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Drowning in Laws: Labor Law and Brazilian Political Culture
(review)

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main exception. It is an interesting question why this should be so. Important factors include the transforming effect of economic change (economic growth was much higher in post-authoritarian Europe than post-military South America) and the role of the European Union and (in the case of Italy) Marshall Aid and NATO.

Overall, this edited collection includes some interesting discussion, and successfully illuminates some significant aspects of the behavior of state actors in Brazil and the southern cone of South America, and to a lesser extent elsewhere. It also contains a number of ideas that can and should be developed in future work.

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GEORGE PHILIP

Drowning in Laws: Labor Law and Brazilian Political Culture. By John D. French. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Pp. xviii, 233. Illustrations. Tables. Appendix. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. \$59.95 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

This book focuses on the history of the *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (CLT), a body of corporatist labor law that President Getúlio Vargas signed into law on May 1, 1943. Its purpose was to give coherence to various pieces of welfare legislation for industrial workers passed since 1930, and it became one of the symbols of Brazil's twentieth-century developmentalist state. French's study is no history of the legislation as such or of CLT-based jurisprudence, but rather a "processual cultural history of labor law enactment, worker mobilization, and political culture in Brazil" (p. xi). The research is an extension of his ongoing project on the metalworkers of greater São Paulo, although he also draws on examples from other regions and states.

French argues that the labor regime under the CLT never became what the letter of the law promised. Under the Populist Republic (1945-64) and beyond, he asserts, working-class activists and leaders of legally recognized unions had a "fundamentally conflicted" relationship that counterbalanced a "rejection of the law" with "its idealization" (p. 98). French makes extensive use of interviews with labor leaders to demonstrate that their experience with continued state repression taught them not to take the CLT for granted. They knew that it was not the generous governmental "gift" (*outorga*) as which Vargas and his fellow "laborites" (*trabalhistas*) portrayed it; instead the workers took a pragmatic approach and used the law whenever possible to exert pressure on employers and the state. French shows convincingly that the *outorga* was a myth of the *trabalhistas*' making: they systematically misrepresented the labor regime under the First Republic as one that failed to acknowledge the importance of the social question and treated labor mobilization exclusively as a "case for the police" (*caso de polícia*).

The book is not a conventional historical monograph. To highlight change over time is not its primary concern. French draws on examples from the entire period

under study to support his interpretations of the labor regime, the workers' "legal consciousness," and Brazilian political culture. Whenever the spotlight is on turning points in the Vargas era, it is to demonstrate that the break in the labor regime was not nearly as pronounced as the government at the time or academics since then made it out to be. A case in point is the chapter on Vargas's election and second presidency (1950-54), which makes the case that the workers "got little if anything from the newly elected president" (p. 91). The book is also relatively light on archival sources if one discounts the transcripts of interviews from the Robert J. Alexander papers. French did apparently not consult the archival records of the *Ministério de Trabalho, Indústria, e Comércio* (MTIC; Labor Ministry), probably the richest body of sources on the state's management of unions under the CLT. It would be most instructive to compare and contrast the picture of the 'real' labor regime emerging from these documents with the one painted by the workers' testimonies. Without a consideration of the MTIC records, it is impossible to reach definitive conclusions about the CLT's net effect on worker mobilization.

The book is best read as a long essay on perceptions and interpretations of the CLT. French moves with ease between published eyewitness accounts, oral histories, scholarly works, and contemporary intellectual commentary to illustrate the rationales for portraying the CLT and the government's labor regime in a more or less favorable light. His comprehensive discussion of these interpretations, old and new, highlights the role politics has played in the scholarly analysis of the CLT and Brazil's labor regime. Ironically, *Drowning in Laws* is very much of that tradition. The book often reads like an indictment of the CLT, a polemic driven by the author's laudable commitment to social justice. French provides ample testimony that the "CLT in practice" was a "generosity akin to fraud" (p. 40), but alternative interpretations of the CLT's effect on labor organization and social welfare are never seriously considered. Rather than being steamrolled into believing that the CLT could "never be used effectively to its declared end" (p. 153), this reader would prefer to be convinced by a more cogent argument based on less partial sources.

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RELIGION/RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millennium. Edited by Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004. Pp. vii, 128. Notes. Bibliography. \$22.50 cloth.

The Violence of Love (reprint). By Oscar Romero. Translated and compiled by James R. Brockman, S.J. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004. Pp. xvii, 214. Notes. \$15.00 paper.

March 24, 2005 marked the 25th anniversary of the assassination of Oscar Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador. He held that position for only three years, but