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Book Review — Digitized Version

[Rezension] Lothar Brock: Entwicklungsnationalismus und Kompradorenpolitik : die Gründung der OAS und die Entwicklung der Abhängigkeit Lateinamerikas von den USA. Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1975

Modern law and society: a review of German language research contributions on law, political science, and sociology / German studies, section II

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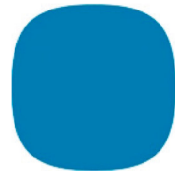
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POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SOCIOLOGY

Book Notes

BROCK, LOTHAR

Development Nationalism and Comprador Policy. The Founding of the OAS and Latin America's Dependence on the United States

["Entwicklungsnationalismus und Kompradorenpolitik. Die Gründung der OAS und die Entwicklung der Abhängigkeit Lateinamerikas von den USA"]

Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1975; 368 pp.

Lothar Brock puts the general purpose of his book into four questions: are the developing countries going to form a lasting and cohesive power block (political power), or are they in a position to form only short-term alliances against the developing countries (the metropolies)? Do the demands of the developing countries symbolize emancipatory attempts towards revising the international division of labour, or do they only compensate for internal deficits of the ruling elites in transforming their backward economies? Is the strategy of collective presentation of demands with the help of international organizations an instrument to improve the bargaining position of the developing countries, or does this only lead to postponements and verbal concessions, which in the end means only the continuation of the traditional division of labour? And finally, is the multilateral diplomacy of organizations and conferences a step towards controlling economic power on the international level, or is it only a retreat manoeuvre of the bureaucracies, who try to solve development problems by rapidly creating new institutions?

On the basis of such critical questions, Brock sets out to analyze the conflict behaviour of the Latin American states vis-à-vis the United States of America; this is to be done under special consideration of the concrete demands of the Latin American states and their ability to carry them through in the period of industrialization. The subject of the study is therefore the policy of the Latin American states at the end of the Second World War and after the founding of the Organization of American States (OAS) (1948) as a manifestation of the "old" economic nationalism. This period is thought to be of special interest for present discussions

on the "new" nationalism of the developing countries in the international arena. Brock wants to make accessible historical experience with developmental issues and their motivations, and to bring them in connexion with the present discussions on the international level. The initiative to organize and expand the tasks of the inter-American system which later led to the founding of the OAS is thought to be a valuable example of an effective instrumentation of development policy.

Brock elaborates this context in what he calls "associative conflict strategy", i. e. a strategy which neither tries to solve development problems via dissociating the developing countries from the industrialized countries nor via unconditional cooperation, but by a combination of cooperative and confrontative interaction patterns.

In a certain opposition to the "dependencia" theory, Brock does not start from the hypothesis of the harmony of interests between the centre (the capitalist countries) and the elites of the periphery (the developing countries). The dilemma of the elites in the developing countries is thought not to rest in the clear alternative between a policy of favouring their own country or of totally subordinating it to the centre, but in the combination of both: the need of a policy of regaining national sovereignty over national resources ("economic nationalism"), on the one hand, and the necessity of a policy of opening up those resources for the economic growth of the centres ("comprador policy"), on the other hand.

Brock begins his empirical study with a short synopsis of the developmental problems of Latin America and its dependence on the United States at the end of the Second World War (chapter 2, pp. 19-43). In the third chapter (pp. 44-67) an historical survey is given, from the creation of the Inter-American System to the foundation of the OAS. The regionalist policy of the Latin American states as a development strategy vis-à-vis the United States is the subject-matter of Chapter 4 (pp. 68-165). Starting with the Chapultepec conference in 1945 and the demands formulated at that conference, the "Clayton Plan" and the economic agreements of Bogotá, a first evaluation is undertaken as to the strength of the position of the Latin American countries against the United States, which ends with exemplifying the "associative conflict strategy" (economic nationalism and comprador policy) described above. The practical effects of that strategy are then investigated in Chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 166-235), by showing the development of the dependence of the Latin American countries until the end of the 1960's, i. e. the end of the "Alliance for Progress" and the reorganization of the OAS. In Chapter 7, the main results of the study are summarized and compared with the working theses put forward in the Introduction. Numerous and voluminous notes make up the next part

(pp. 247–338), followed by bibliographical data and organization charts (pp. 340–371), which together amount to more than a third of the book and include valuable historical, economic, social and political details on Latin America and its relationship with the United States of America.

It is not easy to resumé the main conclusions of the study, partly because many of the arguments put forward are very general or mixed, partly because the language the author uses leads to misinterpretations. He makes it clear that Inter-American post-war diplomacy took place as a discussion on the rights and duties of states in the international system; this discussion, however, was not very successful. The diplomacy was, in the first place, a reflection of the dependence of the Latin American countries on the United States and was not an instrument for reducing that dependence significantly. As a rule, the Latin American governments, in order to secure their domestic power, accepted curtailments of their margin of external action vis-à-vis the United States. In most cases where the Latin American states were not in line with the United States, the latter retained the ability to protect itself against the duties involved; if this was not possible, the results of the agreements remained fairly vague.

However, the conflict behaviour of the Latin American states is thought to support the hypothesis that economic association between centre and periphery countries does not mean harmony of interests of the respective ruling elites. Collective action of developing countries at international organizations is not necessarily a reflection of an opportunistic alliance but a sign for the desire to change international structures; the carrying capacity of the harmony of this desire however, is in fact very limited.

At the same time, conflict articulation by the developing countries is not an expression of favouring economic dissociation from the industrialized countries but an attempt to control these economic relations better. This attempt at control, however, has not succeeded, mainly because the coordination of policies among the developing countries themselves has failed.

The adherence of the developing countries to an associative conflict strategy is at the same time a signal of the weak conflict potential they possess; and this again is a reflection of the ambivalent situation of their being usufructuaries of the international division of labour, although that division may imply serious destructive effects on their economic basis. Associative conflict strategies also imply the possibility of continually having recourse to unconditional external cooperation and reckless internal repression.

Making such general interpretations of history more precise with regard to Latin America would of necessity mean going into detailed, separate studies country by country, in which the real domestic power relations

would have to be examined, especially those between the integrated and the non-integrated social groups, and those between the supporters of the status quo and the supporters of social reforms and social revolutions. Such an examination, however, is not intended or covered by this book, which makes further reading necessary.

Brock's book makes valuable reading for those academically trained in the study of international relations; it is not for the general public and will therefore – as with all such books – not significantly change the subject it was written about. Much “translation” would be needed to make this and other books more easily comprehensible and in this way bring historical experience within everybody's grasp.

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