

# **Latin American Politics in the Neoliberal Era**

This book offers an outstanding Marxist overview of the turns of the political pendulum in contemporary Latin America, and the shifting fortunes of left in the class struggle. The book is solid and insightful, and unsurpassed in its coverage and depth. An indispensable companion to political economists, trade unionists, community organisers, and activists seeking lessons and inspiration from the most politically active region in the world.

*Alfredo Saad-Filho,*  
SOAS University of London, University of Johannesburg,  
LUT University, and Università degli Studi della Campania  
'Luigi Vanvitelli'

I highly recommend this profoundly original work. The extraordinary value of this book is that it addresses and dissects the essential dimensions of an exceedingly complex contemporary reality. In this regard it matches works of great importance such as those of Tulio Halperin Donghi or Darcy Ribeiro, who in the past knew how to penetrate appearances to grasp the underlying essence of reality. This book does so superbly in the contemporary context of capitalist development, enhancing a clearly articulated theoretically framed overview of Latin America's historical trajectory with detailed national comparative studies, which range from Mexico and Central America to Brazil and Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. The highlight of the book is an analysis of the dynamics of political change and class struggle in terms of swings to the left and right of the pendulum of electoral politics, and the associated conflict between right-wing neoliberalisms and left-wing progressivisms.

*Alberto Bialakowsky,*  
Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Universidad de Buenos  
Aires; Cofounder, South-South Forum of Social Science;  
Founding President, ASET (Argentine Association of Labor Studies)

A refreshing overview and synthesis of past and current happenings in Latin America with attention to neoliberal authoritarianism and progressive politics, social change, and political economy. Emphasis on class and class struggle and includes case studies on Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru. Especially useful as a text for Latin American Studies.

*Ronald Chilcote,*  
Professor Emeritus of Economics and Political Science,  
University of California, Riverside

A must-read book on the political crossroads and the dynamics of class struggle in Latin America in the 21st century. The author offers us an in-depth and nuanced analysis of three fronts of the class struggle unfolding in the region, with particular emphasis on the emergence of a progressive cycle of regime change – the so-called 'pink tide' – and the subsequent rise of neo-authoritarian regimes on the radical far right. Added to an analysis of the pendulum swings of electoral politics the book provides an analysis of the class struggles associated with

the peasant movement as well as the indigenous communities on the frontier of extractive capital. Highly recommended for scholars and students concerned with the politics of development in Latin America.

*Raúl Delgado Wise,*  
Holder of the UNESCO Chair for Migration and Development  
at the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, and Emeritus  
National Researcher with the National Council of Humanities,  
Science and Technology, Mexico

With customary analytical precision and exacting synthesis Henry Veltmeyer surveys the terrain of class struggle in Latin America within the current world conjuncture of neoliberal authoritarian ascendancy and intensifying capitalist extractivism. Assessing advances and setbacks of left projects in the region, across both electoral and social-movement landscapes, Veltmeyer's book is an essential guide through the fault-lines of Latin America in this fraught political moment.

*Jeffery R. Webber,*  
Co-author of *The Impasse of the Latin American Left*

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# Latin American Politics in the Neoliberal Era: The Changing Dynamics of Class Struggle

BY

**HENRY VELTMEYER**

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83797-842-7 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-83797-841-0 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-83797-843-4 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This book is dedicated to my comrade in (intellectual) arms, James Petras, whose pioneering work, theoretical reflections, and incisive analysis of the changing dynamics of the class struggle in Latin America have paved the way for others in the field. Petras is one of the most important political sociologists of the 20th and 21st centuries, having made significant contributions to a critical Marxist tradition in sociological and political analysis. No one has done as much in shaping and advancing our understanding of the complex dynamics of class and the class struggle in Latin America.*

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# List of Acronyms

ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América)
AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
APRA	American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana)
BRICS	Originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa; today also Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates
CACEP	Agrarian, Peasant, Ethnic, and Popular Summit (Cumbre Agraria, Campesina, Étnica y Popular)
CDP	Popular Defense Committee of Durango (Comité de Defensa Popular de Durango)
CIMI	Indigenous Missionary Council (Conselho Indigenista Missionário)
CIOAC	Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos)
CND	National Democratic Convention (Convención Nacional Democrática)
COAC	Independent Agricultural Workers and Peasant Center (Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos)
COB	Bolivian Workers' Center (Central Obrera Boliviana)
CONACAMI	National Confederation of Peruvian Communities Affected by Mining (Confederación Nacional de Comunidades del Perú Afectadas por la Minería)
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador)
CPAC	Conservative Political Action Conference
CTM	Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de México)
CUT	Unified Workers' Central (Central Única dos Trabalhadores)
EAP	Economically active population

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ECLAC	Economic Commission on Latin America (CEPAL – Comisión Económica para América Latina)
ECUARUNARI	Confederation of Kichwa Nation Peoples of Ecuador (Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador)
ELN	National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Colombia)
EZLN	Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (United Nations)
FARC-EP	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo)
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FLN	National Liberation Army (Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional)
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas (ACLA – Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas)
FUNAI	National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples (Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas)
FZLN	Zapatista Front of National Liberation (Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional)
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEI	Global greenhouse gas emissions (gases de efecto invernadero)
IBGE	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía)
ISI	Import substitution industrialization
ITT	Yasuni Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini National Park
IU	United Left (Izquierda Unida)
IVMs	Intentional violent deaths
MAS	Movement toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo)
MESCP	Productive Community Social Economic Model (Modelo Educativo Sociocomunitario Productivo)
MORENA	National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional)
MRC	The Citizen Revolution Movement (Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana)
MST	Landless Worker’s Movement (Brazil — Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra)
MUPP-NP	Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement – New Country (Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik – Nuevo País)

NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSP	New social policy
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAN	National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional)
PCM	Communist Party of Mexico (Partido Comunista Mexicana)
PDVSA	Venezuela State Petroleum Company (Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.)
PNAP	National Agrarian and Popular Strike (Paro Nacional Agrario y Popular)
PRD	Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática)
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional)
PRO	Republican Proposal (Propuesta Republicana)
PROCUP	Clandestine Revolutionary Party Union of the People (Partido Revolucionario Clandestino Union del Pueblo)
PRONASOL	National Solidarity Program (Progama Nacional de Solidaridad)
PSDB	Brazilian Social Democracy Party (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira)
PSUV	United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela)
PT	Brazilian Worker's Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores)
REM	Mexican Network of Those Affected by Mining (Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería)
SELA	Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (Sistema Económico Latinoamericano y del Caribe)
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UNAM	National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)

## About the Authors

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## Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges the permission provided by the publishing house Taylor & Francis and the publisher Routledge UK to republish material drawn from several of the author's earlier publications to wit: Petras, J. and Veltmeyer, H. *Class Struggle in Latin America: Making History Today* (London: Routledge, 2018); Petras, J. and Veltmeyer, H. *Latin America in the Vortex of Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2019); and, in particular, Veltmeyer, H. "Populism, Extractivism, and the Social Transformation of Brazil," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* (2023). This material, substantively rewritten and updated, was useful for the provision of background to the class struggles written about in this book and the pre-2019 context for these struggles.

In addition to acknowledging the permission granted by Routledge UK to republish relevant materials derived from the author's archival notes, the author acknowledges with appreciation the contributions of numerous collaborators in the context of an annual sojourn to different countries in South America and Mexico for field research conducted by the author from 2005 to 2018. These contributions took the form of extensive field notes based on data collected in the research field as well as conversations held with colleagues and collaborators. Among others, these include Raúl Delgado Wise, whose expertise regarding Marxist theory and its application to the political economy of Latin American development is reflected in several chapters. In addition, the author would like to acknowledge the contributions of several other collaborators including Igor Ampuero (re political developments in Bolivia) and Mario Hernandez as well as Norma Giarracca and Miguel Teubal regarding developments in Argentina and Brazil.

But the author would like to particularly acknowledge with deep appreciation and respect the invaluable contributions to the book made by his longstanding colleague, friend, and co-adventurer James Petras, who shared the author's annual sojourn to Latin America and many of the author's research visits to Latin America as well as numerous publications. For many years the two of us would plan and undertake together visits to different countries to collect data and documents on political developments and engage in extensive conversations with social movement leaders, politicians, and activists, as well as colleagues and collaborators.

Finally, the author acknowledges with appreciation the expertise of Mark Rushton in copyediting the manuscript.

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# Introduction

It is difficult to discern a definitive trend in the pendulum swings of Latin American politics on the stage of electoral politics. Or rather, we can observe a trend in both directions, a trend that began with a left-turn toward a progressive policy agenda in the early years of the new millennium – a decade-long “progressive cycle” of governments and policy regimes that are concerned with moving beyond capitalism in its current form (i.e., neoliberalism/extractivism), a process that played out in South America with a downturn in a primary commodities boom (high export prices for commodities based on natural resources) on capitalist markets. The end of this *progressive cycle* was signaled by the election of Mauricio Macri, a self-proclaimed libertarian free market capitalist and leader of the Republican Proposal (PRO) party since its founding in 2005, as president of Argentina. Macri represented the parliamentary forces of conservative opposition to policies advanced by left-wing progressive forces in the political arena of the class struggle.<sup>1</sup> He served as President from 2015 to 2018, having replaced the center-left regime that featured Cristina Kirschner, who in 2007 succeeded her husband Nestor Kirschner as President and served in this capacity until Macri assumed the presidency. With Macri the pendulum of electoral politics swung from a cycle of left leaning “progressive” policies to right-wing authoritarian populism. This occurred not

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<sup>1</sup>The term “class,” as understood and used in this book refers to the relationship of individuals to production (as opposed to income, occupation, or socioeconomic status). In capitalist systems there are two basic classes so defined: the capitalist class (owners of the means of social production) and the working class, defined by their lack of access to any means of production and who are thus compelled to exchange their labor power for a living wage. The class struggle in this context is based on the capital–labor relation, but most often and in this book, it refers to the social relations of production, exploitation, and political conflict. In the historical context of the capitalist development process the class struggle most often refers to the struggle of workers for higher wages and improved working conditions or (in the agricultural sector) the struggle for land or land reform. But the class struggle involves a very complex multifaceted dynamic, and as this book illustrates all too well, it takes different forms in diverse contexts. In this book, we explore three fronts of the class struggle, although the emphasis is placed on the political arena, which involves the contestation of power and conflicting ideas regarding social change, and the struggle of different class agencies and forces to implement the social and political projects of one class or the other.

only in Argentina, but also in Brazil and in Ecuador, where Rafael Correa, leader of the Citizen's Revolution movement, was succeeded by a series of neoliberal conservative regimes. In this conjuncture, the progressive cycle of Latin American politics sputtered to an end, although generally not as the result of another turn in the swollen tide of electoral politics but as the product of a coup undertaken against a democratically elected regime.

This was notably the case in Brazil with the ouster of Dilma Rousseff, Lula da Silva's successor; and in Bolivia, where Evo Morales, after having served 14 years as the country's president, was ousted by a coalition of right-wing parliamentary forces and the country's armed forces, which withdrew their support from the governing party the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) after several weeks of political unrest. Morales was succeeded by archconservative, religious ideologue and opposition senator Jeanine Áñez, who played a key role in orchestrating the coup. She served as Bolivia's interim president after Morales was forced to flee the country amid postelection protests in 2019. But after just a few months in office, beset by the activism of the social movements that demanded the holding of new elections,<sup>2</sup> she was charged with the offenses of terrorism, sedition, and conspiracy, before being sentenced to 10 years in prison for orchestrating the coup and for dereliction of duty in making decisions contrary to the constitution. Despite the repression exercised by the government under Áñez's brief stint in the presidency and the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the social movements managed to mobilize effectively to force new elections in October 2020 (Farthing, 2023). Morales's party, The MAS, subsequently returned to power with the election of Luis Arce, Minister of the Economy and Public Finance from 2006 to 2017, and in 2019.

The years 2002–2012 saw a sharp turn away from the neoliberal model of free market capitalism that had served to shape macroeconomic policy for most Latin American governments in the 1990s in response to the Washington Consensus. These years in South America featured what has been described and is generally viewed as a “progressive cycle” of policies oriented toward a more inclusive form of postneoliberal development. The end of this “progressive cycle” and the subsequent emergence of several authoritarian neoliberal regimes were signaled by the election of Macri. But even with this political development – a short interregnum (2015–2019) of conservative governments and neoliberal policy regimes – there were signs of another left turn – a turn to the far left in the case of Chile with the election of Gabriel Boric, a former leader of the progressive student movement;

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<sup>2</sup>By the mid-1990s, Bolivia's peasant and indigenous movements had forged MAS as a “political instrument” (rather than a political party), which they conceived of as their electoral arm (Farthing, 2023). After 2002, the MAS expanded into urban areas, propelling Morales into office. As documented by Farthing, the social movements went on to play a vital role in the MAS government, including the passage of one of the world's most radical constitutions in 2009. But during Morales's 14 years in office, these movements relinquished much of their mobilization capacity, as their leadership was incorporated into government positions and the MAS party.

Colombia, with the election of a former guerrilla army commander; and Peru with the election of Pedro Castillo, a throwback to the traditional pattern of politics in both Peru and Colombia that featured an endless succession of shifts from the right to the left and back. In the case of Peru, after serving as president for less than a year, Castillo was ousted by forces on the Far Right of the political class. On the political dynamics involved in Castillo's ouster see Chapter 5.

Interestingly, the move by Castillo in December 2022 to dissolve parliament to avoid his impeachment failed, resulting instead in his ouster, which was orchestrated by the conservative forces on the Right. This turn of events was repeated in Ecuador four months later by the neoliberal conservative President Guillermo Lasso, but this time successfully.

Even so, in the case of Ecuador the division in the ruling power bloc and a resurgence of a counter-hegemonic bloc of progressive forces, resulted in an apparent revival of Correism (with reference here to the progressive regime in Ecuador headed by Rafael Correa), manifest in the defeat of the candidates on the Right and the victory of those with close ties to Correa as well as a growing chorus of calls for right-wing President Lasso to step down. The eventual outcome of the correlation of class forces at the time of this writing (September 7, 2023) remained uncertain. But with Luisa González of Correa's Citizen Revolution Movement coming in first place with 33 percent of the vote in the first round of the Presidential elections, and thus advancing to the run-off on October 15, the odds are that the movement started by and associated with Correa will assume power once more.<sup>3</sup> Another related development in the same direction (another turn to the left and a decline in the forces of authoritarian neoliberalism) was a national referendum on banning oil exploitation in the Yasuní National Park – arguably the most biologically diverse spot on earth – that was called for by environmentalists and the indigenous communities. Approval of the referendum, held on the same day as the elections, undoubtedly was a major blow to President Lasso and a major boost to the progressive Left.

But this left turn (a “pink tide” of progressive regime change) – neither Peru nor Colombia having participated in the progressive cycle formed at the turn into the 21st century – also included the advent of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (a left populist popularly known as AMLO) as President of Mexico; the re-election in 2022 of Lula da Silva, who was restored to power at the head of a broad center-left coalition; and the electoral victory of progressive forces in regional elections in Ecuador. This second “pink tide” of regime change, which was kicked off in

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<sup>3</sup>The October 15 vote called for by President Lasso to avoid his impeachment for corruption was not, as widely expected, won by the RC candidate, Luisa González. It was won by the National Democratic Alliance (AND) candidate Daniel Noboa, a conservative but inexperienced politician and an heir to a fortune built on the banana trade, who will serve as president until the end of Lasso's mandate in May 2025. Noboa was supported by conservative forces on the right. Noboa himself, although bizarrely proclaiming himself to be on the center-left, is clearly situated on the right wing of Ecuadorian politics.

#### 4 *Latin American Politics in the Neoliberal Era*

2018 by Mexico, washed ashore in Bolivia in 2020, and in 2021 in Peru, Honduras, and Chile, and then Brazil and Colombia – Colombians having elected the first left-wing president in their history. We have here another turn to the left after several short-lived conservative authoritarian regimes from 2015 to 2019.

As for Mexico, after the state visit in February 2023 of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, Lopez Obrador took advantage of TA convergence of left-leaning regimes by proposing a summit of progressive governments in the region as a means of creating a common agenda of progressive policies. To date (early September 2023) the governments of Argentina and Brazil have agreed to participate in the summit, but it is expected that Cuba, Colombia, Chile, Honduras, and Venezuela, as well as Bolivia, would also join this gathering of progressive forces. Meanwhile, in a blow to President Biden's efforts to bring together governments across the region to concert action regarding the thousands of migrants seeking to enter the United States along the southern border, Lopez Obrador informed Biden that he planned to skip his Summit of the Americas. At issue here was the US government's refusal to invite Cuba and Venezuela.

But to add an element of ambiguity and confusion to these crosscutting trends and developments, in the midst of this second left turn that raised hopes on the political left of another progressive cycle, the Far Right appeared to be on the rise again with the emergence of both a traditional variety of right-wing politician and politicians in the populist-authoritarian mold of Jair Bolsonaro, who represented a new type of conservative politics – radical right authoritarian populism – versions of which also emerged and has spread across the world in recent years (Berberoglu, 2020).<sup>4</sup> And it would appear it is still trending in Latin America. This surge of authoritarian populism represented a backlash against both libertarian developmentalism and the new conservatism of the 1980s which at the time was disguised as neoliberal globalization (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Hunter & Power, 2019; Sanahuja & López Burian, 2021).

After the capture of the presidency by Bolsonaro, right-wing candidates and parties with an authoritarian bent have emerged in several countries, notably José Antonio Kast in Chile, Guido Manini Ríos and his party *Cabildo Abierto* (CA) in Uruguay – and, most recently, Javier Milei in Argentina, a populist in the mold of Bolsonaro. In El Salvador the pendulum of electoral politics brought

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<sup>4</sup>Authoritarian populism – what Kestler (2022) describes as “radical right populism” (RRP) – is a subcategory of right-wing populism. As noted by Kestler, it is specified by Mudde (2007) through the ideological features of authoritarianism and populism as well as radicalism, defined by Mudde (2007, p. 25) as “opposition to some key features of liberal democracy,” what some views as a benevolent more humane form of capitalism, ignoring the inner secret or scatological fact or truth of capitalism: that regardless of its specific form it is fundamentally based on exploitation and thus crisis-ridden. Initially, this categorization of populist antielite authoritarian was understood to apply mainly to European cases, but with the rise of such figures as Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Donald Trump in the USA, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and now Milei in Argentina, RRP seems to have become a global phenomenon (Berberoglu, 2020; Zanotti & Roberts, 2021).

to power Nayib Bukele, a businessman and a very unconventional representative of the trend toward right-wing populist authoritarianism, who like Bolsonaro and Trump, has no use for the niceties and institutional trappings of liberal democratic politics, evidently prepared to bypass these institutions if need be in asserting his presidential power and taking direct actions against the ultra-violent criminal gangs that have plagued El Salvadorian and regional politics, even spilling into the United States. In March 2022, following a sudden spike in violence, he declared open war on these gangs. Bukele and his allies quickly established a state of exception, allowing law enforcement agencies and courts to bypass due process guarantees and other constitutional protections, taking the criminal gangs off the streets, suspending their constitutional rights. Since March almost 60,000 people have been arrested, some because of arbitrary detentions. In Peru, a similar proposal to suspend an institutional proceeding (in this case, an effort of Pedro Castillo, the recently elected leftist president, to dissolve the legislature to avoid his impeachment) failed because his opponents on the Far Right of a sharply divided and polarized legislative chamber greatly outnumbered his allies on the center-left and were in a position and able to take revenge for having lost the presidency by charging him with “rebellion” (“breaching the constitutional order”) and deposing him.

As for the defeated but not necessarily down and out Bolsonaro,<sup>5</sup> who has been frequently referred to as a kind of “tropical Trump” and often mentioned in the same breath as Hungary’s Victor Orban or Italy’s Matteo Salvini (Weizenmann, 2019), he has returned from self-imposed exile to renew the class struggle. In Chile, first round winner of the 2021 presidential election (he ended up losing to the leftist candidate Gabriel Boric), José Antonio Kast, the far-right founder of the Republican Party, evidenced strong sympathies not just for the right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil but also for other right-wing extremists like the Spanish party Vox. Noting that Chile “might have a future after all” (anticipating his winning the elections), he vowed to join the class struggle with a right-wing populist agenda (Rama et al., 2021). His success in the first round of the 2021 presidential election was commented on enthusiastically by the Argentine populist outsider and recently elected Javier Milei, who declared himself a natural ally of Donald Trump and adopted the claim “Don’t tread on me” known from the US’s Tea Party movement (Figueiredo, 2021). Regardless of whether these politicians have managed to capture the reins of political power, right-wing populism evidently is an ascendent force in Latin American politics.

Other examples of an emergent right-wing populism, what some have labeled “radical right authoritarianism” (Kestler, 2022), is Uruguay’s Guido Manini Ríos, who declared his intention of bringing about a “moral renewal” of his country,

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<sup>5</sup>Upon his defeat Bolsonaro, who, like Trump refuses to countenance the idea that he lost the election (echoing Trump in his declaration that the elections to had been “rigged”), went into self-imposed exile in Miami but has since returned to Brazil to promote and plot to his return in command of the right-wing forces that brought him to power and renew the fight against Lula’s centrist regime.

and the far-right libertarian Milei, who against all odds has captured the *Casa Rosada* (Pink House), the Argentine Republic's official workplace. Like other right-wing populists, both Manini Ríos and Milei, like Donald Trump, also oppose universalism and the politics of inclusion. These commonalities suggest that there exists a kind of populist contagion, leading some observers to conclude that the new right-wing populism in Latin America fits the category of neoliberal or radical right populist authoritarianism known from its appearance in Europe and North America (Berberoglu, 2020; Cannon & Rangel, 2020; Kestler, 2022; Luna & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021; Zanotti & Roberts, 2021).

### **Setting the Agenda for the Latin American Class Struggle**

In this book, we seek to gauge the prospects of the Latin American Left caught in the headwinds of right-wing authoritarian or neoliberal populism. The situation in which the political Left finds itself is not unique to Latin America. What some observers have termed “right-wing populism,” or the politics of neoliberal globalization, has manifested itself all over the world. Berberoglu (2021), for example, edited a collection of 12 essays on the crisis of neoliberalism and the surge of postneoliberal right-wing authoritarianism all over the world, with case studies from Putin's Russia, China, and the United States as well as Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

David Collier, in 1979, had edited a collection of essays on what was then described as “bureaucratic authoritarianism” (O'Donnell et al., 1986), in Latin America and Southern Europe, with reference to the politics of the “new conservatism” that originated with the concern in some policy circles for the excessive power of unions and organized labor, and the emergence in Brazil and the southern cone of South America of military dictatorships oriented toward the National Security Doctrine fabricated by the US imperialist state (O'Donnell, 1979).

The neoconservative project is to halt or reverse the gains made by the working class in the United States and elsewhere (the United Kingdom and Europe, in particular) in increasing their share of national income, which, to the chagrin of conservatives and the capitalist class, reduced the pool of available capital for investment and threatened their capacity to accumulate capital.<sup>6</sup> The solution to this problem as proposed by the advocates of the new conservatism was to reduce the role or take the State out of the development process (its responsibility for economic and social development) and turn it over to the market – to release the “forces of economic freedom” from the regulatory constraints of the

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<sup>6</sup>Capital, as understood and used in this book refers to productive resources such as money used to expand production or accumulate wealth. Capital comes in diverse forms – financial, natural, physical, and social – but most often is used in its financial form – money or other financial resources available for investment in the expansion of production or the generation of wealth. Although one form of capital might predominate in a particular context, in actuality – in the capitalist development process – the development of the forces of production – different forms of capital are usually combined in practice.

welfare-developmental state. To bring this about they turned to the ideas established by a group of scholars associated with the Pellerin Society in the 1930s who elaborated the doctrine of free market capitalism or neoliberalism.<sup>7</sup>

The ideas of this school, based on the ideology and economic doctrine of free market capitalism in the 1970s were converted by the “Chicago School” of neoliberal thought into policies and structural reforms – *globalization* (integration into the world market) the *privatization* of state enterprises, *deregulation* of markets, and the *liberalization* of both commerce and the flow of capital – into a doctrine and policies that were implemented in the first instance by Pinochet and his “Chicago Boys” in the wake of his takeover of the state apparatus in the context of a military coup launched against the democratically elected socialist regime of Salvador Allende. In the 1980s, the neoliberal “structural reforms” proposed by these Chicago Boys were imposed on the heavily indebted countries in Latin America – especially the big three – the MBA (Mexico, Argentina, Brazil) – whose industrial import-substitution policies had helped push these countries into a debt crisis. The outcome was the installation of a new world order based on neoliberal globalization, which effectively launched a new era in the history of capitalist development in the region.

The focus of this book is on the politics of this advanced phase of capitalist development, which has been characterized as “extractive capitalism,” with reference here to the massive flows of investment capital mobilized under the rules of the new world order, that is, investments in the extraction of natural resources (minerals and metals, fossil fuels, and agri-food products) for the purpose of exporting them to capitalist markets in primary commodity form. For the development and resistance dynamics of extractive capitalism see Chapter 10.

## The Class Struggle, Chapter by Chapter

The opening chapter provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of capitalist development and the forces of social change associated with the class struggle in Latin America, a struggle that is rooted in *the capital–labor relation*, a relation of *production, exploitation, and political conflict* that is reproduced in *the center–periphery relation of dependency between countries at the center of the world capitalist system and those on the periphery*. As we see it, this center–periphery structure of international relations, and the associated conditions of economic exploitation and dependency, has given rise to forces of resistance that has taken the form

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<sup>7</sup>The Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) is a neoliberal international organization composed of economists, philosophers, historians, intellectuals, and business leaders. Its founders included Frank Knight, Karl Popper, Ludwig von Mises, George Stigler, Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek who, in 1947, invited 39 scholars, mostly economists, to a meeting to discuss the fate of classical liberalism, his goal being an organization which would resist interventions and promote his conception of classical liberalism. Thus, the Mont Pelerin Society was born, although it was not until the 1980s that the neoliberal doctrine espoused by it would achieve hegemony regarding economic policy.

of a class struggle for land and labor – and equality. Each advance of capital(ism) in the development process, each phase in the development of the forces of production, it is argued, generates new forces of resistance that can be mobilized to either the left or the right, from above or from below. The chapter elaborates on this point with reference to recent political developments in Latin America.

Chapter 2 provides a framework for understanding the politics of capitalist development in the current context. This framework centers on what we describe as the geoeconomics and politics of capital, with reference to the relative advance of “extractive capital” (foreign investments in the large-scale acquisition of land – “landgrabbing,” in the parlance of Critical Agrarian Studies) (Borras et al., 2012), and the extraction of raw materials and natural resources for export in primary commodity form. The geopolitics of capitalist development has to do with what in the Latin American context is understood as a “pink tide” of “progressive” regimes formed in the wake of a decline in the legitimacy of neoliberalism as an economic doctrine and policy framework (Barrett et al., 2008). It could be argued (see Petras & Veltmeyer, 2011) that the apparent demise of neoliberalism can be traced back to the political activism of the peasant movement and indigenous communities in the 1990s (in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Mexico).

Chapter 3 turns to a second front of the class war focused on the politics of agrarian change. The class struggle throughout the 20th century took two fundamental forms – a struggle for higher wages and better working conditions waged by workers against the capitalist class; and a struggle for land and land reform protagonized by the peasantry of small-scale agricultural producers. The land struggle over the years took diverse forms, but in this chapter, the focus is on the activism of the peasant-based agrarian movements in the neoliberal era. It is argued that the activism of these movements generated conditions that led to a progressive cycle in Latin American politics – a left turn on the front of democratic electoral politics.

Chapter 4 explores the political dynamics of the so-called pink tide that took form as a “progressive cycle” – a succession of regimes concerned with moving beyond neoliberalism toward a more inclusive form of national development. This cycle of progressive regimes, which paralleled not coincidentally a primary commodities boom on capitalist markets, unfolded primarily in South America.

Chapters 4–8 explore the political dynamics associated with various left and right turns in the dynamics of electoral politics in recent years. At issue in these dynamics is the emergence of left-leaning postneoliberal regimes facilitated by the political activism of the peasantry, or what was left of it after several decades of capitalist development in the neoliberal era (a semiproletariat of rural landless workers – the “rural poor,” in the development discourse of the World Bank). This left turn came to an end after a 10-year cycle of progressive policies oriented toward inclusive development, or “neodevelopmentalism” – a model promoted by economists in the structuralist tradition of the Economic Commission on Latin