

## URUGUAY: THE FALL

URUGUAY: THE POLITICS OF FAILURE. By MARTIN WEINSTEIN. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975. Pp. 190. \$13.50.)

"How and why did a nation that was regarded as so different from and superior to its neighbors so quickly 'fall' and come to resemble them?" (p. xiii). In Martin Weinstein's *Uruguay: The Politics of Failure*, the answer is based on the assumption that Uruguay is another example of the current victory of Latin American corporatism, "the centuries old falangist (corporatist) ideal of a society based upon and regulated through the functional operation of its essential pillars or sectors" (p. 134), over the rival conception of an egalitarian "rule of law that has permitted the creation of a secular and relativistic political market place" (p. 10). Fortunately, the social science jargon of the introductory chapter—"The particular stance taken in this work assumes that basic values can be inferred only from the ideological positions and the particular institutional and class structures found in a society and that there will ultimately be a congruence between structure, institution, and underlying values in a society that has been successful in containing conflict, without resort to overt coercion, at levels which permit the continued existence of the basic institutions and structure of the society" (p. 6)—is replaced by more straightforward language when Weinstein constructs his answer by analyzing Uruguayan political ideology and political institutions.

The Uruguayan example in the general Latin American struggle between democratic egalitarianism and corporatism is seen as an ideological contest between Batllismo, a prolabor and state interventionist political movement victoriously led by José Batlle y Ordoñez in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and its "counterideology, rooted in the countryside, dominated by landed agricultural interests, and espousing the concepts of tradition, hierarchy, and order . . . which would slowly prevail" (pp. 48–49). Batlle's original success is explained by "the huge influx of immigrants in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth," a "new and overwhelmingly urban mass" (p. 20), which Batlle and his lieutenants channeled into the Colorado Party. Ruralism resisted Batlle, built up over the years, and, under the leadership of Benito Nardone, provided the votes that finally defeated the Colorados in 1958.

Weinstein's exposition of Batlle's ideas does not break new ground, though he avoids the usual misstatement that Batlle had no rural program. The point-counterpoint, *batllismo-ruralismo*, leaves out much of Uruguayan political ideology. But Weinstein gets into real trouble when he examines the political support for ideological programs. His explanation of a batllismo based on a huge late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century inflow of immigrants overlooks the fact that the percentage of immigrants to total population in Uruguay declined from 33.5 percent in 1860 to 21.6 percent in 1900 and to 17.3 percent in 1908. The 1908 census revealed that there actually were fewer foreign-born residents in

Montevideo (94,129) than there had been in 1889 (100,739), even though the city's total population had grown from 215,061 to 309,231.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants were a presence (the Colorado Party played the Hymn to Garibaldi at party meetings), but most of them preferred not to become citizens because foreigners were exempt from the National Guard dragnet during civil wars.

By 1956, Weinstein notes in another context, Uruguay's rural population was only 17.2 percent—about that of immigrants in 1908—of the total population; Uruguay, he maintains, had become industrialized between 1935 and 1955. The triumph of country over city in these circumstances would be puzzling. In fact, while it is true that Nardone's ruralists provided anti-batllista votes in the 1958 Colorado defeat, it is also true that an opposition Blanco group won the government of Montevideo in that election, which suggests that more than a rural-over-urban explanation is required. And the emergence of Benito Nardone—a Montevideo newspaperman of Italian background who used the gaucho nickname Chicotazo and gave Radio Rural broadcasts from Montevideo—as leader of ruralismo also suggests that rural-urban differences are not so clearcut in Uruguay.

Weinstein's conviction that rural-based corporatism is the key explanation for Uruguay's recent past carries him to prediction: "After two years in power and with the added prodding of the oil crisis, it appears that the Uruguayan military and supporting civilian interests are prepared to abandon any meaningful attempt to modernize the industrial sector. Rather, the image of an agrarian state has an ever increasing hold on the imagination of the leadership. As these men see it, the future is an Uruguay that is one big estancia [ranch] importing its industrial needs from its northern neighbor, i.e., Uruguay, as an agrarian client-state of Brazil" (p. 136). By 1975, when Weinstein was writing, the government's economic policy was to encourage industry, particularly through money *reintegros* for nontraditional exports. The government now boasts of the success of that policy: in 1976, 40 percent of Uruguay's exports were nontraditional; in the first five months of 1977, nontraditional exports reached 50 percent of the total exports.<sup>2</sup>

The second part of Weinstein's exploration of the question of why Uruguay "fell" centers on political institutions, more particularly coparticipation. Colorado control of government from 1865 on made coparticipation, sharing in government, a central opposition demand. It was advocated in the nineteenth century as a means of bringing into government the best talents a small country had and justified by the argument that nothing fundamental divided the Colorado and Blanco parties. The hope was that giving a share of the central government and control of some of the departments (the geographic subunits into which the country is divided) to the Blancos would avoid civil wars.

Coparticipation is a form of consensus government; in the twentieth century, though, it operated as a struggle for government positions and patronage. It is this aspect, rather than the broader effect of coparticipation on government policy, that Weinstein traces through analysis of electoral legislation, constitutional reforms, and elections. He makes factual errors in describing early electoral laws and later political personalities; but apportionment of government

employment was an integral part of the Uruguayan electoral process and government operations, so such errors do not fundamentally change the process Weinstein describes. However, he is interested in tying coparticipation to corporatism, which he believes established itself in Uruguay in the 1930s: "Corporatist politics in Uruguay were therefore never as obvious as in other systems. It was unique in that it was built upon a highly competitive two-party model. It is not suggested that politics in Uruguay is therefore any less corporatist in its intent or its effect, but only that it is less superficially corporatist in formal structure" (p. 72).

Since Weinstein defines "the heart of a corporatist system" as "the particularist columns or pillars into which it compartmentalizes society and the classbound politics in which it holds the individuals found in its pillars," (p. 85) the most obvious way to demonstrate the existence of corporatist politics underneath ostensible democracy would be to reveal the mechanisms by which politics dealt with the different compartments of society. Instead, Weinstein proposes to demonstrate that "the ideological and institutional matrices prevailing in Uruguay have been and are incapable of providing for the economic integration and maturation conducive to the degree of social mobility associated with a fluid class situation" (p. 86).

Such a demonstration poses both logical and practical difficulties. Can description of a society's regional and class inequalities be a proof of the existence of corporatism? Does the fact that the top 0.5 percent of all individuals in the mid-1950s owned 25 percent of all personal-sector wealth prove that the United States had a corporatist political system?<sup>3</sup> What measurements can determine the degree of social mobility in Uruguay necessary to a fluid class structure? Weinstein puts great weight on education and one of his measurements of social rigidity is the demonstration that in 1968, while only 4.4 percent of the general Uruguayan population had some university education, 29.9 percent of the fathers of entering university students did. A different observer might say that a class in which 70 percent of the students were the first in their families to go to the university showed substantial social mobility. In fact, Weinstein does not pursue social rigidity systematically and limits himself to presenting statistics on rural-urban differences, social differentiation in educational opportunity, and generational occupational patterns. His analysis of social structure ends with the conclusion that economic stagnation produced "increased pressure on the state, through the good offices of the traditional parties, to absorb those entering the job market" (p. 111). Competing political parties providing government jobs is certainly not the promised demonstration of the existence of corporatism.

Only twenty-six pages, the last chapter of this short book, are given to the 1960s and 1970s when the "fall," the worsening economic situation, hyperinflation, urban guerrillas, and the military coup of 1973 took place. Weinstein feels that he here validates his "conceptual scheme," but the chapter is more narration than analysis and major issues are treated cursorily. The economic policies of the Blanco governments are given less than a page; the political program of the Frente Amplio, the Left's coalition in the 1971 election, is not

even mentioned. Weinstein believes that Wilson Ferreira Aldunate was counted out in that election and calls him the only liberal candidate of the eight running for the traditional parties, but there is not a word on what Wilson advocated. A reader whose only acquaintance with Uruguay came from this book would be at a loss to understand how Blancos could produce a liberal.

The book is dedicated "To Ruth and the Tupamaros . . . Two Forms of Love," and Weinstein concludes "with the advantage of hindsight" that their "decision to support the Frente Amplio and refrain from their usual activity from October 1971 to April 1972 was a fateful mistake for the Tupamaros" (p. 128). A more persuasive conclusion with the benefit of hindsight is that the Tupamaro attempt to bring socialist revolution to Uruguay by their "usual activity"—kidnappings, assaults, and killings—was a very large link in the chain of events that brought on the military coup of 1973.

Weinstein considers the present Uruguayan government to be like those of Brazil, Bolivia, and Chile, "authoritarian, corporatist military regimes" (pp. 138–39). The Uruguayan government is militarily controlled, authoritarian, and repressive, but it has two conflicting elements within itself that do not easily fit into a corporatist framework. One is its adherence to a market economy, a preference that owes much more to the Chicago school of economics than to the medieval heritage from Spain. The other is the military's very authoritarianism: it is convinced that it knows what the national interest is; it feels no obligation to consult the general population or social groups within the population; it makes decisions by itself and then enforces them.

Martin Weinstein's *Uruguay: The Politics of Failure* shows what can happen when a methodology that seems to have great interpretative power at the level of a very broad overview is brought down to explain specific political circumstances. Weinstein was not wrong in picking his title, he was not wrong in seeing Uruguay's fall as a long-term process. He was wrong to believe that, though the period was poorly researched, his methodology could overcome his reliance on secondary sources, many of them polemics for positions different from his own.

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## NOTES

1. *Anuario Estadístico* 1(1902–3) (Montevideo), p. 116; *Anuario Estadístico* 2(1907–8), part 3, *Censo General de la República en 1908*, pp. vii–viii.
2. *El Día* (Montevideo), 30 July 1977.
3. Harold G. Vatter, *The U.S. Economy in the 1950s: An Economic History* (New York, 1963), p. 36.