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## Introduction to the Study of the New Latin American Left

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At the beginning of the 1990s, the Mexican political scientist Jorge Castañeda (1993:3) opened his well-known book on the Latin American left with this unequivocal judgement:

The Cold War is over and Communism and the socialist bloc have collapsed. The United States and capitalism have won, and in few areas of the globe is that victory so clear-cut, sweet, and spectacular as in Latin America. Democracy, free-market economics, and pro-American outpourings of sentiment and policy dot the landscape of a region where until recently left-right confrontation and the potential for social revolution and progressive reform were widespread. Today conservative, pro-business, often democratically elected and pro-US technocrats hold office around the hemisphere. The United States spent nearly 30 years combating nationalist Marxist revolutionaries where the left was active, influential, and sometimes in control, and where it is now on the run or on the ropes.

Viewed a decade and a half later, it is striking that Castañeda's declaration of the end of a historical cycle for the left was as correct as his diagnosis and future predictions were mistaken. We now know that, in effect, the end of *really existing socialism* marked the end of an era for the Latin American left, one which was defined by the milestones of the Cuban revolution in January 1959, the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in Chile (1970–73), the victory of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in

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1979 and Daniel Ortega's electoral defeat in 1990 (Sader, 2001). Despite the survival of the Cuban revolution and the Colombian guerrilla movement into the new millennium, since the fall of the Sandinistas and the demobilisation of the Guatemalan and Salvadorian guerrillas, the dominant tendency on the Latin American left turned from armed revolution to reform through elections and popular protest.

In this way, beginning with the Zapatista uprising of January 1994, events quickly invalidated the premature diagnosis of the triumph of neoliberalism, liberal democracy and the close alignment of Latin America with the United States, as well as the prognosis of a left on the defensive, limited to exploring familiar variations on the market economy and representative democracy. As the chapters in this book abundantly illustrate, the region is witnessing the multiplication and consolidation of leftist movements, parties, and local and national governments that question every one of the elements of this diagnosis. Today, parties and political figures representing self-styled leftist or 'progressive' tendencies govern in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela, as well as many of the most important cities in the region, from Bogotá and Mexico City to Montevideo, Caracas, Rosario, San Salvador and Belo Horizonte. At the same time, diverse social movements of the left have become fundamental political forces in different countries, as demonstrated, among other examples, by the decisive influence of indigenous movements in Bolivia, Ecuador and Mexico, the mobilisation of Brazilian landless rural workers, and the activism of unemployed workers and *piqueteros* in Argentina.

Similarly, the new forms of social mobilisation and the proposals and experiments offered by contemporary progressive governments go beyond the narrow confines of classic modifications of the market economy and representative democracy. An example is the system of participatory budgeting introduced by the Partido de los Trabajadores (Workers' Party, PT) government in Porto Alegre in 1990, which combines an innovative redistribution policy with a radicalisation of democracy through direct citizen participation. This has been reproduced, to varying degrees and with various nuances, by many other leftist municipal administrations (see Goldfrank, 2006).

In this way, the programmes offered by the 'new' left go beyond the specific issues of economic equality and democracy. As numerous analysts have shown, a good part of what is original about the *new* Latin American left can be found in the way these traditional concerns have been expanded to include many different agendas related to ethnicity,

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gender, race and other sources of inequality (see Lechner, 1988; Dagnino, 1998; Sader, 2001 and 2002; Wallerstein, 2003; Santos, 2005). To cite only the most obvious example, the demand for the rights to cultural difference and self-determination has become a central part of the left's agenda as a result of the mobilisation of indigenous peoples in Ecuador, Bolivia and Mexico over the past two decades.

This book offers a systematic and explicitly comparative analysis of the origins, characteristics, dilemmas and possible future trajectories of the various manifestations of the new Latin American left. Towards that end, and in accordance with the methodology and the process of discussions and meetings described in the preface, each of the seven case studies refers to a common set of themes, based on a detailed analysis of the most relevant leftist – or *progressive* – parties, movements or governments in the country in question. The central objective of this introductory chapter is therefore to present the general themes that structure the empirical analysis contained in the case studies, emphasising the connections, similarities and differences between them. In this way, in the pages that follow, we seek to offer an overall view of the forest of the Latin American left that complements the detailed examination of the trees (the movements, parties and governments) presented in the empirical chapters. This comparative and general overview makes it possible not only to offer a more precise definition of what is 'new' and what is 'left', but also to emphasise the central issues, actors and dilemmas involved.

Although this book is the first attempt at a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon, in recent years an extremely interesting and copious body of literature has emerged that includes incisive debates aimed at renovating the theory and political strategy of the Latin American and international left.<sup>1</sup> In view of this, an additional aim of this introductory chapter is to situate the central themes and case studies presented in the book within that growing body of literature and those burgeoning regional and international debates. In Chapters 9 and 10, Atilio Boron and Boaventura de Sousa Santos present general commentaries that point towards that same objective.

In order to gain a full understanding of the nature of this book, it is worth clarifying what it is *not*. First, the book does not aim to be a conclusive and definitive evaluation of new left formations. As several of the authors emphasise, it might be too early to know with any certainty the contours, limitations or likely future outcomes of left forces whose rise dates barely to the last few years, or in some cases months. Nevertheless, this does not imply that it is not possible to trace their antecedents and

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historical roots; examine their composition, possibilities, limitations and dilemmas; establish the connections among different segments of the left within each country, and between them and others in the region and the world; and identify the factors that may determine their future. These are the central tasks of this volume, to contribute to the emerging academic and political discussion about the new left. In this sense, the text leaves the question regarding the future trajectory of the new left unanswered – hence the question mark following the possibility of a ‘utopia reborn’ in the title of this introductory chapter.

Second, the book does not present a unified and comprehensive theoretical synthesis or proposal regarding the new left. This is not only because of the nature of the project of open and pluralistic dialogue that gave rise to the book, but also because of the very nature of the new left itself. As political theorists who have examined the topic in the region have emphasised (Dagnino, 1998; Holloway, 2001, 2004), and as Bartra, Schuster, Santos and Boron argue convincingly in this volume, the variety of actors and issues that comprise the contemporary Latin American left does not fit easily within the dominant unitary leftist theories of previous decades, based on an orthodox reading of Marxism, or more precisely, of Marxism-Leninism. This does not mean that, in addition to conducting careful empirical case studies, the authors do not engage in theoretical analysis based on what they observe in their countries and the region as a whole. Several of the case studies are, in fact, original and incisive contributions to the theoretical debates about the left, and the final chapters by Boron and Santos were written with this specific end in mind. Nevertheless, neither this introduction, nor any of the contributions, is searching for a definitive theoretical synthesis.

Finally, in keeping with the above, the book is not a prescriptive or strategic manual on the left, of the sort that proliferated in past decades in the academic literature on the topic, and to which some analysts continue to dedicate their efforts even today (see for example Petras, 1999; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2006). This does not mean that it does not draw general conclusions about the political actors and strategies of the new left forces in the region. The methodology used to reach these conclusions, however, is more inductive than deductive; that is, it is based on a meticulous empirical examination and a rigorous analysis of the experiences of each country, rather than an exercise in applying a uniform theoretical or political model to the realities of different movements, parties, and governments of the left.

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## SIGNIFICANCE AND ORIGINS OF THE 'NEW' LEFT

**The demise of the old left and the significance of the new**

Given that the title of this book and several of the chapters employ the concept of the *new left*, it is important to begin with a definition of this expression. As César Rodríguez-Garavito explains in his chapter on Colombia, the adjective *new* is used here in a descriptive, rather than evaluative, sense. Hence, it refers to the fact that the left formations under consideration are of recent origin or in recent years have strengthened their capacity for mass mobilisation (in the case of movements), for competing in the electoral arena (in the case of political parties), or for governing (in the case of local and national administrations).

Although each of the political forces has followed its own timeline, in general the developments analysed in this book have taken place in the 1990s and in the first half of the current decade: that is, in the years following certain global and regional events – such as the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, or the end of the Sandinista revolution in 1990 – that are widely recognised as the end of an era for the left and the beginning of a new one. For the purposes of this book, therefore, the *new left* is new because it is recent, and not because it is better or worse than what came before it.

To describe something as new is, of course, only meaningful in relation to that which preceded it in time. In order to characterise the new left, it is therefore necessary to specify not only the elements of continuity with the old left (that is, those elements that make it possible to describe both as of the left), but also the characteristics that differentiate it from the latter. With respect to the first task, for the specific purposes of this introduction, we draw on Norberto Bobbio's (1995) now classic distinction between right and left, according to which the former advances a positive view of social hierarchies in order to defend the economic and political virtues of inequality, while the latter promotes equality between individuals and groups (whether classes, genders, racial/ethnic groups, etcetera), inspired by a horizontal vision of society.

As Bobbio himself and many other commentators have noted, the criterion of equality, even understood in this broad sense, is not sufficient to characterise the subtleties and historic tendencies of the right or the left, nor does it encompass the totality of the agendas of either. In the case of the left, for example, the defence of equality has been accompanied by various demands for radical democracy, international solidarity, anti-imperialism and other aims. We will return to this later, in the context of the debate over the values of equality, difference and democracy within

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the contemporary Latin American left. For now, however, Bobbio's distinction serves as a preliminary criterion for distinguishing between left and right-wing positions, and for underscoring the continuity between the 'old' and 'new' lefts, both of which – despite their considerable differences in strategy, theoretical framework and programmes – are concerned with the promotion of equality.

Reference to the new naturally emphasises its contrast with the old. For this reason, and in order to make the concept of the *new Latin American left* descriptively and analytically useful, it is necessary briefly to examine the differences between the old left and the contemporary left, as well as the point of historical inflection between the two. Today, when analysts and political actors speak of the new left, the historical left they have in mind is the collection of political parties, social movements and guerrilla organisations that comprised the spectrum of the left between 1959 (with the victory of the Cuban revolution) and 1990 (with the end of the 'second revolutionary wave'). The high points of this second wave were the advances of guerrilla forces in El Salvador, Guatemala and, above all, Nicaragua, between the 1970s and 1980s, and it ended, as mentioned above, with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 (see Pearce, 1999).

The organisations that comprised the left during this period can be classified into five groups:

- Communist parties, almost all formed in the second decade of the last century, which came to defend the 'peaceful road to power' and maintained close ties to the Soviet Union.
- The nationalist, or *popular* left, which included such figures as Juan Domingo Perón (in Argentina), Getulio Vargas (in Brazil) and Lázaro Cárdenas (in Mexico).<sup>2</sup>
- The guerrilla organisations of varying ideology, strategic orientation and social extraction that multiplied during the two revolutionary waves initiated by the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions.
- The reformist parties, which focused on competing in elections and pursuing change 'within the system', and were more distant from the Soviet Union and Cuba.
- The social left, which included trade unions, *campesino* leagues, ecclesiastical base communities, human rights organisations, and other rural and urban movements.

As Emir Sader (2001) has explained, towards the end of the 1980s and the

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beginning of the 1990s, each of these groups went through a period of decline or transformation that marked the twilight of the left of the previous three decades and its point of inflection towards a new left. As communist parties went into crisis following the collapse of 'really existing socialism' in the Soviet Union and the so-called socialist camp, the Cuban revolution entered a 'defensive phase', and armed struggle was extinguished across practically the entire region with the Sandinista defeat, the demobilisation of the remaining guerrilla movements, and the growing political isolation of those that survived in Colombia and Peru.

The reformist and national-popular parties suffered equally profound transformations. With their social and ideological bases weakened and prematurely seduced by the neo-liberal wave that swept the region in the 1980s, they moved rapidly towards the centre and adopted some variation of the 'third way'. The shift was evident in the neo-liberal policies applied by social-democratic and national-popular parties and coalitions during the 1990s, ranging from those of the PRI under Salinas in Mexico, to those of Peronism under Menem in Argentina, and those implemented by the *Concertación* governments in Chile. The so-called *Buenos Aires Consensus* bears witness to the spirit of the time. This well-known document, authored by Roberto Unger and Jorge Castañeda in 1997 on the basis of discussions with Latin American political figures from the centre and the left, attempted to offer a creole version of the 'third way' (or a 'tropical Blairism', as Sader called it) in the face of the rising tide of neo-liberalism.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the effects of neo-liberalism on the social left were equally profound, insofar as they weakened the predominant organisational form of social mobilisation of the past century: the trade unions. As Federico Schuster demonstrates in his chapter on Argentina, the combined effect of rising unemployment, privatisations, the 'flexibilisation' of labour regulations, rural bankruptcies and mass migrations to the cities, the growth of the informal economy, and financial crises undermined the social bases of trade unionism. In the place of the formal work positions that had been lost in the public and private sectors, enormous populations of chronically unemployed, informal and migrant workers emerged (Portes, 2003), forming a dispersed *pobretariado* very distinct from the organised proletariat that had sustained trade unionism for decades.

The destabilisation of the social bases, ideologies and strategies of the various manifestations of the Latin American left was the regional expression of the crisis of the so-called old international left. Beyond the specifics of Latin America, this crisis within the international left – as Immanuel Wallerstein has shown (2003) – consisted of two components,

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symbolised by the decline of the progressive traditions of two of the great modern revolutions. The theoretical component of the crisis is symbolised by the extinction of the legacy of the French Revolution, with its faith in the linear course of history, progress (which guaranteed a ‘happy ending’) and the fundamental rationality of humanity. The leftist version of this tradition – historical materialism – offered not only a comprehensive theory of society and history, but also the certainty for leftist movements and parties that the outcome of history would be on the side of the oppressed. The growing critique within left-wing intellectual circles of this social and historical vision – which in Latin America was heavily influenced by Gramsci’s critique of the orthodox reading of Marx (Dagnino, 1998) – marked the gradual transition to new interpretations of the left’s theoretical traditions and the formulation of new theories (more on this below).

The other component of the crisis of the old international left relates to its political strategy, and is symbolised by the decline of the Leninist canon that emerged from the Russian Revolution. Leninism’s contribution to the Marxist theory of history was to highlight a privileged historical subject – the party, or the party-state – which was responsible for guiding and realising the revolutionary potential of the proletariat. The political strategy illustrated by the Russian Revolution and the centralised states that emerged from it helped to solidify the belief within a significant part of the international left that the most effective political actions were those based on hierarchical, centralised structures and directed toward taking state power. Nevertheless, with decades of Soviet authoritarianism contributing to a deepening disenchantment with statism and centralism among many sectors of the international left, the fall of the Soviet Union dealt the *coup de grâce* to the Leninist vanguardist model. As we shall see shortly, this ‘crisis of the Leninist subject’ (Tischler, 2001) generated a profound revision of strategies and theoretical frameworks at the heart of the parties and movements that came to form the contemporary left.

**The emergence of the new left**

Following the historical trajectory briefly outlined in the previous section, the final decade of the past century found the Latin American and international left in an openly defensive position, immersed in a deep internal critique of the strategies and ideas that had guided it throughout the century. From the other end of the political spectrum, the ‘liberal economic creed’ (Polanyi, 1995), dominant during the second half of the

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nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, re-emerged in the form of neo-liberalism (Sader and Gentili, 1999; Blyth, 2002). The rise of neo-liberalism and its rapid diffusion from the governments of Augusto Pinochet, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher was so vertiginous that the political and intellectual right was able to declare the end of ideology and the impossibility of any alternative.

In the midst of this climate of retreat on the left and the consolidation of the right's *pensée unique*, what factors can explain the subsequent emergence of a new left in Latin America? We refer the reader to Atilio Boron's essay in Chapter 9, which offers an incisive and detailed response to this question. For the purposes of this introduction, we limit ourselves to mentioning the four main points of Boron's diagnosis and linking them to the case studies contained in the chapters that follow.

First, by the beginning of the 1990s, the ravages of the unconditional opening of the region's economies to the flow of goods, services and capital were beginning to be clearly felt. As has been amply documented, the negative impact of neo-liberalism on growth, inequality and poverty was particularly evident in those countries which, as a result of being exceptionally hard hit by the 1982 debt crisis, had adopted shock therapy as part of structural adjustment programmes promoted by multilateral financial agencies (see Hubert and Solt, 2004). It is therefore no accident that the event that symbolises the emergence of the new Latin American left – the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas – took place in Mexico on 1 January 1994, the date on which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect.

As Armando Bartra describes in Chapter 7, the unconditional opening of the Mexican economy required by NAFTA served not only to consolidate neo-liberalism, but also to increase popular discontent with the structural adjustment measures. According to Bartra's eloquent account, the bankrupting of the countryside and the resulting exodus of millions of *campesinos* and unemployed Mexicans to the United States reveals NAFTA's 'heads I win, tails you lose' business deal: 'exporting bankrupted farmers and importing agricultural products'. It is for this reason that the Zapatista uprising, and their call in 1996 for a 'Conference for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism' in Chiapas, generated such resonance.

As the economic crises and corruption scandals linked to structural adjustment reforms multiplied throughout the region, leftist movements and parties opposed to neo-liberalism emerged or gained strength. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's decision to privatise Brazil's public services and state-owned enterprises engendered generalised discontent

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with neo-liberalism, swelling the PT's electoral following and carrying Lula da Silva to the presidency in 2002 (see Chapter 2).

The Argentine collapse in December 2001 marked the death foretold of the region's most radical neo-liberal experiment of the 1990s, and opened the way for Néstor Kirchner's government (see Chapter 6). The regressive effects of the drastic reforms in Bolivia and Ecuador in the 1980s and 1990s triggered social protests by *campesinos*, indigenous peoples and urban workers, and the rise of powerful social movements and leftist parties (see Chapter 8). Venezuela's 'dual society', fed by structural adjustment policies, intensified the reaction of the majority of the population that had been denied access to the country's considerable riches. This reaction was channelled by Hugo Chávez's Movimiento Quinta República (Fifth Republic Movement, MVR), and helps to explain the solid electoral support that popular sectors have given to the Chávez government in ten consecutive local and national elections (see Chapter 3).

Although the Colombian transition to neo-liberalism was more gradual than in most countries in the region, the economic crisis came suddenly in 1999, and with it the rapid deterioration of social indicators under the neo-liberal era became apparent. This created the space for the left to restore a defence of 'the social' and thereby win elective office, including the mayoralty of Bogotá as well as other important political positions. Moreover, in the presidential elections of May 2006, it achieved the largest vote for a progressive party in Colombian history, with more than 2,600,000 votes, or 22 per cent of the electorate (see Chapter 5).

In Uruguay, the alarming economic and social deterioration caused by structural reforms not only contributed to the victory of the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) in the 2004 presidential elections. It also led to two popular referenda that were internationally unprecedented, the first (in 1992) blocking the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and the second (in 2004) establishing a constitutional prohibition on the privatisation of water (see Chapter 4).

The second factor that helps to explain the rise of the new left is the emergence of new political actors that have served to compensate for the decline of the trade unions. Although unions continue to be a central part of the left – as is demonstrated by the fact that two of the parties that have come to govern cities and countries in the region, the PT in Brazil and the Colombian Polo Democrático Alternativo (Alternative Democratic Pole, PDA), have their roots in trade union initiatives – a large part of the left's organisational and ideological novelty comes from recent indigenous movements, *campesino* organisations, movements of the unemployed,

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mobilisations of landless rural workers, afro-descendent organisations, feminist movements and other forms of social mobilisation (Álvarez et al., 1998). In fact, as we will argue below, this variety and plurality of actors is one of the central characteristics of the new Latin American left. This is evident in all the case studies in this book, from the indigenous and *campesino* coalitions in Bolivia, Mexico and Ecuador, and the ‘broad fronts’ of social movements, to the various parties in Uruguay, Brazil and Colombia.

Third, the diminished legitimacy and internal crises of traditional parties, which until recently were firmly rooted in the political systems of the entire region, have created political opportunities which the new left formations have succeeded in exploiting. Following the transition to democracy almost everywhere in the region, it became clear that most of the traditional parties or factions lacked the capacity or the political resolve to convert the popular will into government policies. This explains why political parties continually rank among the least respected institutions in national public opinion polls, and why, in a recent regional study of political attitudes, only 58 per cent of those surveyed stated that democracy is preferable to other forms of government (Corporación Latino-bárometro, 2006).

In some contexts, such as Argentina in 2001 or Ecuador until recently, all types of parties, whether new or old, have been the targets of citizens’ discontent. This is the source of the slogan made famous during the protests that brought down Argentine President Fernando de la Rúa: *que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo* (‘throw them all out, every last one’). In other cases, the main focus of citizens’ frustration has been the parties controlling rigid two-party systems that closed off the political system during much of the previous century, such as AD and COPEI in Venezuela, the Liberal and Conservative parties in Colombia, and the Blanco and Colorado parties in Uruguay. In one or the other situation, social movements and progressive parties – independently or together – filled part of the space left by the decline of these traditional parties.

Finally, the new Latin American left has been strengthened by the revitalisation of the international left following the 1999 protests in Seattle and the emergence of a global movement against neo-liberalism and war. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues in Chapter 10, this is a very diverse and decentralised international left, whose nexus is the World Social Forum (WSF) and whose manifestations can be found in a growing number of national and regional gatherings, protests in cities around the world, and movements and organisations promoting progressive economic

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and political programmes. The fact that the WSF was born in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil – the city that was, at the time, the symbol of the PT's political success – shows that the Latin American left has had considerable political and symbolic influence on this movement, which at the same time serves as a space for interaction and a source of support for the movements and NGOs (and to a lesser extent, the parties) that compose it.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW LATIN AMERICAN LEFT**

As the chapters that follow clearly demonstrate, the recent experiences of the left are very diverse. They include the radical grassroots mobilisation of *campesinos*, indigenous peoples, women, students, environmentalists, people of African descent, unemployed and landless rural workers, not always articulated (indeed, at times in explicit confrontation) with the platforms of left parties, as well as the centre-left parties that have won local and national office, and organisations of the historic left – such as trade unions and communist parties – that continue to mobilise and integrate themselves into the new cycles of protest and various newly formed party coalitions. This does not mean that it is not possible to detect certain common characteristics of the new left. Based on the case studies contained in this volume, we highlight below a (non-exhaustive) list of five characteristics that are present in the majority of the political forces under study and that contrast with the characteristics of the historic left described above.

**Plurality of strategies and articulation  
of decentralised forms of organisation**

By contrast with the left that preceded it – which, as we saw, emphasised theoretical unity and strategic centralisation – the new left is distinguished by a marked plurality. With respect to organisational strategies, in place of the Leninist unitary political subject – the vanguard party or party-state – the predominant forms are 'broad fronts' of parties and movements, *coordinadoras* (networks) of social movements, or *encuentros* (gatherings) of activist organisations.

In all cases, we see coalitions or networks whose participant organisations contribute to common political purposes – for example, an election, a campaign or a cycle of protests – without losing their organisational autonomy.<sup>4</sup> The Uruguayan Broad Front (FA) and the PT in Brazil are the paradigmatic cases of the first type of coalition between parties and leftist

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movements, a model that sectors of the Colombian left have attempted to reproduce via the creation of the Social and Political Front and the Alternative Democratic Pole. The Coalition in Defence of Water and Life in Cochabamba – internationally renowned for having prevented the privatisation of the city's water – is the most visible example of articulation between social movements (Olivera, 2004). With respect to gatherings of activists and NGOs with left-wing agendas, the innumerable encounters that led to the growth of the feminist movement (Álvarez, 1998; Vargas, 2003) and the regional indigenous movement (Ceceña, 1999; Brysk, 2000; Bartra, 2004; Rodríguez-Garavito and Arenas, 2005; Escárzaga and Gutiérrez, 2005) stand out.

The same plurality is reflected in the strategic political objectives of the contemporary left. Winning government office and the democratic reform of the state remain central objectives for many of the new political forces. Alongside these, however, a significant group of social movements promotes an anti-party, anti-state position, based on civil resistance and self-management. Among these, Holloway (2001) and Zibechi (2003) have highlighted the Zapatistas in Mexico and the *piqueteros* in Argentina. This strategic position and the reaction it has provoked among analysts have given rise to some of the most intense academic and political debates about the new left, as we shall see at the end of this introduction. For now, however, we want to emphasise that, when viewed as a whole, the strategy of the forces of the contemporary left is as distant from the old Leninist obsession with taking national power as it is from the extreme vision of authors such as Hardt and Negri (2002, 2004), according to which the new left consists of a hyper-decentralised international network of local organisations that seek global forms of co-ordination, rather than the reform of the state or seizing national power.

Between these two poles, one can find a wide range of strategies that includes, in addition to competing in elections for local and national power, the construction of what Nancy Fraser (1993) has called *multiple public spheres*, which are set in contrast to the Habermasian idea of a unitary public sphere as a counterpart to the state. The multiple public spheres include spaces of community self-government – such as the *campesino* councils and the committees of Bolivian farmers organised around irrigation rights (see Chapter 8), the Zapatista *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* ('good government committees') and autonomous municipalities (see Chapter 7), and the Argentine neighbourhood assemblies (see Chapter 6) – as well as citizen forums for democratic deliberation that are linked to the state, such as the Brazilian and Uruguayan participatory

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budget assemblies (see Chapters 2 and 4) and the Venezuelan grassroots committees (see Chapter 3).

**Multiplicity of social bases and political agendas**

A second characteristic, directly related to the first, is the broadening of the social bases and political agendas of the left. The economic, political and social changes that eroded the political primacy of trade unions and the monopoly of the struggle against class inequality within the heart of the left – and the resulting emergence of ‘new social movements’ – have been extensively analysed by social scientists (see Melucci, 1996).

The same shift is obvious in the Latin American left. In fact, some of the most effective forms of popular mobilisation involve actors whose agendas are based as much on the classic demands for social equality as they are on demanding respect for difference. The paradigmatic example of this type of mobilisation is the new continental *indianismo* that has expanded since the indigenous peoples rising organised around Ecuador’s Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE) in 1990. Today this forms the main social base of the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS) in Bolivia and – to a lesser extent – of Rafael Correa’s new government in Ecuador, and it is a social and political force on the rise in Colombia and Mexico as well.

The inclusion in the new left agenda of the right to difference, on a par with the right to equality – or the extension of the classic objective of promoting equality to include the struggles against forms of discrimination based on ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality and the like – contrasts with the historical trajectory of the left in the last century. As Luis Tapia demonstrates in his analysis of Bolivia, the response of the historic left to the cause of multiculturalism was unenthusiastic at best, and in the worst case was openly hostile. This kind of response was demonstrated before by the repression of the Miskito autonomous indigenous movement by the Sandinista government in the 1980s. Although the history of the Latin American left shows the persistence of profound internal tensions within the left around this theme – for example, between the historic left and the CONAIE in Ecuador (see Dávalos, 2005) – the dominant tendency is towards what Norbert Lechner (1988) has called the *logic of politics* (as opposed to the exclusionary logic of war), which imposes mutual recognition on the different actors on the left.

In order to capture the plurality of agendas, strategies and social bases of new left forces, Schuster and Bartra propose in their chapters that we

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speak of *lefts* in the plural. In the same vein, in Chapter 10, Santos argues eloquently that the new left's possibilities for cohesion will depend on the creation of 'depolarised pluralities' – that is, on a labour of translation and mutual intelligibility among the parties, movements and organisations that from different angles are opposing neo-liberalism, imperialism and other sources of inequality and domination. The international movement for an alternative form of globalisation, articulated through the WSF, is striving for the same type of co-ordination of plurality (Seoane and Taddei, 2001; Sader, 2002; Sen et al., 2004; Santos, 2005).

**Prominence of civil society**

A recurring theme among contemporary left forces is the defence of civil society as a space for political action. This new addition to the left's ideology and programmes can be explained as much by the fact that civil society was the focal point of resistance to the region's right-wing military dictatorships as by the rejection of traditional Leninist statism mentioned above.

According to Francisco Weffort, 'the discovery that there was more to politics than the state' (1984:93) began for the Latin American left with the experience of the solidarity of the Catholic Church, human rights organisations and other members of civil society during the period of authoritarian military rule, and continued in the two decades that followed with the multiplication of progressive NGOs and autonomous spaces for citizens' deliberation, such as the Mexican and Brazilian neighbourhood associations in the 1990s (Avritzer, 2002). The international left has taken the same path, as demonstrated by the dominance of social organisations within the WSF and the explosion of theoretical and empirical analyses of civil society.

The prominence given to civil society has generated intense internal tensions and debates within the left. In his chapter, Atilio Boron emphasises the ambiguity of the concept and the risks it poses for the left when the term is understood as the condensation of political virtues, in opposition to the state. In the same vein, Emir Sader (2002) has criticised the international left's concentration on civil society, and its consequent abandonment of the task of transforming the state, which would thereby remain in the hands of neo-liberal reformers. Álvarez (1998) and Pearce and Howell (2001) – among other analysts – have warned of the risks of *NGO-isation* of social movements: that is to say, the possible domination by NGOs of social activist agendas and forms of action.

Some of the case studies confirm the dangers identified by these

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analysts – for example, the Argentine neighbourhood assemblies analysed by Schuster, which, in the absence of an articulation with the state, dissolved as the diverse interests that they accommodated moved in opposing directions. However, other cases illustrate the vitality of civil society as a space for mobilisation on the left – for example, the Bolivian indigenous and *campesino* councils for self-government. Meanwhile, a third group of experiences clearly exhibit an articulation of society and the state – for example, the local participatory budgeting programmes in Brazil and Uruguay – and, in this way, have contributed to the democratisation of both the state and civil society. We will return to these issues in the final section of this chapter.

**Reformism**

For the reasons outlined in the previous section, the fundamental dichotomy of the left in the past century, *revolution or reform*, was resolved in favour of the latter with the end of the second wave of armed revolutions in Nicaragua in 1990. Reform, either through institutional means or through non-violent extra-institutional mobilisation, appears to be the dominant path taken by the contemporary left. The fact that the new left is ‘reformist’ nevertheless has distinct implications and effects for political actors and analysts situated in different locations on the ideological and political spectrum than the left of previous decades.

For the social-democratic parties and other variants of reformism, the closure of the revolutionary path implied a welcome vindication of their historic position and the disappearance of the counterweight that separated them from the centre. Thus, as noted above, many of these – such as the Argentine Peronists, the Mexican PRI-ists, and the Chilean Socialists – quickly gravitated towards the centre and developed some form of ‘tropical Blairism’. By contrast, among those searching for more radical social and economic ruptures prior to 1990, the triumph of reformism has generated the dilemma of how to promote ‘non-reformist reforms’ (Gorz, 1964). In this last group, we find the majority of the movements and parties that have positioned themselves or remained explicitly on the left or centre-left.

Whatever the level of enthusiasm that has met the triumph of reformism, it has had at least two implications for the Latin American left. On the one hand, in political terms it has meant a distancing from armed struggle as the path to social transformation and access to power. For example, the unprecedented success of the left-wing parties in Colombia – the Social and Political Front, the PDI and more recently

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the PDA – has been marked by an explicit break with guerrilla groups and with the historic Colombian left's 'combination of all forms of struggle' (see Chapter 5). The same posture can be seen at a regional and a global level, as is demonstrated by the fact that one of the guiding principles of the WSF is non-violence, which has led to the exclusion of armed organisations of the left.

On the other hand, in economic terms, reformism has meant the abandonment of models of centralised socialism – though not, as we shall see, of all appeals to socialism. In their place, the proposals and economic programmes of the new left have combined the market with more or less profound forms of state intervention, income redistribution and democratic planning. Given that economic reformism concerns one of the central problems of the new left – the construction of alternatives to neo-liberalism – we will explore this issue in greater detail in the following section.

### Deepening democracy

The final characteristic common to the political forces studied in this book is the centrality of democracy. As we saw, one of the motives behind the resurgence of the left in Latin America is the generalised disaffection with 'really existing democracy'. In this context, it is therefore not surprising that the left has placed great emphasis on the deepening and expansion of the democratic canon, via proposals and practices that combine representative democracy with the radicalisation of participatory democracy. Given the prominence of this issue on the agendas of contemporary leftist parties and movements, and its contrast with the programme of much of the historical left, we examine it more closely in the section that follows.

## BETWEEN NEO-LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Against the backdrop of this general overview of the origin and characteristics of the new left, we are now in a position to focus on two issues that illustrate with particular clarity both its advances and possibilities, as well as its main dilemmas and tensions: (1) the search for alternatives to neo-liberalism and capitalism, and (2) the democratisation of Latin American politics and societies, including the democratisation of the forces of the left themselves.

As the following chapters demonstrate, these two themes are not only present in all the national case studies, but have also given rise to the most

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intense internal debates within the left. The discussions are especially acute in relation to the promises and limitations of leftist local and national governments, and have been particularly evident in the cases of the Lula government in Brazil – whose leftist critics accuse it of having continued the neo-liberal policies of its predecessors (Oliveira, 2004, 2006) – and the Chávez government in Venezuela, which has provoked distrust among some sectors of the regional left, who brand it as authoritarian and populist and contrast it with the pragmatic left of Lula (Villalobos, 2004). Francisco Panizza (2005) refers to Brazil's Workers' Party and Uruguay's Broad Front, together with Chile's Socialist Party, as the clearest examples of 'the social-democratisation of the Latin American Left'. Identical dilemmas appear in other prominent examples of the contemporary left, as illustrated by the discussions about the political, social and economic orientation of the Kirchner government in Argentina and the Vázquez government in Uruguay.

Variations on the 'two lefts' thesis have become increasingly commonplace in Latin American academic and political circles. Jorge Castañeda (2006), for example, contrasts those governments and parties that pursue 'pragmatic, sensible, and realistic paths' (such as the PT in Brazil, the Socialist Party in Chile and the Broad Front in Uruguay), with those that 'emerge from a purely nationalist and populist past, with few ideological foundations' (such as those headed by Chávez in Venezuela, Kirchner in Argentina, and López Obrador in Mexico City). Similarly, the former communist leader and current ideologue of the Venezuelan opposition, Teodoro Petkoff (2005), distinguishes between the 'advanced reformist left' and what he calls the 'Bourbon left' (alluding to the European tradition of authoritarian monarchs). Offering a less polarising but still bipolar viewpoint, Carlos Vilas (2005) has emphasised the differences between the 'old' left and a 'new' left – purportedly those parties and movements that have dropped 'infantile leftism', internalised democratic values, and acknowledged the need for 'responsible' macroeconomic policies. Finally, from an over-simplistic perspective and lacking analytical rigour, Plinio Mendoza, Carlos Montaner and Álvaro Vargas Llosa (2007) establish a distinction between a 'carnivorous' left – represented by Ricardo Lagos, Michelle Bachelet, Lula da Silva, Tabaré Vázquez, Alan García and Daniel Ortega – and a 'vegetarian' left – represented by Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales.

In contrast to the proponents of the 'two lefts' thesis, in this book we speak of *the left* in general, not only because the boundary between these two poles is far from clear and continues to be the object of debate, but

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also because, in contrast to Castañeda and other analysts, we include within the cast of actors on the left not only parties and governments, but also social movements. The breadth and diversity of the left understood in this way thus makes a categorical distinction between two lefts impossible, to the extent that, to be descriptively accurate, it is necessary to speak of a variety of *lefts*.<sup>5</sup>

**Beyond neo-liberalism: the problem of alternatives**

As governments and social movements have discovered in recent years, it is one thing to mobilise and channel generalised discontent with neo-liberalism, and quite another to build alternatives that translate that discontent into local experiences and national policies that promote equality in the short term and are sustainable in the medium and long term. The clearest example of this difficulty is the tensions afflicting left-wing parties that have won local and national office. The dilemma is as much economic as it is political. Subjected, on the one hand, to the pressures of global markets and the demands for economic orthodoxy of international financial institutions and, on the other hand, to the scrutiny of electors who voted for them in order to change the course of the economy, various governments on the left have continued the programmes of their neo-liberal predecessors – and have even introduced reforms that the latter had been unable to consolidate due to the opposition of the very left-wing parties now in power. As Danilo Astori declared upon being named Uruguay's minister of economy and finances following the left victory in the October 2004 presidential elections, the Broad Front government 'will have to do things that we ourselves have criticised. Exactly the same will happen here as in Brazil' (Rother, 2004:A8).

The political cost of this transformation is potentially very high. As Eduardo Galeano recalled, on celebrating Tabaré Vázquez's electoral victory in his country, given that 'sins against hope are the only ones that attain neither forgiveness nor redemption' (2004:6), the survival of the left as a viable political option depends in large part on resolving the dilemma between deepening neo-liberalism or implementing feasible alternatives to it. It is very possible that the results of the 2004 Brazilian municipal elections – in which the PT lost control of two cities that were of fundamental political and symbolic importance (São Paulo and Porto Alegre) – were the early signs of the costs of the orthodox management of the economy during the first half of the Lula government (see Sader, 2005).

The terrain on which this dilemma takes place is defined by the

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national and international constraints confronting governments of the left. With respect to the latter, the irony for these governments lies in the fact that the circumstances that facilitated their electoral victories significantly limit their room for manoeuvre. In effect, the same economic crises that swung voters to the left in countries like Brazil, Venezuela and Uruguay, left a legacy in their wake – including high fiscal and balance of payments deficits, vulnerability to attacks by speculative capital, excessive dependence on the international prices for basic goods – that present formidable obstacles for changing the course of fiscal, monetary and social policy.

To continue with the paradigmatic example of Brazil, the mere prospect of Lula's electoral victory in 2002 was enough to prompt international financial actors to withdraw their short-term capital from the country and cause the risk rating for Brazilian debt to skyrocket. Given that short-term capital controls had been dismantled as part of the structural adjustment package, only a few months after the election Brazil faced the possibility of an economic collapse similar to that experienced by Argentina a few months earlier.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) responded to the emergency loan request of Lula's predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, with a condition that left no doubt about its power to intervene in national policy-making: of the total financial assistance authorised, only a fraction would arrive before the elections. The rest would depend on the promise of all the candidates – including Lula – that if elected they would continue and deepen the neo-liberal policies, including an increase in the primary fiscal surplus that would severely limit the future government's capacity for social spending. Faced with this ultimatum, the PT issued its *Letter to the Brazilian people*, in which it submitted to the IMF conditions – to the relief of investors, the disappointment of its traditional bases, and the satisfaction of the middle-class voters who finally voted for Lula (see Chapter 2). This episode left the power of the international financial community absolutely clear: although it does not vote, it does veto in order to maintain the rules of the global economic game.

The national obstacles to changing economic course are also significant. One of the fundamental reasons that neo-liberalism has been able to resist the rise of the left and popular discontent is the inertia of institutions and economic cadres formed during the neo-liberal era. As Sánchez, Machado Borges Neto and Marques demonstrate in Chapter 2, monetarist economists and other neo-liberal reformers are firmly entrenched within the Central Bank, the Ministry of Economics, and the Finance Ministry of Brazil. It is for this reason that the Lula government has maintained an

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orthodox monetary and fiscal policy that sets these members of the so-called *economic team* against members of the PT's *political team*, who occupy other positions in the government and the party, and who prefer (or preferred) a decided shift away from neo-liberalism.

In this way, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1999), the legacy of neo-liberalism in the region is felt today in the tension between a 'right hand' of the state, charged with maintaining economic orthodoxy, and a 'left hand', generally represented by the ministries of education, health, labour and social welfare, seeking to push policy in a post-neo-liberal direction.

The Venezuelan case, as Edgardo Lander demonstrates in Chapter 3, vividly illustrates both the presence of these national and international restrictions and how circumstances can make them less restrictive. Lander points out that Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement government has generated an unprecedented increase in social spending, channelled primarily through the so-called *misiones*: programmes to expand the coverage, and improve the quality, of basic public services (health, education, infant nutrition, etcetera) in poor areas. This social policy – whose popularity has been evident in the many elections in which marginalised classes have consistently voted for Chávez, including a recall referendum (see López Maya, 2004) – was made possible by the reorientation toward social spending of Venezuela's oil revenue, which has been exceptionally high in recent years and is without parallel in other countries of the region. This extraordinary source of foreign exchange has diminished the influence of international financial institutions and the restrictions burdening other leftist governments that are dependent on international capital. At the same time, the Venezuelan experience illustrates the tight restrictions produced by national resistance to changes in economic policy. The redirection of oil income towards social investment took place only after a prolonged strike by the Venezuelan business class, who were joined by the personnel of the state-owned oil company.

While these and other obstacles are recognised by the parties, governments and movements of the new left, there are profound debates and divisions over the possible room for manoeuvre within the indicated limits, and the capacity of governments, whether on their own or with the support of social movements, to go beyond those limits and increase the possible range of economic policies. As Daniel Chavez asks in his chapter on Uruguay, to what extent are the narrow margins for manoeuvre a product of the decisions of the governments themselves? To what extent are these governments being more 'fundist' than the International Monetary Fund? Judging by the intense controversy surrounding the

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Lula government, both internal and external to the PT – which even led to the December 2003 expulsion of PT members of Congress who had criticised the government – these questions trace deep lines of division within the new left.<sup>6</sup> While the government and the PT leadership contend that prudence and orthodoxy are necessary conditions for opening space for post-neo-liberal policies, their critics call for a change of course and assert that the imperatives of macroeconomic stability are equivalent to a permanent conversion to neo-liberalism.

This state of things might lead one to conclude that there is, in effect, ‘no alternative’ to neo-liberalism, as Margaret Thatcher proclaimed two decades ago. Nevertheless, the chapters in this book show that the problem lies more in the question than in the response regarding the existence of an alternative. If the question is whether the new Latin American left has a fully developed and clear alternative to the neo-liberal model, the answer is clearly *no*. Instead, what we find in the case studies are multiple local or national initiatives with diverse degrees of effectiveness and originality.

The path followed by several ‘progressive’ governments suggests that the reconstitution of the Latin American left is no longer defined by radical changes in institutional politics and macroeconomic policies, but by the implementation of social reforms. This apparent new left ‘agenda’ takes for granted the basic principles of market economics, while promoting reforms such as the implementation of welfare programmes for the poorest members of society (such as the *Fome Zero* in Brazil or the *Panes* in Uruguay), a renewed concern for public security, a more active role for the state as regulator and mediator between capital and labour, the expansion and improvement of public services, and the introduction of a more progressive tax regime.<sup>7</sup> Despite making a positive difference in the lives of the citizens affected by these policies, they do not add up to a comprehensive alternative model to neo-liberalism. Moreover, these and other post-neo-liberal experiences are far from consolidated, and the political actors themselves promote them in an atmosphere of considerably greater uncertainty than that which drove the ideology and programmes of the old left.

Indeed, it bears noting that in all the countries governed by the left, we observe the existence of actors that are not simply anti-neo-liberal but also anti-capitalist and have thus positioned themselves to the left of the progressive parties in government. This implies growing pressure from both sides of the political spectrum and a much more complex equilibrium than the bipolar left–right contradiction hegemonic throughout the region. In this context, we see the left both *in* government and *against* the government, with the line separating supporters and opponents not always clear.

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As seen in Brazil and Venezuela with the re-election of Lula and Chávez, the poor tend to support the government, whereas those with higher levels of formal education tend to adopt a more critical stance. At the same time, the economic policies implemented by some of the progressive governments analysed in this volume are endorsed by social and economic sectors that not long ago were at the forefront of resistance to the left. In short, the very same governments are seen by some critics as 'sold out to market forces' and neo-capitalists, whilst others perceive them as not market-friendly enough. For all these reasons, Latin America is at this moment a privileged laboratory for analysing the identity and future evolution of the left and progressive left politics in and beyond the region.

In one important respect, the uncertainty characterising the contemporary Latin American left may be seen as an advance over the old left. Indeed, as Atilio Boron contends in Chapter 9, the construction of economic and social alternatives never proceeds in accordance with a manual or a pre-conceived model. Rather, it is a historical, dialectical and ultimately unpredictable process with multiple possible outcomes.<sup>8</sup> The inflexible pursuit of a pre-conceived model is therefore more likely to serve as a hindrance to the construction of an alternative than as a reliable guide. Similarly, in an essay exploring the problems of the transition to socialism, Erik Olin Wright (2004:17) contends that such a transition is best conceived as moving in a general *direction*, rather than toward a specific institutional *destination*. This approach, he asserts, is like:

leaving for a voyage without a map of the journey, or a description of the destination, but simply a navigation rule that tells us if we are going in the right direction and how far we have travelled. This is obviously less satisfactory than a comprehensive roadmap, but it is better than a map whose destinations are constructed through wishful thinking and which give a false sense of certainty about where we are headed.

From this broader perspective, an extensive range of proposals, programmes and experiments becomes visible, and it becomes possible to analyse and evaluate the extent to which the actors on the left today offer alternatives to neo-liberalism. Thus, rather than a fixed destination, a more useful analytical criterion consists of determining to what extent these economic initiatives go in the direction of the values widely recognised by the left itself, such as decreasing inequality between classes and countries, economic democracy and environmental sustainability. In other words,

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these aspirations constitute the essential points of reference on the left's navigation rule.

But to continue with Wright's metaphor a bit further, it is also essential to understand the left's point of departure and – perhaps even more crucially – the specific set of obstacles it is likely to confront as it embarks on the pursuit of those aspirations. As the above discussion strongly suggests, this is particularly relevant to Latin America, given the enormous unmet needs of the region's population, its structurally disadvantageous position in the hemispheric and global economy, and perhaps most importantly the fierce opposition of domestic and foreign elites to progressive social and economic change. This implies that in assessing the policies advanced by the new left, it is necessary to consider not only their success in producing real improvements in people's lives, but also their capacity to alter the structural relations of power. It is the relationship between these two objectives that is of course at the heart of the long-standing debate between revolution and reform. As Atilio Boron notes, several decades ago Rosa Luxemburg warned that as genuine as reforms may be they do not alter the prevailing social and political order, and indeed will in the end serve to strengthen it by demobilising progressive social and political forces. For Luxemburg, therefore, the only really viable option was a direct assault on the power of elites – in a word, the revolutionary 'conquest of political power'. This is obviously not the hegemonic approach within the contemporary Latin American left.

For a variety of historical reasons, revolution no longer occupies a prominent place on the agenda of the contemporary Latin American left and, almost by default, there has been a return to reformism. Yet, Luxemburg's warnings about the power implications of reformism are as relevant today as ever. Does this mean that the left faces an irresolvable dilemma, or is there an alternative to the seemingly equally unpromising options of reform and revolution? An answer may be found in André Gorz's concept of 'non-reformist reforms', to which we alluded above, or what Armando Bartra refers to in Chapter 7 as 'revolutionary reforms'. Such reforms seek not only to produce immediate and genuine improvements in people's lives, but also to build popular political capacity and thereby lay the foundation for further advances at subsequent stages of political struggle. In other words, popular political power is not only deployed to bring about short-term changes; the changes themselves are selected with the specific strategic goal of augmenting that power. Thus, rather than simply ends in themselves, non-reformist reforms are a means to an end, the first step in

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a process of ongoing and sustained transformation in the relations of social and political power between dominant and subordinate groups.

The successful design and implementation of such reforms is, of course, a tricky proposition. For it is precisely because elites often perceive even quite minor changes as the first step on a slippery slope to an eventual erosion of their power that they have often been violently opposed to any change whatsoever. Still, the history of social and political struggle demonstrates that elites have on many occasions been forced to accept rather significant change, typically after concluding that suppressing change posed a far greater threat to their power and privilege than acquiescing to it. Again, in most cases, the outcome of this struggle is unpredictable, and the resulting change rarely what any of the participants intended. As we shall discuss in greater detail below, this is as much the product of the tensions and contradictions internal to the left itself, most importantly, between social movements, parties and governments.

Finally, it bears noting that following Hugo Chávez's open call for the construction of a 'socialism for the twenty-first century' in Venezuela and beyond, the new Latin American left's option for 'reform' over 'revolution' no longer appears as unanimous as it once did. Immediately after his re-election in December 2006, Chávez called on his followers to dissolve their existing parties and to form a new and revolutionary United Socialist Party of Venezuela as the means to 'construct socialism from below'. In his chapter, Edgardo Lander contends that there is no possibility of building a democratic alternative to the capitalist order, of pursuing a revolutionary project, without first having a profound debate about the historical experience of 'really existing socialism'.

It is therefore impossible to assess how many of the policies being implemented today in Latin America could be characterised as 'non-reformist' or 'revolutionary' reforms. As we shall see, the authors of the chapters that follow highlight numerous examples of policies and initiatives that offer diverse types of policies, whose depth and radicalism vary significantly, depending on the economic and social context in which they are taking place. Some look for the immediate relief of basic needs left unsatisfied by neo-liberal programmes; for this reason they frequently operate as complements to such programmes. The social policies aimed at the poorest sectors – for example, the programmes to fight hunger – are examples of this kind of alternative. Other initiatives – such as the initial renegotiation of the Argentine debt under the Kirchner government – imply a break with some of the pillars of neo-liberalism. A third group of policies – such as the direct management of public

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companies by consumers and citizens as an alternative to privatisation – have post-capitalist characteristics, insofar as they are based on community control of production and management of productive units (see Olivera, 2004; García Linera, 2004; Chavez, 2007).

At a local level, leftist governments in cities such as Bogotá, Porto Alegre, Montevideo, Mexico City, São Paulo and Caracas have revived the issue of *the social*, which had been marginalised during the neo-liberal era, and consequently have introduced important changes in municipal social and fiscal policy. The conversion of the PT's participatory budget into an icon for left-wing local governments, and the interest that this model has inspired in international theory and political science, can be explained by the fact that by combining heightened social spending, increased tax collection, income redistribution, administrative efficiency and the empowerment of the citizenry in general and the poorer sectors in particular, it is possibly the clearest successful example of non-reformist reforms undertaken by leftist administrations (Fung and Wright, 2003; Baiocchi, 2003). As the evolution of the participatory budget of Porto Alegre illustrates, this kind of reform faces serious resistance from economic and political elites, to the extent that its success has resided in displacing its decision-making power toward popular organisations and organised civil society, always with the guidance and co-ordination of a proactive state apparatus (Baierle, 1998).

Also at the local level, several important experiences created by social movements stand out, among them the aforementioned community management of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the co-operative management of 'recovered' firms by unemployed workers and *piqueteros* following the massive wave of bankruptcies in Argentina in 2001, the sustainable management of natural resources in indigenous territories, and diverse experiences of the international 'fair trade' movement (which involve communities of small farmers and unions from the region working with international networks of activists and consumers).

At the national level, early signs of post-neo-liberalism were also expected in some of the PT's social policies: the Lula government's educational, agrarian and urban reforms were supposed to be heading in this direction but, as Chapter 2 shows, the current path of such policies is not always an alternative to neo-liberalism. A more open break with neo-liberalism, motivated by the profound nature of the Argentine crisis, was exhibited by the Kirchner government, as demonstrated by its decision to delay paying international creditors in order to give priority to social spending and the reactivation of the domestic economy, thereby openly contradicting the

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recommendations of international financial institutions following the crisis.<sup>9</sup> In Venezuela, the restructuring of the management of oil revenue and the considerable expansion of social programmes also goes against the Washington Consensus and the policies of previous governments.

Whatever the eventual outcome of these and other governments, the initial signs already reveal that just as there is no single variety of capitalism or neo-liberalism, the emerging alternatives are equally diverse. Given their distinct starting points, levels of economic development, positions in the global economy and institutional structures, the countries that have turned to the left follow different routes, the results of which are not possible to predict in advance. This last point is illustrated by the recent economic performance of Argentina and Brazil. Despite the initial predictions by the international financial press of the success of Lula's more orthodox route and the certain failure of the heterodox route chosen by Kirchner, growth has been fairly positive in both countries under the two governments, and especially vigorous in Argentina, which bounced back from the crisis thanks to an annual growth rate of over 7 per cent in recent years.

Finally, at the regional and global levels, the highlights include Lula, Kirchner, Morales and fundamentally Chávez's proactive foreign policy of promoting South-South regional and global blocks in order to alter the international economic rules of the game. Among the regional initiatives, we can find the Brazilian opposition to the initial proposal for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the terms of which were unfavourable to Latin American countries, proposals for strengthening MERCOSUR (the Common Market of the South) and the promotion of a wide range of alternatives to the Washington Consensus's recipes for trade liberalisation. More recently, we can observe the construction of proposals based on solidarity, justice and complementarity between nations, such as the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) or the Bank of the South. Lastly, efforts are underway at a global level to strengthen the negotiating power of the Global South in the World Trade Organization (WTO), via alliances like the one attempted at the ministerial conferences in Cancun in 2003 and Hong Kong in 2005.

### **The new left and democracy**

The corruption scandals and deterioration in economic and social conditions that have taken place across the length and breadth of the region during the last two decades generated a crisis of legitimacy of the region's

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new and old democracies. One result of the crisis was the weakening of the age-old parties that had dominated electoral systems until the 1990s: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico, the Democratic Alliance and COPEI in Venezuela, and the Liberal and Conservative parties in Colombia.

The political space thereby opened to new left movements and parties – whose popular protests and electoral strategies were decisive in the creation of that space – once again placed on the agenda of progressive forces a problem that had caused profound divisions within the old left: *democracy*. On the one hand, the confluence of ideas drawn from Marx, Gramsci and Luxemburg had contributed to the formation of a radical democratic tradition in Latin America that inspired agendas of free and egalitarian participation, in both the political and the economic spheres. On the other hand, the widespread acceptance of Leninist vanguardism and the demonstration effect of the Stalinist experience had given rise to a rejection of so-called ‘bourgeois democracy’ or ‘strictly formal democracy’ by influential sectors of the old left. In their view, as Luis Tapia notes in Chapter 8 in relation to the dominant attitude within the Bolivian left until the 1970s, liberal democracy was either a form of political organisation of the capitalist class, or a stage along the road to socialism.

At the end of the last century, two historic events changed the balance of forces within the left in favour of the radical democratic tradition. The first, mentioned above, was the end of ‘really existing socialism’ and the demise of the revolutionary path. This served to reinforce the shift initiated in the 1980s toward replacing the idea of revolution with that of democracy as the central concept of the left’s political ideology (Weffort, 1984; Lechner, 1988). The second was the experience of opposition to the right-wing military dictatorships in various countries, in which leftist parties and activists played a leading role. In fact, some of the most consolidated parties of the new left, such as the Brazilian PT and the Uruguayan FA, have their roots in the struggle against authoritarian rule, which was initiated by their activists from exile or from within local human rights organisations, trade unions, guerrilla groups or intellectual circles (see Chapters 2 and 4).

As the return to democracy became the source of political and ideological cohesion within the left, the theories and programmes of the social movements and parties that would come to form the new left extended the critique of right-wing authoritarianism to a critique of authoritarianism in general. Even after the transition to liberal democracy in nearly the entire continent, the legacy of this shift by the left is evident in its defence of

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civil rights vis-à-vis governments with authoritarian leanings. For example, the new Colombian left has been the visible leader of the opposition to the multiple attempts by the Uribe government to suspend or weaken the individual rights consecrated in the 1991 constitution (see Chapter 5).

In theory at least, the implications of this embrace of democracy by the left can be understood on two levels. On the one hand, it can be seen as providing a means to an end, offering the politico-institutional openings necessary for the realisation of the left's central aspirations. This is not a new discovery, of course, as historically it has been those who have had the most to gain from democracy (namely, subordinate classes and labour in particular) that have fought hardest for it (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992). On the other hand, democracy can also be understood as an end in itself, not only because of the traumatic experience of authoritarianism that has led to a deeper appreciation for basic civil liberties, but also because democracy itself can become the object of change. That is to say that one of the changes that democracy makes possible is a deepening of democracy. Put somewhat differently, democracy is an obvious arena for the pursuit of non-reformist reforms – making use of existing democratic openings to institute reforms that deepen and expand democratic practices and procedures, including those that are outside formal political institutions. In this sense, it may be more appropriate to speak of *democratisation* as an ongoing, dynamic process than of *democracy* as a final end state.

In practice, the shift towards deepening democracy has developed on two fronts. In relation to representative democracy, the rise of various parties has been linked to their role as promoters and guarantors of the democratic rules of the game. The PT, for example, went from being a minority local party to being a powerful electoral force at the national level thanks in large part to the leading role it played in removing Fernando Collor de Mello from office for corruption in the early 1990s. The Mexican Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, PRD) also opened the way for the reform of the Mexican electoral system following the scandal produced by the 1988 presidential elections, in which the PRI stole the election from the victorious PRD candidate, Cuahutémoc Cárdenas. Today, even those parties frequently accused of being 'anti-democratic' (such as Hugo Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement, or Evo Morales' Movement Towards Socialism) routinely participate in elections, and in that way – according to Lander and Tapia in their respective chapters – have sustained electoral systems that could otherwise have collapsed under the weight of the traditional parties' loss of legitimacy.

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The second front concerns the experiences and proposals in the area of participatory democracy, which has become a central theme in the ideology and programmes of numerous left movements and parties (Santos, 1999 and 2003a). In effect, within the theories and institutions of participatory democracy, one can see a convergence between the deepening of democracy and another distinctive characteristic of the new left: the revitalisation of civil society and its articulation with the state.

We have already mentioned the ways in which the participatory budgets and other forms of citizen involvement in municipal administration demonstrate these characteristics. Other experiments and proposals illustrate the same tendency. Some are firmly established – for example, the good government committees in the Zapatista territories and the community councils in the Cochabamba region of Bolivia – while others are more tentative or fleeting, such as the popular assemblies that channelled the discontent of Argentines toward the formal system of political representation. In either case, it involves experiences that take place at a local level, given the logistical limitations of direct citizen participation. Thus, in addition to the promotion of radical democracy, an emerging front on the agenda of the left is the articulation between local participatory democracy and representative democracy at the national level, as illustrated by the campaign initiated by Bolivia's social movements and the MAS to hold a Constituent Assembly aimed at establishing a new institutional map that would integrate elements of both (see Chapter 8).

The incorporation of democracy into the programmes of the left is, nevertheless, far from being unanimous and peaceful. Three points of tension and controversy are evident in the case studies. First, several of the most prominent social movements have deep reservations about the transformative potential of the institutions of representative democracy. In Ecuador, for example, the indigenous movement exhibits a deep distrust toward the existing channels of representation, which on many occasions – particularly the 1998 Constituent Assembly and the 'betrayal' by Lucio Gutiérrez in 2002 – ended up reinforcing the power of political, ethnic and economic elites. Similar reservations can be detected in the Bolivian *campesino* and indigenous movements, whose recent experience shows that mobilisation and direct democracy have been more effective than the attempts to reform the institutions of political representation.

Second, the application of democratic principles to the structures of left parties and organisations themselves has been uneven. While a few parties, such as the Uruguayan Broad Front, choose their candidates in democratic primary elections, most continue to be dominated by

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vanguards or figures reminiscent of the old left. For example, the weakening and (until 2006) repeated electoral defeats of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua, one-time icon of the Latin American left, can to a large extent be explained by the absence of internal democracy and renewal, linked to the domination of the party by the historic figure of Daniel Ortega (Rocha, 2004; Torres Rivas, 2007). With respect to social movements, we have already referred to the risks of ‘NGO-isation’, with the consequent dominance of professional staff over the grassroots in the making of fundamental strategic decisions.

Finally, the question of respect for democratic institutions predominates in the intense controversy, both inside and outside the left, over the ‘Bolivarian revolution’ in Venezuela. As Fernando Coronil (2004) indicates, there are two perspectives on the issue in contemporary Venezuela: while for supporters of the government, democracy began with the Chávez ‘revolution’, after decades of institutional manipulation on the part of the traditional parties, in the view of its detractors, the government put an end to democratic checks and balances in order to institute an authoritarian state. In Chapter 3, Edgardo Lander documents this ‘cognitive break’ between the two sectors and offers an analysis that questions the leading role played by the armed forces in the government, while at the same time refuting the image of the Bolivarian process as a break with democratic institutions (see also López Maya, 2004).

**THE ACTORS ON THE NEW LEFT:  
MOVEMENTS, PARTIES AND GOVERNMENTS**

Following an examination of the meaning, origin, characteristics and central tensions of the new left, we move now to a brief discussion of the three principal types of actors examined in the empirical chapters: the social movements, parties and governments to which they now have access.<sup>10</sup> Given that throughout the preceding pages, we have referred to all three and have illustrated their initiatives and programmes in the countries under consideration, in what follows we concentrate on the task of examining the relationships among these three political forms, each of which plays a distinct but crucial role in a complex and often contradictory division of labour within the left. In this way, we attempt to break the general category of the new left into its component parts and to demonstrate how their distinct political logics and the national contexts in which they operate give rise to complementary or contradictory relationships,

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which in turn help to explain the characteristics and perspectives of the left in each country.

Of these, social movements might be considered the most essential. For social movements not only serve as the single most important counterbalance to the social forces of oppression (on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, gender, for example); they also provide the primary impetus for social and political change. Indeed, social movements are the principal novelty of the new left in several of the countries analysed. As Federico Schuster demonstrates, the renewal of the Argentine left following the shift from Peronism to neo-liberalism under Menem can be attributed to the mobilisation of *piqueteros*, popular assembly participants, trade unionists, middle-class people who had lost their life savings, and ordinary citizens who took to the streets to protest, deliberate and demand that every last politician be thrown out of office. In Mexico, in the words of Armando Bartra, the most promising left is in the streets – that is, in the protests of indebted farmers, bankrupted *campesinos*, the chronically unemployed and surviving trade unionists. The most robust and organised social movements in the region can be found in Bolivia, where they have been capable of exercising direct pressure on the course of governments and the economy, while in Ecuador the power of the indigenous movement has been demonstrated by the ousting of two presidents. Even in those cases where political parties dominate the left, grassroots pressure has been decisive, as demonstrated by the central role of Brazilian trade unionism in the rise of the PT and the party's historic relations with the Landless Peasants' Movement (MST).

Beyond the details of the national experiences, for the purposes of this section we highlight four characteristics common to the different case studies. First, as Atilio Boron asserts in Chapter 9, Latin American political and economic structures are extremely unyielding and have only ceded ground when faced with the reality or immanent possibility of massive popular mobilisation. This explains why most analysts had argued in the late 1990s that the outlook for the left was most promising in those countries with strong social movements – such as Bolivia or Brazil – and why it was more uncertain in countries where, for historical reasons, social movements have proved more fragile, such as Colombia. Such predictions were somehow off-target, as the crisis of the PT and the whole of the Brazilian left would indicate. However, the proven capacity of elites to influence the Brazilian government would seem to confirm Boron's argument about the unyielding character of the region's economic and political foundations. The Brazilian experience also suggests that strong social movements are a necessary but

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hardly sufficient condition for a sustained process of change, a point to which we will return below.

Second, there is a notable convergence in the evolution of the demands of social movements in different countries. In general, this involves a change from demands for privileges for specific groups (for example, industrial trade unions, *campesinos*, truck drivers) to more universal demands based on the concept of citizenship or the defence of fundamental rights. Among other cases, this tendency can be observed in Argentina, where Schuster documents the transition from protests based on the demands of trade unions to those based on citizenship rights; Brazil, where the same transition has taken place toward the defence of citizenship (Dagnino, 1998); and Colombia, where, despite the violence against members of social movements, the latter have advanced in the same direction and have attained an unprecedented level of visibility in recent years (see Rodríguez-Garavito in this volume; Archila, 2004).

Third, the region's movements have experienced a prolonged 'protest cycle' (Tarrow, 1998), which began with the mobilisations against privatisation at the beginning of the 1990s and continued with the mobilisations of *ahorristas*, unemployed workers and sectors of the middle class affected by the second wave of structural adjustment programmes at the beginning of this century. Initially directed against neo-liberal reforms, the cycle of protests has widened to include mobilisation against the traditional political actors responsible for those reforms, as illustrated with particular clarity by the explosion of protests in Argentina over the past ten years.

Finally, as we already indicated, the social bases of the old and new movements have diversified. Together with the strengthening of movements of the indigenous, people of African descent and landless rural workers, among others, another novelty of recent social protest lies in the fact that class-based movements have included sectors that were not traditionally included within trade unionism, such as the unemployed and workers in the informal sector (see Chapter 6).

Beyond the details of specific cases, the relationships between movements on the one hand, and parties and governments on the other, have been one of the most dynamic focal points of internal political and theoretical discussion within the new left. Some movements and political theories, inspired by the Zapatista experience, have developed a grassroots position, centred on local self-management that declares itself anti-political in that it does not seek to take state power. As John Holloway has insisted, from this point of view, the novelty of the

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contemporary left would reside in 'the project of changing the world without taking power' (2001:174). This implies a strategy that 'goes beyond the state illusion ... the paradigm that has dominated thought on the left for more than a century [and] that places the state at the centre of the concept of radical change' (Holloway, 2000:46). Instead of party competition and attaining government office, the political and theoretical focus of this aspect of the new left can be found in the permanent mobilisation of the grassroots, without connection to electoral politics. The privileged actor of this left, therefore, is the autonomous and rebellious social movement, capable of pressuring for change from below. These movements, moreover, would be directly articulated with their international counterparts, which together would constitute a network of global resistance that avoids the intermediation of national states (Hardt and Negri, 2004).

There are also those who, while in agreement with the new left's critique of statism, nonetheless underscore the importance of state power for the advance of the left's programmes (Boron, 2001; Bartra, 2003a). They note the parallels between the anti-politics that stresses local self-management and mobilisation, and the neo-liberal proposal to minimise the state. Such a position would surrender the terrain of the electoral arena and the state to the agendas of the right. From an alternative perspective, parties and governments are as important as they have ever been, and they are at least on an equal footing with the social movements in making up the new left.

With respect to the state, its key attribute is its capacity to intervene in social and economic relations. Although this capacity is most often used to reproduce or deepen social and economic inequalities, it is also essential to mitigating them and thus to enabling social movements to realise their fullest potential. In the words of Santos in Chapter 10, 'while the state can sometimes be an enemy, it can also be a precious ally, particularly in peripheral or semi-peripheral countries.' This is not to say that the state is a passive instrument of social and political forces (let alone a neutral agent or an autonomous subject). Rather, it can be understood as an 'institutional complex of forms of intervention and representation' with changing institutional boundaries and asymmetrical effects on the nature of social and political forces and their capacity to pursue their interests (Jessop, 1990). In other words, consistent with the tensions within the Brazilian state discussed in Chapter 2 and Santos' description of the state as a contradictory social relation in Chapter 10, it should be seen as a 'strategic terrain' upon which contending social and political forces struggle to give the individual or collective activities of its different branches a specific strategic direction.

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Social movements are therefore not limited simply to blocking state action or 'pressuring from below'. They are also capable of transforming the state, both by redirecting its modes of intervention (in order to lessen social and economic inequalities and thus alter the balance of social forces) and by transforming its forms of representation (in order to make it more accessible and thus more susceptible to pressure from below). Thus, building on the concepts of non-reformist reforms and democracy as an object of change discussed above, the relationship between social movements and the state should be understood as a dialectical one. For the manner in which social movements engage the state will be crucial to determining not only the latter's institutional capacities and strategic direction, but also their own power and capacity for constructing an alternative society.

Similarly, political parties can play a critical role in advancing the cause of a viable left alternative. More specifically, they perform three fundamental tasks related to this objective. First, a political party (or parties) of the left can serve as the political arm of social movements, enabling them to project their social power and express their demands in the political arena and providing them with a necessary means for gaining access to the state. Second, a political party is uniquely positioned to promote a broadly conceived socio-political project capable of integrating diverse social actors and movements and can thus play a key role in providing an overarching vision and point of connection for social movements with distinct 'sectoral' concerns.<sup>11</sup> Finally, organised political force in the form of parties is of great importance to giving the diverse activities of the state's various agencies a specific strategic direction and providing the political support necessary to sustain it (see Boix, 1998).

While political parties are uniquely positioned to carry out these tasks, their essentially electoral logic very often works in direct conflict with the logic of social movements. As Adam Przeworski (1985) argued in his classic work, the imperative of winning elections forces leftist parties to offer a programme that appeals not only to their primary base among subordinate classes, but also to centrist voters among the middle and even upper classes. As a result, not only are the demands of social movements at risk of being marginalised, they are also under enormous pressure to refrain from making use of their principal power resource (social mobilisation), particularly if it involves acts of disruption.<sup>12</sup> This tension only becomes intensified if the party proves victorious and assumes office. Schuster's account (Chapter 6) of the Kirchner government's effort to demobilise the social movements that helped bring him to power provides a clear illustration of this tension, as

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well as its potential long-term consequences. As Schuster notes, if Kirchner succeeds in this effort, he will probably gain a degree of political stability, a goal to which all governments aspire. But it is likely to come at the cost of diminishing the government's power (and room for manoeuvre) vis-à-vis Argentina's dominant classes, and thus its capacity to undertake more significant reforms.

Thus, the balancing act of the left parties consists of carrying out the promised programmes that mark the difference between them and the centre or the right, but within the economic, political, national and international restrictions that tend to cause them to gravitate towards the centre. Several of the case studies demonstrate that, in practice, the parties of the left have followed a common path to building their political capacity and mitigating the dilemmas that they face. It involves a multi-level strategy that proceeds from advances at the local and provincial levels to electoral victories at the national level. As students of left-wing local governments have documented, the latter have invariably been the launch pads for national candidates and political platforms (Stolowicz, 1999; Chavez and Goldfrank, 2004). The most prominent examples are, once again, the Broad Front, which built its national prestige on 15 years of governing Montevideo prior to its rise to national power in 2005, and the PT, which rose to the presidency after more than a decade of success in municipal administration in cities like Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza and São Paulo.

The distinct logics driving movements, parties and governments can thus give rise to diverse relationships of collaboration or confrontation. An ideal scenario for the left would consist of the presence of, and dynamic articulation among, strong popular movements, parties and governments, thereby maximising the left's overall capacity to build and sustain a viable alternative. Under this scenario, the first provide the grassroots demands and pressure necessary for the second to carry out their programmes and fulfil their responsibilities as instances of ideological and strategic articulation, and for the governments to drive the (non-reformist) reforms that comply with the programmes and create the possibilities for even more profound change, including the further strengthening of social movements and the deepening of democracy.

At the beginning of the Lula presidency, the Brazilian left was the closest to this complex model. However, in practice, the first two years of government were marked by scant social mobilisation and the consequent timidity of the PT in the execution of its government programmes. Given the strength of Bolivian social movements and their growing articulation

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with an ascendant leftist political party (MAS) currently in government, it is possible that Bolivia will come closer to this model in the near future. The opposing scenario is made up of fragile movements, and of weak parties that lack the capacity to govern. Of course, the majority of the cases are situated somewhere between these two scenarios, ranging from those dominated by political parties (such as Colombia) to those dominated by movements (such as Ecuador).

The debate over the relative importance of movements, parties and governments runs throughout the new Latin American and international lefts and continues to produce contrasts between grassroots movement theories and organisations – such as Zibechi (2003) on the *piqueteros* – and party-centric or state-centric perspectives and organisations (see, for example, Mertes, 2002). The chapters by Bartra, Santos and Boron contribute to this discussion, and we refer the reader to them. From our perspective, the empirical evidence found in the case studies suggests that the majority of leftist actors and analysts assume a pragmatic position that views the relationships among movements, parties and governments as variables that depend on the political context and historical experience of each country. In this sense, as Santos argues in Chapter 10, framing the debate in terms of a categorical choice between institutional and extra-institutional action, or between parties and movements, or between state power and community power as the aims of social struggle, is frequently a pseudo-debate. It is for this reason that the chapters that follow give equal emphasis to governments, parties and movements.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In keeping with the aims, issues and central actors described in this chapter, the remainder of the book is organised into three parts. The first focuses on parties and examines the four most prominent contemporary experiences of leftist national and local government in the region. In Chapter 2, Félix Sánchez, João Machado Borges Neto and Rosa Maria Marques trace the Brazilian left's climb to national office in 2002 and analyse the economic and social policies of the PT-led government.

In Chapter 3, after documenting the historical roots of the crisis of the Venezuelan two-party system and the rise to power of the Fifth Republic Movement, Edgardo Lander explains the connection between that political and social trajectory and popular-sector support for the government of Hugo Chávez. Lander also examines the extent to which

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the policies and institutional changes initiated by the Chávez government have offered an alternative to neo-liberalism, as well as the deep and growing social and political polarisation that they have provoked. The author concludes his chapter with some critical reflections on the prospects of a unified socialist party in Venezuela.

In Chapter 4, Daniel Chavez goes back to the origins of the Broad Front at the beginning of the 1970s, and discusses its role in the resistance to the military dictatorship of 1973–84 and its subsequent political consolidation and rise to power in Montevideo in 1989. After briefly reviewing the coalition's performance in governing the capital city, he examines the road to national office, and the dilemmas and tensions that being in government has generated for the Uruguayan left.

In Chapter 5, César Rodríguez-Garavito analyses the political, economic and social factors that explain the emergence and electoral rise of a new left in Colombia since the end of the 1990s. Rodríguez-Garavito then turns to a study of the composition, perspectives and proposals of the new left. In so doing, he analyses the particularities of the Colombian context, namely the way in which the country's internal armed conflict has contributed to the polarisation of Colombian politics, the crisis of the traditional party system, and the emergence of successful political blocs on both the left and the right of the ideological spectrum

The second part of the book focuses on social movements, examining three countries that have been characterised by a continuous and dynamic process of social mobilisation since the 1990s. In Chapter 6, after reviewing the history of the Argentine left during the past century, Federico Schuster focuses on the cycle of protests that erupted during the economic crisis at the end of 2001. Schuster examines the composition and agendas of the new Argentine social movements and the influence they have exerted on the Kirchner government.

In Chapter 7, Armando Bartra begins by briefly tracing the singular history of the institutionalisation of the Mexican left since the revolution of 1910, summarising its major ups and downs over the course of the past century. Bartra then turns to an examination of the Zapatista, indigenous and *campesino* movements, as well as the principal political formation of the new Mexican left, the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD).

In Chapter 8, Luis Tapia studies the transformation of the Bolivian left and shows how, since the 1970s, democracy and the defence of indigenous cultural and political autonomy have become central to its agenda. Tapia emphasises the leading role and growing capacity for social mobilisation of the *campesino* and coca growers syndicates, as well as their

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articulation in the so-called ‘water war’ in Cochabamba and in electoral campaigns that have led to the rapid growth of leftist parties (most importantly, the MAS), culminating in the victory of Evo Morales in the 2005 presidential elections.

Finally, the third part balances the empirical focus of the case studies contained in the first two parts with two essays that offer a more general and theoretical perspective on the new Latin American left. In Chapter 9, Atilio Boron seeks to explain the resurgence of the left across the region, and devotes particular attention to two central problems confronting the new left that were mentioned above: the formulation of alternatives to neo-liberalism, and the relationship between the left and democracy. In Chapter 10, Boaventura de Sousa Santos concludes the book with a general reflection on the new Latin American and international left. Among other issues, Santos examines the need for a new connection between theory and practice in the contemporary left, the productive versus unproductive debates relevant to the pursuit of that connection, the points of contact among the various movements and parties, and the role of the World Social Forum as a gathering space for the international left.

## NOTES

1. On the Latin American left see, among others: Álvarez et al. (1998); Boron (2001); Holloway (2001, 2004); Tischler (2001); Sader (2001, 2002); Munck (2003); Chavez and Goldfrank (2004); Rodríguez-Garavito et al. (2005); Elías (2006); Laclau (2006); Touraine (2006).  
On the international left, see, among many others: Bobbio (1995, 1996); Bosetti (1996); Kagarlitsky (2000); Hardt and Negri (2002, 2004); Wallerstein (2003); Sen et al. (2004); Wainwright (2005); Santos (2005).
2. Despite its inclusion within the broader framework of the left, we should be aware that the regimes led by Perón, Vargas and Cárdenas incorporated clear authoritarian features (in the role assigned to the national leadership, the relationship with the opposition and its own social base, and the internal structure of the ruling political force) that nowadays we would characterise as neo-fascist. Their social agenda, however, was undoubtedly progressive.
3. The text of the *Buenos Aires Consensus* can be viewed at <[www.robertounger.com/alternative.htm](http://www.robertounger.com/alternative.htm)>.
4. The same sort of coalitions and networks predominates in the left in other latitudes, as is shown by the initiatives – mostly failed – aimed at building a ‘plural left’ in France, and a ‘rainbow coalition’ in the United States (see Wallerstein, 2003).
5. This view is shared by Ramírez Gallegos (2006), who argues that the left has

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acquired a specific form in each country, based on the legacy of neo-liberalism, the role and place of social movements, and the historic evolution of progressive parties. Hence, from this perspective, there would be many more than just 'two lefts', and all progressive forces would have as a common characteristic the will to strengthen the role of the state and improve social indicators beyond the political and institutional agenda of neo-liberalism.

6. The importance of (and the controversy generated by) this topic is reflected in a large and growing bibliography on Brazil. See, for example, Knoop (2003); Carvalho (2003); Tavares (2003); Dowbor (2003); Costa (2003); Gonzaga (2003); Baiocchi (2004); Sader (2004); Oliveira (2004, 2006).
7. In this sense, with the apparent exception of Chávez's Bolivarian transition to socialism, the new Latin American left seems to have embraced *post-neoliberalism* as proposed by thinkers such as Joseph Stiglitz (2002, 2006), who propose a 'humanisation' of capitalism without altering the basic economic and political structures of capitalist societies.
8. In fact, as Mark Blyth (2002) documented in his genealogy of neo-liberalism, the latter emerged gradually from a process of the convergence of diverse theories and political platforms that took more than three decades to crystallise before becoming the dominant model of the 1980s.
9. This trend was later contradicted by the Argentine government's decision of January 2006, when \$9,600 million were used to cancel the country's IMF debt in advance. To some analysts and political activists, this marked the 'independence' of the country vis-à-vis international financial institutions, while the radical left, social movements and the Nobel laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel criticised the payment of a debt which they regarded as immoral and illegal (Calloni, 2006).
10. These three types of actors do not, of course, constitute an exhaustive list of political actors on the Latin American left. The latter also includes a range of additional actors – for example, progressive NGOs, left-wing intellectuals – that are not affiliated to any particular party, government or movement. Nevertheless, we concentrate on the latter in this section, given that they are the protagonists in the accounts presented in the case studies.
11. This role, moreover, cannot be performed by corporatist institutions alone. Even in 'liberal corporatist' systems, where corporatist policy-making has tended to diminish the importance of parliamentary government mediated through parties, the party system has not been supplanted since it continues to manage many of the antagonistic issues that would overwhelm the consensus-building capacity of corporatist institutions (Lehmbruch, 1979, 1984). In the words of Bourke, 'involved in a party is social space in its totality. A party undertakes not only the promotion of specific, multiple, and heterogeneous interests, but also the reproduction of the totality of the social formation. In it unfolds the whole domain of hegemony, alliances, and compromises' (quoted in Leys, 1989:179).

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12. This process was clearly evident during the transition from military to civilian rule in Chile, where the centre-left opposition to the Pinochet regime abandoned the social mobilisation strategy initiated in the wake of the 1983 protests in favour of an electoral one, thereby marginalising popular movements that had played a central role in the protests, most importantly the labour movement (see Barrett, 2000, 2001, 2002).