated much of the second half of the 20th Century and privileged issues of "high politics"–spheres of influence and containment theory--over such mundane issues as where a person might find food for themselves or their children, how a person might keep their children from dying from some easily preventable or treatable disease such as diarrhea,[4] where one might find a roof to protect their children from the elements. In his oft quoted lamentation, Dom Hélder, one of the driving forces at the Second Latin American Bishops Conference (Medellín 1967) which interpreted the Vatican II documents for Latin America and the Caribbean and one of the authors of the "Justice" portion of the resulting documents, notes that: "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint; when I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist." Across five hundred years, social justice in practice has remained elusive.

Social Justice In Latin America and the Caribbean

In modern Latin America and the Caribbean, the drive for social justice has been central to both virtually every reformist movement for democracy and every revolutionary movement; even some authoritarian/totalitarian movements have laid claim to such principles--Peron in Argentina (the first time around) and perhaps Vargas in Brazil as well as the Peruvian military, at least in its initial formulation, in 1968 come to mind here. The critical point here is that democratic movements everywhere "derive much of their moral authority from the hope they hold out of displacing unjust social arrangements" (Shapiro 1996: 579). By the same token, revolutionary movements at least since 1789 in France have sought to rally popular support and relied on popular responses that "reflected less concern for legality than for social justice" (Hickey 1996:622). All such movements as well as some authoritarian movements in the region have been defined in part by their commitment to rectifying the profound inequities, the injustice, people confront in their daily lives. Central to the claims to state power put forth by all such movements is the articulation–plausible or not–that the core purpose of the state is to redress the grievances

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[4]Lest this seem an exaggeration, diarrhea remains one of the primary killers of children under five in Latin America and the Caribbean.

of its citizens and provide a better life for all; naturally, the attendant claim is that only this person or group can do so.

For revolutionaries in Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, Grenada, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Mexico (redux) and for progressive democrats in Peru, Guatemala, British Guiana/Guyana, Chile, Jamaica, Suriname, Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico, demands for social justice developed out of individual and collective action in the face of unresponsive, intransigent, and unrepentant elites and their international allies. The cases where either progressive democrats or revolutionaries managed to acquire state power, with the arguable exception of Cuba,[5] reflect the efforts on the part of those newly in power designed to, if not win over, at least placate the capitalist class while implementing policies broadly favorable to the general population, mostly workers and campesinos. The resultant intense social contradictions contributed in almost every case to the "defeat" or stagnation of either the reforms or the revolutionary processes by the local elites and their international allies, for the last hundred years, predominantly the United States. Even the most doctrinaire Marxists amongst this crowd–of whom there were remarkably few, under the circumstances--spoke the language of social justice rather than that of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The claim to social justice has been the dominant discourse and the elusive promise.

The popular conception, often reinforced by regional elites until a crisis hits and their international supporters not to mention mainstream North American/European academia (read the modernization/development crowd here) of quiescent/apathetic/lethargic/somnolent masses in need of order and discipline–a flip side, of sorts, to the panic-stricken elite, regional intellectuals (by and large) and starry-eyed North American/European academics' propensity for reading the masses as a roiling cauldron of anger and resentment barely held in check by the world's most repressive systems[6]–ignores that the revolutions noted above as well as the somewhat more

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[5]A variety of extenuating circumstances make this an extremely difficult case to consider in this context. But see Eckstein (1994) and even more McCaughan (1997).

[6]As I have argued elsewhere (Selbin 1999:145), there is, in some sense, a recurring plot line with regard to revolutions in Latin America and the Caribbean: revolutions happen, practically part of the region's "romantic" flora and fauna (for amplification on this topic, see, e.g., Dorfman and Mattleart or Black 1988). Moreover, as Sánchez Lira and Villarreal point out, "we all know that many North American leftist intellectuals have a tendency to romanticize the violent social processes south of the border. It seems that, for them, we will always be curious and exotic subjects in need of redemption" (1995:223). Certainly North American and European scholars have displayed such a penchant since the Mexican revolution and popular fascination in those regions with the Mexican revolution and especially the "heroic" presentations of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata and even more so since the Cuban revolution and the mythologizing of "El Che." Yet Mexico's "modern" Zapatistas, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) consciously sought to evoke the romanticism of revolution in choosing their name; it was Zapata, after all, who declared that it was "better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees" (a pharse he apparently borrowed from his fellow revolutionary martyr, Práxedis Guerrero; see Albro1996), a phrase rivaled in its romanticization of revolution only by Che's famous proclamation that the "true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love."

mundane if no less dramatic electoral victories of the region's progressive democrats would have been impossible without broad popular support. In every case mentioned above, the deployment of the ideal of social justice was central to the efforts of either the reformers or the revolutionaries to capturing popular support by invoking and evoking collective memories and symbols. The framing of grievances and construction of some sort of oppositional identity around social justice served to broaden the base of, to enable and, perhaps more importantly, to ennoble, any movement committed to dramatic social change.

Claims related to social justice are not surprisingly critical for revolutionary movements and especially for revolutionary processes as they unfold. Revolutionaries must critique the excesses and abuses of the old regime even while they articulate a compelling vision of the future. More recently, this has also been the case with the push for (re)democratization in Latin America and the Caribbean; the abject failure of authoritarian/totalitarian approaches to ameliorate the injustices confronted by the populous and remedy the ever-widening gaps between the rich and the poor provided an easy target for the proponents of democratic renovation.[7] Seizing on issues related to social justice provided a ready-made platform.

Movements for Social Justice

People in a wide array of places, in different times, under various circumstances, well aware of the risks involved, have shown their capacity and willingness to organize in an effort to change their world. To succeed, the ideas and ideals, the stories told and the symbols deployed, must be persuasive, must be able to demand of people that they sacrifice a great deal in pursuit of what has historically–both small and capital H[8]--been as ephemeral as it has been alluring: the

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[7]At the end of the 20th century, more people in Latin America and the Caribbean live in poverty than did twenty years ago and income distribution has worsened. According to Gert Rosenthal, the executive secretary of the United Nations Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean, "the levels [of poverty] are still considerably higher than those observed in 1980, while income distribution appears to have worsened in virtually all cases" (Schrieberg 1997:165). The numbers remain simply staggering: "nearly half the region's 460 million people are poor--an increase of 60 million in one decade. Meanwhile, the number of Latin American billionaires rose from six in 1987 to 42 in 1994, a figure that is widely reported and resented" (Schrieberg 1997:165-6). The social and economic deprivation is stultifying.

[8]No practice capable of transformation occurs in isolation; there is always a context extant. History is the story, if not necessarily the whole story, of that context. Ahistoricism is illusory at best, disingenuous as a rule, and often mendacious; the denial of history does us no good and buys us even less. The critical question is whose history? History traditionally has been presented as a coherent chronicle of the past, a "historical record" uncovered by European and North American scholars that objectively represents "the facts" as they occurred. History thus revealed "the truth," a perspective no doubt comforting to most of those writing it and many of those reading it. This history, manufactured from the top, often ascribed to as and described as "fact," and in the service of the mighty that has been inscribed in books, taught in schools, and enshrined in official myths and legends. It is this history which has dominated our understanding of the world in which we live; most of us cannot imagine life without it. Yet Hegel's aphorism

fundamental transformation of the material and ideological conditions of their everyday lives.

What is necessary for broad based popular movements? With all due respect to more structural approaches, even the fairly congenial political opportunity structure perspectives,[9] or rational choice approaches,[10] the contention here is that the answer lies with a focus on collective memory, symbolic politics, and the (re)-creation, perhaps, of a collective identity. This reflects, at least in part, a conception of social movements and other forms of collective action as temporary autonomous zones from within which people seek opportunity, a moment in which they endeavor to take control, perhaps for the first time, of their lives.[11] Such zones are denoted in large measure by the efforts of individuals, banded together, who in various measures reassert control, resist destruction, and/or restructure their culture in the face of domination. Whether at the end of the 20th Century, increasingly frustrated populations will seek to use democratic mechanisms to make claims for social justice–including social movements–or whether they will rely on the more familiar paths of rebellion and revolution remains to be seen. Regardless, subjective, agency-oriented understandings of events and processes are required to capture the means and the manner in which people cobble together the sense of community necessary to combat the elite/the state.[12]

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bears repeating: "revolutions, nomadic wanderings, and the strangest mutations" are not in the history books (Hegel 1956:61, cited in White 1984:12).

[9]While the increasingly rich work in the political opportunity structure vein is sensitive to concerns about overly structural positions (see, e.g., Tarrow 1998), it remains embedded in structuralism. The flaws with Tarrow's impressive, challenging, and engaging work would appear to be few and far between. What merits mention for our purposes, however, is that it remains unclear why social movements fail to emerge when the political opportunity structures are in place and by extension neglects the role played by people's desires and hopes in creating and driving social movements. Despite explicitly providing a space for people, the details remain resolutely structural--perhaps not surprising when the key concept is that of political opportunity *structures*.

[10]I continue to be underwhelmed by both the premise and the promise of rational choice perspectives. With regard to the issue at hand, Reeher (1998:216) sums it up rather nicely: "social justice matters to people not simply for rational, self-interested reasons, and their views about justice are not simply rationalizations for self-interest."

[11]The pirate enclaves of the 18th century, the Assassins of the Middle Ages, the Paris Commune (1871) and the Munich Soviet of 1919 are all usefully conceived of as places where people imagined themselves in the process of taking control of their own destiny. I have borrowed the term "Temporary Autonomous Zone" (TAZ) from Hakim Bey who would almost certainly be uneasy with the use to which I put it here. Bey pointedly notes he has "deliberately refrained from defining the TAZ--I circle around the subject, firing off exploratory beams....the TAZ is almost self-explanatory." Bey's discussion of his "*essay* ('attempt'), a suggestion, almost a poetic fancy" (emphasis in the original) is contained in Bey 1991. These quotes are on p. 99.

[12]See Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994 on the role of social networks within their historical and cultural context.

Mexico and the Siren Song of Social Justice: A Case Study

One example of this can be found in Mexico. Calls for freedom, social justice, land, and dignity were central across a variety of the combatants engaged in Mexico's revolution, a reality reflected in the Mexican Constitution of 1917 and in the mantle assumed by the ruling party, eventually to become the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI). The PRI's deteriorating claims of commitment to social justice were badly bent by 1968 and the massacre in Tlatelolco and effectively shattered by 1994 uprising in Chiapas. Each of these merits brief mention.

Mexico's Revolutionary Legacy and the PRI. I would be remiss not to note the irony of a party which proclaims in its very name the concept of an institutionalized revolution. At least some scholars have suggested that the institutionalization of revolutionary processes represents their death knell and Mexico (along with Russia and China) has been invoked as case of such; institutionalization associated with oppression, conservatism, bureaucracy, inertia, and inefficiency. While I have argued elsewhere that institutionalization is a necessary condition, along with consolidation, for the success of any revolutionary project, I concur with those who contend that it was in part the institutionalization of Mexico's revolutionary process that destroyed the heart and soul of the revolutionary process and which provided an example that proved equally problematic for their compatriots in Bolivia in the early 1950s (Selbin, 1999:17,34,36). That said, there can be little question that demands for social justice–in principle--were central to the events and processes that history records as elements of what we refer to as the Mexican Revolution. While buffeted about in the aftermath of the revolutionary process–a notoriously tricky conclusion to date–such claims probably reached their culmination during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), after which the state managers' commitment(s) to matters of social justice amounted to little more than lip service. The voices of social justice were relegated to little more than ghosts, attendant to the various myths of Zapata–murdered in 1919–and his fabled white horse roaming the countryside doing battle on behalf of the poor and oppressed people in Mexico.[13]

Tlatelolco: Myth, Memory and Modernity The importance of events at Tlatelolco and the process surrounding the aftermath should not be underestimated and just now, thirty years later, are receiving their due. For the first time in a generation, demands for and about social justice were heard to ring out again in Mexico, this time largely from students, the future elite of the country, the scions of the ruling party. And they were met with bullets. While the numbers of dead and wounded and exact details continue to be contested, there seems little argument that as if in some bad film script in the very place meant to celebrate the three cultures which are considered to constitute Mexicanidad–indigenous (Aztec/Mexica, Maya, et al.), colonial (Hispanic), and their cosmic progeny (mestizo)–the Mexican military at the behest of the PRI

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[13]Although made in a slightly different context at a time his brother was still very much alive, Martin Guevara noted that claims from around the world that Che Guevara was still alive were like "like the white horse of Zapata. He is everywhere" (Ryan 1998:36).

answered student calls for justice and democracy by massacring a number of them, jailing even more, and perhaps even disappearing some. Tlatelolco remains shrouded in secrecy and mystery, an open wound in Mexican society wrapped in an elegiac miasma, a simple protest turned into a political martyrdom reminiscent of fifty years earlier. The ghost of 1968 came to join the ghost of Zapata in a socio-cultural and psychological landscape, a collective memory, increasingly populated by people and places which represented vestiges of social justice.

The EZLN: Mexico's Premodern/Postmodern Revolutionaries Intentionally conjuring up and rousing the image/man/myth/symbol most associated with social justice in Mexcio, the modern Zapatistas–the EZLN–(re)produced themselves as fundamentally a movement for–and about–social justice. The implications of this were so powerful, so compelling, that the EZLN garnered support throughout the world and the Mexican government was forced to grant the EZLN combatant status and negotiate with them.[14] There is now a rich and varied literature on the EZLN and their deployment of symbols and myth in pursuit of a more democratic and just Mexico. What merits mention here is that the centerpiece of the Zapatista struggle focuses on claims for social justice and demands that the state address the grievances of those left out of and behind in Mexico's push for modernization. Whatever one makes of their tactics–and they range form claims of post-modernism to pre-modernism–there is a decidedly modern, enlightenment-era core to their calls which nestles firmly and happily within the bosom of the French Revolution and its antecedents, demands for social justice for all.

Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean

In theory, modern democracies, most often referred to as "liberal" or "Western," guarantee their citizens an array of rights which might variously be ascribed to categories such as economic (commonly confined to property), political (voting, freedom of speech, right of assembly), and quasi-social (freedom of religion). Outside of Europe and some of its offspring (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, South Africa), very few of these democracies extend such promises to food, shelter, and medical care and even in many of these states there are serious limitations to what is made available. While "democracy" has returned to Latin America and the Caribbean, at least for now, in practice, as this chapter has suggested repeatedly, there are tremendous differences in what is actually offered to people, differences

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[14]In rather direct contrast to the treatment accorded Mexico's other major revolutionary group extant, the People's Revolutionary Army (EPR), arguably "classic" Cuban-style Latin American revolutionaries. Their June 1996 Manifesto of Agua Blancas announced their intention to overthrow the government by arms and bring people's democracy and social justice to Mexico, led by a vanguard party. The EPR is a merger of 14 smaller groups, akin in this sense to organizations such as the FSLN in Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador; the most important of these groups appears to be the armed wing of the early 1970s leftist group Party of the Poor (PROCUP), perhaps the region's only remaining *focistas*. The EPR's vision of state socialism imposed from the top by a revolutionary elite reads a bit like Stalinist North Korea, but overall the tone and the project are familiar ones; certainly the Mexican government has responded to them in the familiar way in Latin America–brutally attacking them and pursuing them.

matched by the dramatically different points at which most individuals in these societies find themselves starting, huge gaps which are simply beyond the ability of most people to overcome.

Thus formal equality has become a chimera behind which the region's nominal democrats hide to excuse the lack of real equality--democracy and social justice. Basic economic and social inequality is maintained and even worsens over time; the weaker classes have difficulty in taking advantage of the opportunities theoretically made available to them in the new democracy. This is exacerbated by the introduction in most of these cases of radical free market economies which work actively to the disadvantage of those with little or no money and resources; the lack of mechanisms to intervene on behalf of the poor and dispossessed increases the polarization and frustration which are often the precursors to democratic failure.

Overall, this democratic go round in Latin America and the Caribbean has provided little more than what might be seen as institutionalized democratic procedures and the basics of civil society, in particular a largely nominal commitment to human rights and dignity, albeit without the concomitant respect for such one might wish in these areas. Nonetheless, in a region notoriously cool to such things, it is hardly fair to liken these to the *democracias de fachada* of earlier years.[15] The generals, by and large, are back in their barracks and death squad activities are reduced.

Yet even a cursory examination of the state of the hemisphere shows that meaningful democratic practices remain weak. Few of these democracies are inclusive, based instead on elite pacts and the continued marginalization of the region's indigenous population, and there have been notable setbacks which many proponents of the democratization process seem loathe to talk about.[16] Most Latin American and Caribbean countries find themselves with corrupt and ineffective judiciaries, weak and often aimless political parties, subservient legislatures, and militaries that remain out of the reach of civilian control. While the generals are back in their barracks, they have left their legacy and retain their minions; at the same time, the region's traditional elites have enjoyed a resurgence, courtesy of their international allies. The networks extant–the same ones which may have led in Brazil to the triumph of the traditional elite over the

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[15]Traditionally, *democracias de fachada* referred primarily to dictatorships which sought some degree of respectability and placated their *patron*, the United States, by holding fraudulent elections. Whitehead (1992:150) also refers to facade demos and the Portuguese phrase "*para os ingleses ver*, which refers to the old habit of holding elections 'for the English to look at.'" Whitehead than goes on to make the interesting argument that facades can become real; while attention to propping up the facade may well lead to some positive changes--changes not to be discounted--no facade I am aware of seems to have made the transition.

[16]Among the more obvious: the *autogolpe*, dubbed a "Fujicoup," in Peru; the coup in Haiti; the popularly supported coup attempts in Venezuela, Paraguay's "non-coup," Ecuador's constitutionally dubious "congressional coup" (in which the military served as final arbiter and king maker), and continuing popular calls for a coup in Panama; the role of Guatemala's military in first supporting then destroying an effort to emulate the "Fujicoup" with a *Serranazo*; intimations of *continuismo* by Fujimori in Peru and Menem in Argentina; and ominous noises from the military and its partisans in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, where General Pinochet, presuming his safe passage home from Great Britain, is now comfortably ensconced in the Senate for the rest of his life.

military (Hagopian 1996 makes a compelling case that while regimes of various stripes and varying degrees of effectiveness may come and go, traditional political elites often do not)–prevent such pressing matters as equality and justice–social rights–from being realized. The instantiation of democracy, democratic consolidation, remains elusive and a palpable sense of justice remains absent from much of the region.

Nor is there any guarantee that increased democracy will increase social justice in either material or ideological terms. This is due, at least in part, to an awkward reality: while the ideal of social justice appears to call for democratic procedures and institutions, democracy is not always the best guarantor of social justice (Freeman 1998:157), especially the highly nationalistic *democraduras* which seem endemic to Latin America and the Caribbean. Equally disturbing is that, as Melucci points out, "reducing injustice in strongly segmented societies may be a priority objective in terms of democracy, but it should not foster the illusion that the new system does not re-create forms of power and inequality" (1998:428) In other words, simply equating the introduction of democracy with the advent of social justice is a mistake; the battle for social justice, as evidenced around the world, is far more complex and convoluted than that.

Not long ago, Rosenberg (1992) introduced the notion of "magical liberalism," consciously invoking magical realism, the famous Latin American literary style,[17] to describe what she saw as many Latin American elite's commitment to a highly fanciful version of liberalism. More recently, I have drawn on the same reference–magical realism–to explain how we might try and understand future revolutions in Latin America and the Caribbean may look like, suggesting that "magical revolutions" might be an apt phrase (Selbin 1999:145). At the risk of overdoing a good thing or at least an evocative one, let me suggest here that it may behoove us to consider the current round of democratic instantiation in the region as reflecting "magical democracy," where, to borrow Kapuscinski's brief description of Latin America as a whole, "fact is mixed with fantasy..., truth with myth, realism with rhetoric" (1992:152). Certainly the premises and promises most commonly associated with democracy must seem fanciful to the immense majority of people in Latin America and the Caribbean. It will only be when the every individual feels a sense of social justice, when the visions attendant to democracy are realized, when people believe that their rights matter, that intolerable social tensions can be resolved left unresolved, they promise to spark new rounds of rebellion and revolution as people seek time honored means–even if there is little to claim for their previous efficacy–to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

Conclusion

Twenty years ago, Barrington Moore cautioned us with regard to what constituted rational authority and justice that "to recapture old certainties is then out of the question, at least

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[17]Usually attributed to the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in the 1940s, "magical realism" is used to denote a literary style which blends fact and fiction in often capricious, amusing, frivolous, ethereal, and fantastic ways. Franco argues that "*Magic realism,* the term coined by Alejo Carpentier in the 1940s, has become an advertising gimmick, a word synonymous with 'exoticism'" (1992:179, emphasis in the original). Cabrera Infante denies that this was Carpentier's term or is an appropriate term or even Latin American (1994:386).

in the form they once existed. Nevertheless there are grounds for suspecting that the welter of moral codes may conceal a certain unity of original form, as well as a discernable historical drift in a single direction, and that variations from this pattern of a single basic form undergoing prolonged historical modification are explicable in general terms. It is at least just barely possible that human affairs do make sense after all" (Moore 1978:4). It is, Moore continues, "actually concrete individuals who create the moral codes. A very large part of the time some individuals create moral codes for their own particular advantages and to the detriment of others in the society. Nevertheless there is a sense in which everybody in any society has to hang together or else each hang separately"(1978:8-9) In the complex and convoluted efforts to transform human behavior and the structures and institutions we have created, people have to act and act in certain ways. What, as Moore formulates the question, "gives them the courage to break wholly or partially with the cultural and social order in which they are embedded?" (1978:89)

      The answer, not surprisingly, is that "without strong moral feelings and indignation, human beings will not act against the social order.....The history of every major political struggle reflects the clash of passions, convictions, and systems of beliefs" (Moore 1978:478) If, as the aphorism has it, politics is fundamentally about who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell 1911), then social justice may be most usefully thought of, á la Barrington Moore, as reflecting popular notions about who should get what and why (1987:449). "Judgements about justice mediate between objective circumstances and people's reactions to particular events or issues" (Tyler 1997:6). And these judgements matter in a wide array of contexts, including "almost all settings in which people interact with one another, either as individuals or in groups" (Tyler 1997:9). Poverty, discrimination, hierarchy, and authoritarianism all combine to impede social justice. And prevent people from realizing their full potential as human beings. If democratic means and methods do not provide the route(s) to the realization of social justice, rebellion and revolution of one form or the other surely must.

      Political "reforms" not only have yet to make meaningful differences in the material conditions of people's everyday lives but have failed to transform their ideological conditions either and as a result undercut the very democratic processes it is claimed that they portend. The failure of neo-liberalism to redress the grievances of the region's poor and dispossessed is ever more apparent. Again, it is important not to exaggerate. Just as the advent of "neo-liberalism" was driven at least in part by the paucity of credible alternatives for solving the wide-spread economic failures which had become endemic to Latin America and the Caribbean, the region's revolutionaries have not produced a markedly better record for confronting the monumental inequities that are commonplace throughout the region. Profound political, economic, or social transformation anywhere in the region has remained elusive for all sides. If the region's modern revolutions did not profoundly change the material conditions of people's lives, they had a lasting impact on their ideological conditions, changing their perceptions of their place in the world and their views of their relationship with the government and with themselves. At least part of what they and the region's reformers have brought to the table is a simple yet compelling idea whose practice has proved transient at best and perhaps intractable: More just and equitable treatment of all serves all of us well.

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