

United States had not supplied Great Britain and the Soviet Union with the materials needed to fight on, then the Axis powers might have won the war — or at least achieved a settlement short of unconditional surrender.

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Marc Becker, *The FBI in Latin America: The Ecuador Files*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. xii, 322 pp. \$104.95 U.S. (cloth), \$27.95 U.S. (paper).

Marc Becker draws on a rich set of surveillance documents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the American State Department to tell two interrelated histories. On the one hand, *The FBI in Latin America* recounts the largely untold story about United States counterintelligence activities carried out by the FBI in Latin America during the 1940s prior to the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947. It is a fascinating story about US efforts to fight both fascism and communism during a critical moment in history — one in which the post-World War II (WWII) promise of expanded democracy and economic equality were quickly shut down by an emerging Cold War conservatism. On the other hand, the surveillance documents provide a unique window into the history of the left in Latin America, and particularly Ecuador. Becker tells both stories extremely well. As one of the leading historians of Ecuadorian social movements, he reads the FBI documents in a way that provides a deep understanding of the Ecuadorian left during this pivotal decade.

The first chapter takes us into Franklin Delano Roosevelt's initiative to put the FBI in charge of political surveillance through a program called the Special Intelligence Service (SIS), which ultimately sent roughly 700 agents to Latin America in the 1940s. Formed to gather intelligence on "subversive activities," the initial focus of the SIS was to combat Nazi influence in the region. But its scope immediately expanded to include a broad array of real and perceived threats to US interests, particularly communists. In the case of Ecuador, a country with small German and Japanese populations, the FBI focused primarily on the intense popular organizing going on in the country at the time. One of the interesting gems to emerge from Becker's research was how amateurish and bumbling initial FBI efforts to gather useful information could be. The first agents were particularly green, recruited haphazardly, and were not always sure who they were working for or what they were supposed to be doing.

Yet, as the second and third chapters demonstrate, FBI agents did gather substantial information about communists, socialists, labour leaders, and

others on the left. This information was often sensationalized, overstating the communist presence (partially) in order to feed the agency's paranoia about communism and justify the work of the agents themselves. But ultimately agents acquired data about how the left was differentiated, how various actors operated, and why they took the positions and actions they did. They spent considerable time focusing on particular leftists, allowing for a much more complex portrait of key actors from the period (even if the FBI tended to focus on lighter-skinned men at the expense of women and Indigenous people, who were presumed to be largely incapable of fomenting revolution).

Chapters four through seven explore La Gloriosa and its aftermath, a moment of intense popular mobilization in Ecuador in which workers, students, women, peasants, Indigenous people, and parts of the military removed a dictator from office in the mid-1940s and flirted with social revolution. Becker's account not only provides new information and perspective on how the US government responded to this potential threat, but highlights how the Ecuadorian left was unprepared and incapable of capitalizing on an opportunity to advance working-class power. This includes an excellent treatment of the consequences of the left's decision to pull back from the long-term process of building a popular base to focus on advancing the revolution through electoral-constitutional processes — and by striking a complicated bargain with José María Velasco Ibarra. A populist, Ibarra was elected President on five different occasions and seduced many on the left while ultimately serving to undermine more radical political currents. What was so interesting about this period is how quickly a moment of revolutionary promise was not only lost, but reversed as the Cold War descended upon the region and the left was effectively dismantled. Ecuador's story, in this sense, is Latin America's tragedy.

The FBI in Latin America is a compelling history that will no doubt spawn similar studies on other countries in the region. Through the use of a fascinating and revealing set of sources, Becker is able to capture a particularly important moment in the emergence of the US as a post-WWII imperial power while simultaneously enriching our understanding of the Latin American left on the eve of its Cold War demise. This well-written book will be of considerable interest to students and scholars of Latin America, US foreign policy, the Cold War, and the political left.

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