

one . . . .To be independent of a state that is a revolutionary state, that's a position of the right wing, it's a reactionary position, no?"(p.118) Well . . . yes.

The universal application of autonomy as a measure of the institutional health of the Bolivarian project misses the mark. Chávez's first priority over a decade ago was inclusion of the formerly excluded majority population and the achievement of greater equality and access to the benefits of citizenship. The problem of exclusion, created during *puntofijismo* (which was itself an effort to resolve the political problems of the day created by the Pérez Jimenez dictatorship), is still the most pressing and the one the Chávez government is attempting – successfully, if we can believe some of these authors – to address. Why would those who support this project seek autonomy from it?

Hellinger's conclusion reminds us that nothing in history lasts forever, although remnants of it can always be found in the new. There will be a post-Chávez era; what cannot be foreseen is what this era will leave behind as its contribution to the advance of Venezuela's majority on the road to full political participation, *protagonismo*, and human development.

Ann Jefferson  
Department of History  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

**STUMBLING ITS WAY THROUGH MEXICO: THE EARLY YEARS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL.** By Daniela Spenser. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011, p. 224, \$35.

Scholars of Latin American revolutions have long noted the simultaneous emergence of the Bolshevik and Mexican revolutions. During the Cold War it was common to point to aspects of the Mexican revolution, including the articulation of its ideology in the 1917 constitution that predated the October revolution, as evidence of authentic, indigenous roots to Latin American revolutionary movements rather than understanding them as emanating out of Moscow.

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent opening of its rich archival collections in the 1990s, debates over Moscow's alleged hegemonic control over global revolutionary movements moved from the realm of contemporary politics to an almost equally heated historiographic debate. Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes initially published histories and collections of documents from the recently opened Communist International (or Comintern) archives that seemed to verify their Cold War position that Moscow did indeed attempt to dictate the actions of global revolutionary movements across the abbreviated twentieth century. A second generation of scholars who sought to assign agency to revolutionary activists around the world delved into those same archival collections and

emerged with quite distinct conclusions, successfully challenging Cold War paradigms.

Daniela Spenser's new book on the role of the Comintern in Mexico is perhaps representative of a third wave of post-Soviet Comintern studies. Similar to Cold War historians, Spenser acknowledges Moscow's domineering role in determining the direction of twentieth-century revolutionary movements, without ignoring the agency of Mexican participants. Spenser begins the book by observing that workers and artisans in Mexico had generations of experience in defending their class interests against oppressive forces, and hardly needed external influences to motivate them to revolt. Furthermore, the presence of radical intellectuals such as Ricardo Flores Magón contributed an ideological underpinning to the revolution.

Writing from this perspective, Spenser is quite critical of Moscow's attitudes toward Latin America. Focusing primarily on the early years of the Comintern from its founding in 1919 until Lenin's death in 1924, she argues that the Comintern was misguided in its belief that it could export revolution to Mexico. Arguably, Spenser overstates her argument in minimizing the significance of the Bolshevik revolution for Mexico and by extension Latin America. She reads this history through the lens of the Regional Mexican Workers Confederation (CROM) that pulled workers away from anarcho-syndicalism and into an alliance with the state and corporate capitalism. In much of Latin America, as elsewhere around the world, the possibility of gaining control over state structures as demonstrated by the Bolshevik revolution inspired the imaginations of many radical activists, thereby pulling them from an anarchist into a communist orbit. If indeed Mexico is an outlier in this broader historical pattern, it is something that would be worth deeper exploration.

Where Spenser's book really shines is not in its engagement with Cold War political themes, but its contributions to a social history of the Latin American left. We have long been aware that few Latin Americans participated in Comintern congresses until the region's "discovery" at the 1928 Sixth Congress (an event that falls beyond the scope of this book), and that Mexico's initial representative to the Comintern was not even Mexican but the Indian activist Manabendra Nath Roy. Perhaps the most important contribution of this work is to put flesh and blood on these activists. In 1921, the Comintern assigned Mexico an unprecedented importance in sending three agents (Charles Francis Phillips, Louis Fraina, and Sen Katayama) to foment revolution. As with Roy, none of the agents were Mexican, but it is arguable that this was not an important consideration given Comintern's goal was a global revolution with Mexico at the center of an emergent Latin American communism. For Spenser, a larger problem was Lenin's lack of understanding of Mexico, and Russia's domination of the Comintern for its own interests that resulted in a lack of space for discussion. Subjugating the Comintern to Russian and Bolshevik concerns weakened its ability to launch a global revolution.



Originally published in Spanish as *Los primeros tropiezos de la Internacional Comunista en México* by the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social in Mexico, Peter Gellert's translation brings this important work to a broader English-speaking audience. Spenser helps us understand not only the potential but the ultimate weaknesses and failures of the Comintern that eventually hindered the realization of its goals of a global revolution.

Marc Becker  
Department of History  
Truman State University

**TRANSITION CINEMA. POLITICAL FILMMAKING AND THE ARGENTINE LEFT SINCE 1968.** By Jessica Stites Mor. Pittsburg: U of Pittsburg P, 2012, p. 262, \$ 24.95.

In the last years there has been a veritable interest in contemporary Argentine cinema as seen in the myriad articles and several studies that have been published since 2007. Among this new work, *Transition Cinema* immediately stands out for its original approach and multi-disciplinarity, located at the intersection of film studies, cultural, political and economic history. Jessica Stites Mor relies on archival materials—many of them never before used—and a variety of secondary sources to trace the relationship between filmmaking, state policies, and the political activities of the Argentine Left from 1968 to 2004. To undertake the survey of these thirty six years, Stites Mor identifies three generations: the first produced films before 1976, the second was active during the democratization of the 1980s, and the third encompasses those who were active after 1989. This periodization also guides the structure the three parts of the book, each composed of two chapters.

The first part explores the political developments of the Argentine Left in the late 1960s, covering important events like the Cordobazo and the project Tucumán Arde, the instauration of the dictatorship led by General Onganía in 1966, and the changes that affected filmmaking. Stites Mor touches on the creation of the labor associations and the relationship of actors and directors with Juan D. Perón so as to trace the effects of state control on film production in the mid-1960s. The author rightly states that “political filmmaking evolved rapidly to express more radical leftist ideologist after Perón was forced to flee the country in 1955” (30). This assertion allows her to investigate the formation of the Argentine Left as well as global events impacting the role of cinema such as Third Cinemas. The innovative work of Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino, and Raymundo Gleyzer in the late 1960s and their political positions are examined. The second chapter centers around the only non-fictional film of Gleyzer, *Los traidores* (1972) as part of the Cine de Base, an underground movement that