

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Department of History
Semester II, 1985-86

Thomas E. Skidmore

Interdisciplinary Seminar 982 on
LABOR AND LABOR MOVEMENTS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LATIN AMERICA

This seminar will focus on labor and labor movements in selected Latin American countries (which will include primarily Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico with attention to other countries according to student interest.) The objective will be to analyze the evolution of the urban working class, and especially the rise of labor organizations, within their social, political and economic context. To what extent is the pattern of their development to be explained by: (1) the timing of industrialization? (2) the social background of workers (rural in-migrants versus urban-born, etc.)? (3) the attitude of the ruling elites? or (4) governmental responses, such as extensive social welfare programs and detailed legal regulations?

Other questions include: Has an "aristocracy of labor" emerged in high-paying sectors and, if so, how has it affected the rest of the labor movements? What roles have ideology and class consciousness played? How can we explain the fact that Latin American labor movements have so often tended to become government-manipulated or highly politicized?

For the pre-1930 period, attention will be given to such factors as the influence of Anarchism, Syndicalism and the contrast between immigrant-led and native-directed movements. In the post-1930 period the key role of populist politicians, pre-emptive government programs and Communist Party efforts will be examined.

The seminar will begin with a series of four sessions devoted to an overview of differing approaches and themes emphasized in the recent monographic and methodological literature on Latin American labor history. The sessions will be a combination of lecture and discussion of assigned reading. Each week will focus on a major topic. The objective of the lectures and discussion during the first four weeks will be to create a background of common knowledge about Latin American labor in the twentieth century, and about the prevailing approaches to studying them. These discussions will also offer an opportunity to explore possible seminar paper topics.

January 20: ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION

January 27: THE HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICAN LABOR: QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

Reading:

Thomas E. Skidmore, "Workers and Soldiers: Urban Labor Movements and Elite Responses in Twentieth-Century Latin America," in Virginia Bernhard, ed., Elites, Masses, and Modernization in Latin America, 1850-1930 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 79-126; 141-156.

Francisco Zapata, "Las organizaciones sindicales," in Ruben Kaztman y José Luis Reyna, eds., Fuerza de Trabajo y Movimientos Laborales en América Latina (México: El Colegio de México, 1979), 194-232.

February 3: HISTORICAL OVER (Tentative paper topic due)

Reading:

Hobart A. Spalding, Jr., Organized Labor in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Urban Workers in Dependent Societies (New York: Harper, 1977), entire.

February 10: EXAMPLES OF RECENT RESEARCH ON DIFFERENT HISTORICAL PERIODS

Reading:

Peter DeShazo, "The Valparaiso Maritime Strike of 1903 and the Development of a Revolutionary Labor Movement in Chile," Journal of Latin American Studies, vol. 11, Pt. 1 (May 1979), 145-168.

Ian Roxborough, "Labor in the Mexican Motor Vehicle Industry," in Rich Kronish and Kenneth S. Mericle, eds., The Political Economy of the Latin American Motor Vehicle Industry (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 161-194.

Charles Bergquist, Workers in Modern Latin American History: Capitalist Development and Labor Movement Formation in Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and Colombia, Chapter 3: Argentina, pp. 136-310.

February 17: THEORIES & TYPOLOGIES

Reading:

Ian Roxborough, "The Analysis of Labour Movements in Latin America: Typologies and Theories," Bulletin of Latin American Research, vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1981), 81-96.

Reading for February 17 cont.

Jonathan Grossman & William T. Moye, "Labor History in the 1970's: A Question of Identity," in Thomas A. Kochan, et. al., Industrial Relations Research in the 1970s: Review and Appraisal (Madison: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1982), 283-310.

The remaining class sessions will be allocated to the presentation of student papers, with the timing dependent on the number of students in the seminar.

Student Papers

The nature and format of the student papers will vary according to the background and interests of each student. Those with sufficient background and interest will write papers based on primary sources (documents, newspapers, etc.) in so far as they are available. Students with less background and/or research orientation will write papers based primarily on secondary sources. Leads to bibliography and sources can be found in the readings for the first four weeks. The Instructor will also furnish further bibliography as students develop a choice for a paper topic. There is no shortage of interesting topics, as will become evident in our early sessions.