



The Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization. by Jonathan Fox
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nomism liberalism in the 1950s goes unexplained, however, and the ideologues of economic liberalism never get the scholarly attention accorded their new liberal counterparts. More generally, the discussion of citizenship fails to consider why the views of its intellectual proponents took root.

Similarly, the account of the wartime creation of the Australian welfare state presents a subtle and complex examination of the interplay between Australian Labor party politicians and public servants, largely economists, in the construction of its key institutions. The discussion of the current Labor government in the same chapter makes no reference to the role of the bureaucracy in reshaping the same institutions over the last decade, though a later chapter describes massive changes in bureaucratic organization and ideology since the 1970s. It prefers a simpler, if less convincing, tale of corporatist sell-out by right-wing Labor politicians and the trade-union leadership.

Recognition of the close interdependence of the welfare state and organizations formally independent of government has implications both for our understanding of the meaning of citizenship and for an adequate appreciation of the scope of social welfare activity. The authors argue, rightly, that such organizations and the functions they perform represent an "other" welfare state, though they say too little about the nature of its relation with the visible, public welfare state. But here the new appreciation of the middle class leads to an unduly romantic celebration of the citizen activism of the 1970s. There is no discussion, for example, of the real interests that middle-class activists had at stake in the gentrifying inner-city areas of Australian cities, or of the distorted allocation of child-care resources.

The Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization, by **Jonathan Fox**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. 280 pp. \$39.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-8014-2716-9.

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Jonathan Fox's study of food politics in Mexico is both an exciting contribution to political sociology and a case study relevant to anyone concerned with the politics of food. Fox illu-

minates the fascinating dynamics of Mexican politics often hidden beneath the welter of acronyms which, like the state agencies they name, grow like topsy. The lucid prose in which the author writes also makes the book useful to a wider audience. American public interest in Mexican politics is finally growing with the prospect of a North American Free Trade Agreement. It is ironic that this interest comes at the end of a decade during which the Mexican state, under pressure of the debt regime, has gone very far in dismantling models of public economic institutions from which, in my opinion, we have much to learn.

The author sets out to analyze an exceptional moment of successful political reform. Between 1980 and 1982, an implicit alliance was struck between bureaucrats aiming for reform in a specific agency of an authoritarian state and popular organizations able to hold the state and the Institutional Revolutionary party accountable. The goal was to encourage small peasants to increase productivity and commercial production, despite the legacy of past support for large-scale capitalist agriculture, and to increase availability of food to the rural poor. The means was a policy initiated by reformers within the state. It creatively shifted focus away from agrarian reform, the ideological legacy of the Revolution (begun in 1910 and consolidated in the 1930s), which powerful interests resisted. Instead, the alliance focused on increasing income for the rural poor both as small producers—through state credit for inputs and support prices from state purchasing agencies—and as consumers—through the sale of staple foods at subsidized prices in state shops.

The success of the reform, though partial, depended on an unusual conjuncture of oil revenues and public borrowing, and a special relationship between committed state officials and a newly mobilized popular constituency. The former is part of the larger story of the debt crisis, which was officially named after the Mexican default of 1982, and which ended the reform. Yet there was nothing inevitable then or now about the international debt crisis. That it interrupted this Mexican experiment in public organization of a national food system is no reason not to learn important lessons from it.

The special relationship, or "sandwich strategy," by which reforming officials and mobilized popular movements defended a social program against counterattack by hostile elites, is of potential relevance to other

countries, both “developing” and “developed.” The National Food System of Mexico was the culmination of decades of an intermittent, contentious, and contradictory construction of public policy and institutions, linking agricultural production, food-processing industries, and finally—in response to intense rural social upheaval in the 1970s—all stages of marketing. It represented a fascinating mix of public and private institutions, regulation and markets, competition and subsidies. As the state has withdrawn, peasant groups remain mobilized in defense of rural credit, rural food shops, and food subsidies.

The success of the author in analyzing the reform rests on a deceptively simple “three bears” theoretical strategy. He sets up the too-hot extreme of “society-centered” perspectives, the too-cold extreme of “state-centered” perspectives, and settles on a balanced, “interactive approach,” which is just right. The danger with this approach is that it can make straw men of the extremes. In my view, Fox’s critiques are fair, however, and his approach is not only nuanced but also tested and solid. His use of data is clear and to the point, and his diagrams enhance the clarity of the argument. *The Politics of Food in Mexico* should find a broad readership, rewarding experts and educated general readers alike. It deserves serious attention by political sociologists. It will also be useful to anyone interested in food politics, particularly the alliances aimed at setting boundaries around national and even regional food economies in the interests of social justice, sustainable land use, food quality, and employment.

Those who enjoy this book may wish to explore other titles in the Cornell series edited by F. H. Buttel, B. R. DeWalt, and P. Pinstrup-Anderson, called Food Systems and Agrarian Change.

Colonial Dilemmas: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Puerto Rico, edited by **Edwin Meléndez** and **Edgardo Meléndez**. Boston: South End Press, 1993. 255 pp. NPL cloth. ISBN: 0-89608-441-8.

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Cultural Dilemmas is a collection of critical essays on contemporary Puerto Rico. It

covers a wide range of topics, from the status debate to the realities of Puerto Rican communities in the United States. The editors start out by defining Puerto Rico as being a neocolony since 1898, when the United States took possession of the island. They claim that colonialism and citizenship are the two issues that define the history of Puerto Rico in the twentieth century, owing to the dependence of the island’s economy on the U.S. economy, the persistent debate over status (whether Puerto Rico should become independent, a state of the union, or remain a commonwealth), and the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States.

The editors also argue—and this becomes a common theme—that Puerto Rico is undergoing rapid change both politically and economically. They claim that the current commonwealth status, established in 1952 under the leadership of the Popular Democratic party (PPD), which granted some autonomy to the local government, was workable as long as the economic development program, known as Operation Bootstrap, was successful. The deepening of the economic crisis in the 1970s led, however, to a major questioning of commonwealth status and encouraged the growth of the pro-statehood movement.

The book is divided into five parts and fifteen chapters. The first part covers political themes, such as the status debate, the national question and citizenship, and U.S. military installations in Puerto Rico. This section is particularly rich in information about the debate over the political status of Puerto Rico: the origins and development of the commonwealth, the search for more local autonomy in the midst of crisis, the development of the pro-statehood movement, the troubles of the independence movement, and the debates in Washington, both in Congress and the White House, over Puerto Rico. A central argument raised here is that while the commonwealth arrangement has lost credibility domestically to address the mounting problems of Puerto Rican society, neither in Puerto Rico nor in Washington has a consensus emerged over the alternative.

The second part of the book discusses changes in the political economy of Puerto Rico. It gives a historical account of economic reforms. First, there was the postwar expansion based on an export boom, the influx of foreign industrial capital, industrial peace, and heavy state support for capital accumulation. Next came the