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Author(s): Ian Roxborough

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The Analysis of Labour Movements in Latin America: Typologies and theories

IAN ROXBOROUGH

*Department of Sociology, LSE
Institute of Latin American Studies
University of London*

This article addresses the question of whether an adequate theory for explaining the historical development of Latin American labour movements is currently available. The importance of the question derives from the fact that empirical studies of labour movements (however restricted in time and space) must necessarily refer (even if only implicitly) to some wider context in which the monographic study is situated. For most researchers, the primary focus of attention is (correctly) the delimited case; the context and comparison is usually (and incorrectly) taken as unproblematic. There is, therefore, a need to turn our attention, every now and again, explicitly to the larger picture.

In recent years there seems to have been something of a minor boom in studies of the working class. For the first time, an impressive quantity of monographic material is becoming available.¹ One rather ironic result of this recent flurry of activity has been to highlight the discrepancy between general theories about labour and our concrete knowledge. It is to this issue that the present article is addressed.

As an illustration of the present situation, it may be useful to begin with some comments on a recent English-language work on Latin American labour history, Hobart Spalding's *Original Labor in Latin America*.²

Spalding is an historian with considerable knowledge of his area, who works within a dependency framework. He has written the first detailed treatment of Latin American labour history from this perspective. This attempt to move beyond the narrow confines and arbitrary comparisons set by monographic analysis is laudible, and there is a great deal that is of value in Spalding's account. As our present concern is with Spalding's theoretical framework, we will pass over the detailed historiographic issues raised by his book, and immediately proceed to examine the interpretative schema which he uses to organize the data.

Spalding claims to detect three 'stages' in the development of the labour movement in Latin America. These he identifies as: (1) formative (2) expansive and explosive (3) co-optive-repressive.³ The first question concerns the analytical power of these categories: what do they tell us? The answer, unfortunately, is remarkably little. Let us examine them in more detail.

The first phase simply states that things have a beginning. It is difficult to imagine *not* being able to talk about a formative period for any phenomenon. This is not a useful conceptual (theoretical) category. It is just a statement that

an historian is going to start at the beginning. The second phase is a little less tautological, in that it asserts that the period of growth (expansion) will be explosive rather than smooth and tranquil. The third period is such a catch-all that it is hard to see what explanatory or descriptive power it has. Is there any labour movement anywhere that cannot be described in some sense as either being repressed or being co-opted? What other alternatives are there? In sum, it seems that Spalding has told us that labour movements have a beginning, a middle, and a period of transition from the beginning to the middle. This is true, but what does it tell us? Since the first task of any analysis of the history of Latin American movements must be to describe them in a meaningful way this is not a trivial point. Spalding's categories are devoid of substance, for a very good reason.

That quarrelsome historian, A.J. Hexter, once claimed that all historians could be divided into 'lumpers' and 'splitters', those who saw a common thread in apparently diverse phenomena, and those who saw major differences among seemingly similar phenomena.⁴ This is, of course, a dilemma which is intrinsic to organized knowledge. Put in other terms, the issue is, what amount of fuzziness around the edges of a paradigm is sufficient to warrant its abandonment? Now, in terms of Latin American history, Spalding is a 'lumper', seeing a single common pattern throughout the continent. On this issue, I am a 'splitter'. Against Spalding's variations on a single theme, I see rather a variety of distinct historical experiences.⁵ (However, as will shortly be apparent, this is by no means an assertion that each Latin American country is unique.)

The historical experience of labour in a country like Peru is quite different from Argentina; and both are profoundly different from Chile, etc.; consequently the elements of commonality can only be conceptualized at the most general level. If *all* Latin American countries are to be squeezed into the Procrustean bed of a single, unitary history, then the analytic categories must be so broad as to be virtually meaningless. This is, I think, the case with Spalding's three stages of development. The framework could be fitted to virtually any labour movement anywhere in the world. If it 'explains' everything, then it explains nothing. Perhaps this seems like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Perhaps Spalding is a straw man. Perhaps. But it must be borne in mind that only Spalding has presented a fully developed theory of the historical development of labour in Latin America. The fact that Spalding is alone in this field is an indicator of the poverty of theorizing in this area.

If Spalding's three stages of development are rejected as an explanatory schema, what alternatives remain? Most of the alternative theories of Latin American labour are either non-developmental or country-specific. By non-developmental, I mean those theories which simply state an opposition between Latin America and developed countries in terms of a static contrast. The explanation then, is the *difference* between labour in Latin America and labour in developed countries. The nature of this difference is conceptualized in a variety of ways, most usually in terms of the centrality of the role of the state in Latin America.⁶ It is frequently asserted that, in contrast to the liberal model of industrial relations which is held to prevail in the countries of advanced capitalism, in Latin America the state actively intervenes in, and profoundly shapes, labour relations. That the liberal model is largely a myth in terms of its applicability to Western Europe and the USA seems to escape these writers.⁷

There seem to be two important objections to such a global comparison. Firstly, even if it were possible to specify some modal pattern applicable, *grosso modo*, to Latin America, and another modal pattern applicable to developed countries, certain assumptions about the ranges of variation would have to be made before useful comparisons could be drawn. Clearly, the notion of a modal pattern implies a certain range of variation of empirical cases about the mode. If the two modes are relatively close to each other, and the ranges of variation are large, then there will be a substantial overlapping of cases. Conceivably, the majority of cases could fit either pattern.

When theorists develop modal patterns and ideal types they are, 'of course', aware of such possible objections. But we are all aware of how easy it is to reify such modal patterns and ignore the range of variation. This is particularly easy to do with that half of the comparison which is not our own particular concern. In this case, it is only too easy to use a model of industrial relations in advanced capitalist countries which is a travesty of historical reality. In the interest of highlighting the role played by the state in industrial relations in Latin America, the very important role played by the state in industrial relations in Britain, France, Germany, the USA, Italy, etc., etc., is practically ignored. It may perhaps be the case that the state intervenes in different ways in industrial relations in Latin America, but the contrast cannot be drawn so boldly.⁸

Secondly, these comparative exercises are almost invariably non-dynamic, and do not deal with the question of change over time. In so far as development is treated in these comparative typologies, it is almost invariably treated as a unilinear progression from politicized forms of trade union bargaining toward a liberal model. The working class becomes more 'responsible' and 'incorporated' as development occurs.

The most debatable point in Spalding's argument is his assertion that all Latin American labour movements go through these same three phases, and for the same basic reasons. This is a familiar theme in Latin American studies which has been accentuated by the generalized impact of 'dependency theories'. Spalding argues that Latin American labour movements share common features largely because of the homogenizing impact of international variables. However, he also argues that two sets of 'internal' variables (the nature of the dominant classes and the structure of the working class) also affect the historical patterns of development of Latin American labour movements.⁹ This point would seem confusing since it is not clear if these two sets of factors are brought into account as differences in Latin American labour movements, or indeed quite what their explanatory status actually is. It seems that Spalding is caught in a contradiction: if he wants to say that Latin American labour movements are basically *the same* then this is best done by emphasizing dependency theory and giving external factors the central explanatory role. The two sets of internal factors would then be relegated to a purely residual role of explaining what Spalding sees as essentially minor differences between various countries. But Spalding is not at all clear on this, and it is possible to read what he is saying as an assertion that these internal factors (which tend to *differentiate* Latin American countries, one from another) *are* important explanatory variables. If this is the case, then it seems that it would be difficult to argue that Latin American labour movements experience a *similar* pattern of development.

The following comments are intended to show the lack of any sufficiently sophisticated conceptual framework for describing labour movements. Four very broad dichotomies are available to us: (1) reform versus revolution (a reformist labour movement versus a revolutionary labour movement); (2) oligarchy/bureaucracy versus democracy/spontaneity (labour movements controlled by conservative leaders versus labour movements which are responsive to the militant rank and file); (3) political versus economic (labour movement oriented towards the state versus a labour movement oriented towards wage bargaining with employers); (4) co-opted versus independent (labour movements which are supportive of the regime versus labour movements which adopt a critical stance vis-à-vis the regime).

The first dichotomy (reform versus revolution) seems pretty limited for purposes of investigation. In so far as a labour movement is institutionalized, it must accept, however provisionally and critically, the status quo.¹⁰ To that extent, it may be described as reformist. This behaviour can coexist with a verbal commitment to revolution or with a verbal statement of belief in the legitimacy of the status quo. In neither case can we infer much about action from such statements.

The second dichotomy, which is concerned with the relationships between union leaderships and the rank and file indicates what I see as a central issue, but as usually formulated the dichotomy is too crude to be useful. We need a typology which is more complex than the black and white categories which tend to crop up in a lot of the literature on labour movements in Latin America.¹¹ The importance of this issue relates to the predictability of certain kinds of institutional arrangements. To the extent that a union leadership must be responsive to the wishes of the rank and file (or, alternatively, must take into account possible challenges from rival leaderships), wage bargaining must reflect movements in the economic variables as they affect that industry.¹²

The third dichotomy deserves a more extended discussion. Since it was formalized by Payne in 1965, the notion of political bargaining has enjoyed considerable popularity.¹³ In brief, it is argued that because unemployment is so high (as compared to the situation in European countries when they began to industrialize) workers cannot easily strike, because they could be quickly replaced. However, while the workers are weak vis-a-vis the employers, the employers are weak vis-a-vis the state (since manufacturing is only a small sector of the economy), and the state is weak vis-a-vis organized urban opposition. This enables the workers to threaten the political stability of the regime by demonstrating in the streets. The state will then attempt to resolve the conflict by putting pressure on the employers to settle on terms relatively favourable to the workers.¹⁴ This notion has been widely accepted. But despite its intuitive appeal, the Payne model is open to challenge on a number of grounds. The most obvious point is that the state may not be responsive to threats of urban disorder which thereby reduces the applicability of the model. The extent to which employers are weak vis-à-vis the state will vary from situation to situation. Finally, whether workers are weak vis-à-vis employers depends (as the model states, of course) on the labour market in that industry. When entry is restricted (either by skill or by institutional barriers), the bargaining power of labour is a factor to be contended with.¹⁵ These comments are not meant to deny that the model has some utility;

but to caution against a global contrast between 'political' Latin American labour movements and 'economic' European labour movements. I think the contrast is overdrawn. The validity of the Payne model is restricted to early industrialization with regimes which are vulnerable to urban protest. Although this may cover quite a broad spectrum of Latin American history, but it is by no means the entire picture.¹⁶ Crucially, the Payne model underplays the role of corporatist labour relations institutions.

The final dichotomy (independent versus co-opted) presents a problem since it lumps together all forms of unionism with some supportive role with respect to the state. It could reasonably be argued that the apparently similar corporatist regimes in Mexico and Brazil concealed entirely different roles for the union movements in those countries.¹⁷ In the independent/co-opted dichotomies the terms of the dichotomy also conceal important variations.

If none of these commonly available conceptual categories are really adequate for the task in hand, what would be a preferable approach? Although this article does no more than search for an answer, one fact is clear. It is important to get away from the neo-Weberian tendency automatically to create ideal-types, that is so easy to slide into. The debates over populism are a good example of the ease with which people adopt ideal-types.¹⁸ The reification of the supposed dichotomy of the economy into a marginal pole and dynamic manufacturing sector is another,¹⁹ while the modal pattern model is the best example of all.²⁰ Instead of rapidly building up ideal types, or theoretical models (if the notion of ideal-types is offensive), it might be more useful to proceed more cautiously via attempts to define variables in isolation. It would then be an open question as to how the variables fitted together in reality to form concrete models. I am arguing that we have moved too directly from empirical reality and labels with common currency to theoretical constructs. All too often we have taken terms such as "trade union bureaucracy", *charro*, *pelego*, *Vandorista*, 'business unionism', and 'reformism', and more or less uncritically incorporated them into our theoretical framework. Before they can be useful these sorts of concepts *do* require major reworking.

The widely used Mexican term *charrismo* may serve as an example (though similar comments could be made about such terms as *pelego*, *Vandorista*, etc.). While there is no universally accepted definition of the term, Alonso's comments provide a useful starting point:

Charrismo is a particular form of trade union control which is characterized by: a) the use of the repressive forces of the state to support a trade union leadership; b) the systematic use of violence; c) the permanent violation of workers' union rights; d) misuse and theft of trade union funds; e) dishonest dealing with the workers' interests; f) connivance between union leaders and the government and capitalists; g) corruption in all its forms.²¹

There are many elements in this 'definition'. Perhaps the most important is the penultimate criterion: anti-working class policies of the union leadership which provides the evaluative connotation. *Charrismo* merely means union leadership disapproved of by the speaker. No serious attempt is made to specify in what ways behaviour is anti-working class, or to clarify what would constitute pro-working class politics (which would be, at the same time, possible). The theory of working class behaviour which is implicit in this definition suggests that

if the *charro* leadership were removed, the workers would pursue 'authentic' working-class politics, and it is only through manipulation and government support that the leadership continues in office. This is a manifest absurdity. It ignores the extent to which all union leaderships must operate within the parameters of the existing system.

The question of corruption is not unimportant. It indicates both a motive for retaining office and a source of power. It also provides, perhaps, a motive for 'selling' a contract to an employer - accepting a less favourable settlement for the workers in return for a bribe. The extent to which such practices occur in Latin America is difficult to determine, but they cannot be dismissed out of hand. The use of state intervention to impose a particular leadership in a trade union (as occurred in the aftermath of the railway workers' strikes of 1958-9) is perhaps a feature of Latin American unionism which does not occur elsewhere. This, perhaps, might be the defining element of *charrismo*. However, if we took the imposition of a specific leadership by the state as the hallmark of *charrismo* we would find that this practice was relatively infrequent, both in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. In this case perhaps the use of violence to repress internal opposition within the union might be a better defining characteristic of *charrismo*. It is certainly the case throughout the world that many union leaderships have used physical violence against sections of their rank and file, most frequently occurring in unions where corruption has been important. Nevertheless, it seems unwise to take the occurrence of violence as a defining characteristic because many unions which we might wish to describe as oligarchical are not characterized by overt violence. Leaderships which are not authentic exist for a variety of reasons and seek to perpetuate themselves in office through a variety of mechanisms which do not necessarily rest on the use of violence.

One of the reasons why trade union leaders continue in office is that their membership see them as delivering the goods. There can be little doubt that, in many instances, unions are able to operate in the labour market to alter wages and conditions of work, at least in the short run. This is, however, largely unexplored territory, with a dearth of concrete studies of the impact of unions on wages in Latin America. Nevertheless, it would be unreasonable to suppose that unions, and therefore union leaderships, are completely irrelevant to this process.

What emerges from this discussion is the need for a multidimensional approach to the subject. Analysts have tended to work with ideal-typical constructs, presenting a list of union types (often only two types), each of which is defined by a cluster of variables. This article argues that these ideal-types should be unpacked, and the constituent variables treated separately. Firstly, it seems useful to treat variables relating to the internal government of unions separately from variables which describe the relationships between unions and other actors and institutions. (There are some problems here, particularly with the analysis of union leadership, since this is the principal point of contact between internal and external variables.) Turning to union government, the simple dichotomy of oligarchy vs democracy needs to be redefined. In the structure of union government, an important question concerns the intermediate strata of union officers. To what extent, and in what ways, do they act independently of the top leadership? Are the shop-floor officials primarily the executive agents of top leaders, or are they primarily responsible to the rank and file? Do they have their own independent

sources of power, or is all power derivative from the top leadership?

In addition to the question concerning the extent to which the union rank and file can influence the selection of leaders and the policies pursued, there is the issue of their perceptions and attitudes to the union government. Do the rank and file accept the leadership as legitimate? Do they think the leadership is doing a good job? Is the leadership popular or not? These dimensions of support for the leadership need to be investigated in their own right. It would be premature to assume that a democratically elected leadership was popular, or that an oligarchic leadership was not. Indeed, one of the sources of oligarchic rule is a widespread belief among the rank and file that the leadership *does* deliver the goods and has a legitimate right to represent the membership.

Until very recently, few studies of internal union government in Latin America existed. The over-politicized conception of the nature of the labour movement, together with a Michelian pessimism concerning the possibilities of union democracy, suggested that empirical investigation would be largely redundant.²² The received wisdom was that trade unions in Latin America were oligarchical machines, run by self-serving leaders, be they populist, verbally 'revolutionary', or conservative bureaucrats. However, those few empirical studies which have been published recently suggest this picture to be overly simple.²³

Although many, possibly most, unions in Latin America are run by oligarchical cliques, there are, and always have been, exceptions to this rule. In Brazil, in the 1950s and again in the 1970s, a number of unions, particularly in the metal-working industries, appear to have produced leaderships which were directly responsible to their constituents.²⁴ In Argentina, important unions such as the meatpackers fought bitterly (but ineffectively) to forestall the imposition of Peronist leaders,²⁵ and within Peronism, militant currents have often provided the vehicles for oppositional currents within unions. A similar situation occurs in Mexico, where despite all the talk of *charrismo*, substantial elements of democracy exist in certain unions in the automobile industry, in electricity, and in the mining-metallurgical union.²⁶ Oppositional currents exist, or have existed in the past, in other important unions, with internal union democracy a salient feature of the labour movements in Chile, Peru and Bolivia. The extent of union democracy, and its perdurability, remain to be examined. That it exists (alongside oligarchical practices) cannot be denied, while, as suggested above, studies of union government need to move beyond the formal dichotomy of oligarchy-democracy, towards a more refined typology of forms of union government.

Up to now, we have concentrated our attention primarily on the working class and the labour movement, and the state and dominant classes have been mentioned only in passing. Yet many analysts would claim that, in the case of Latin America, one should begin with the state. The corporatist organization of labour in Latin America testifies to, and derives from, the preponderant role played by the state in these societies. Generally speaking, the strength and omnipresence of the state vis-a-vis civil society is the starting point for any analysis of labour movements in Latin America. However, the balance needs redressing against this over-politicized image, since the state is not all. Moreover, it is easy to underestimate the direct impact of both the working class and industrialists on policy formation and implementation. Even in the strongly corporatist *étatiste* regimes, the direct influence of these classes is often discernible.²⁷ Just as the corporatist

aspects of Latin American societies are often overstated, so also are the corporatist aspects of European and North American societies understated. To say this is not to say that corporatism does not exist, but merely that it is neither unique to Latin American nor the key to the understanding of those societies.

It is not difficult to show how Latin American states, with varying degrees of success, have attempted to control labour relations. As important is to attempt to determine the role played by labour and capital in this process. It is very easy to see labour as a passive or purely reactive force. However, a somewhat different reading of the historical record is possible. As Skidmore has noted in a recent essay,²⁸ it is paradoxical to claim that labour is essentially passive when it can plausibly be argued that many major political crises are due largely to the action of the labour movement. Perhaps it might be useful to enumerate a few illustrative examples. **Bolivia:** Since the revolution of 1952, the COB, and in particular the tin miners, have been a major political force. The COB was the leading force in the governments of Paz Estenssoro, an important force in the Siles Suazo administration, while the Barrientos coup of 1964 was, in many aspects, a response to the power of the union movement. Later, under the brief Torres regime, the COB once again participated in a situation which has been described as dual power. **Brazil:** Despite widespread agreement among academics as to the weakness of the Brazilian labour movement, it was, as a result of the 'strike of the 300,000' in Sao Paulo in 1953, largely responsible for Vargas' downfall the following year.²⁹ Strike activity continued, with another massive stoppage in 1957, while during the Goulart presidency strikes were a factor contributing to the military intervention of 1964. Since 1977, the Brazilian labour movement has once again experienced an upsurge of militancy, viewed with considerable concern in governmental circles. **Chile:** Mention of the Popular Unity government is sufficient to note the importance of organized labour in Chilean history. Perhaps it should also be emphasized that the victory of the Popular Unity in 1970 was not a bolt out of the blue; it was the culmination of decades of work. **Mexico:** Generally regarded as a country where labour is totally subservient to the government, a brief look at the history of government-union relations suggests that these have been more problematic than is sometimes assumed. The general pro-government posture of the official labour movement was only secured as a result of massive purges of the Left in 1948.³⁰ Even so, opposition to government policies continued in a number of important unions, and flared up dramatically in the railway workers' strike on 1958-9. In the late 1970s, the government with some difficulty persuaded the labour movement to accept an incomes policy, as part of an anti-inflationary policy. **Argentina:** The history of Argentina since 1943 has been the history of Peronism, and hence, of the trade unions. When the Peronists have been out of power, the labour movement has (at least until 1976) been able to bring down government (as in the Cordobazo of 1969).³¹ In power, Peronism has always had to try to control a militant rank and file. As in Mexico, dissident unions have been able to exert substantial pressure on the government.

These, of course, are the strongest cases. Similar arguments might be difficult to make for countries such as Ecuador, Venezuela or Colombia. But it is not the purpose of this article to argue that the labour movement is a major political force in *all* Latin American countries, only that theories that emphasize the element of *control* neglect an important part of the picture - continuing militancy

in the more important countries. In a period when military dictatorships do their best to confine union activity to narrow limits, it is perhaps salutary to stress the potential for conflict and destabilization which is characteristic of organized labour. On the other hand, it would be quite wrong to suggest universal militancy and political combativity. Labour movements vary considerably in their political behaviour, both over time, and from country to country, and therefore must be discussed in terms of the system of political parties specific to each country.

It may seem strange that the notion of populism has hardly been mentioned in this article up to this point. The omission is deliberate. The term is used so loosely, and in so many ways, that it generally brings with it confusion rather than enlightenment. Rather than enter a necessarily lengthy discussion about the possible meaning of the term, I will merely state how I intend to use it in this article. My understanding of the term populism is that it refers to an ideology, or element in an ideology, which asserts that the principal conflict in society is between the people and the oligarchy or imperialism.³² As such it is usually counterposed to a vision of society as made up of classes. Movements or governments which espouse such an ideology may be referred to as populist, providing that this is taken as descriptive of their ideology alone, and carries no other implication such as a loose organizational structure, or a charismatic leader, or a mass (rather than class) base, or a multi-class coalition, etc. Given this definition, a great many political movements make some sort of appeal to the people, and thus have populist elements in their ideology.³³ In general terms, I suspect that the analysis of labour movements in terms of differences in their professed ideologies and beliefs is probably of limited use in understanding their actual behaviour. If this is so, then the differentiation, in ideological terms, between populist and class-conscious labour movements is probably of little utility.

What is more useful, perhaps, is a distinction in terms of organizational structure and the class origins of the membership, which is, of course, what is implied in some definitions of populism. Unfortunately, the correlation between ideology and organizational structure is usually asserted, rather than demonstrated, with considerable slippage between the two. It is probably more useful to examine organizational structure separately. This must be examined in terms of real relationships between the component parts of the organizational structure. It cannot be inferred from an organizational diagram or from a set of statutes. This said, the significance of organizational structure appears to reside in two sets of questions: (1) internal union government, which is discussed elsewhere in this article, and (2) size and composition of bargaining units.

The organization of collective bargaining varies widely in Latin America. Not only are some countries much more centralized in this respect than others, there is also considerable variation within certain countries. Disentangling the effects of bargaining structure from other variables, although complicated, can be neglected only at the analyst's peril. Another closely related factor which differentiates labour movements is the state of the labour market. *Grosso modo*, it seems reasonable to account for the greater bargaining strength of unions in Chile and Argentina, compared with other Latin American countries, in terms of the early formation of more or less homogeneous labour markets with relatively low levels of unemployment.³⁴ At a sectoral level, various insitutional controls over entry into the labour force act to tighten labour markets in situations of apparent

labour surplus. In some industries (mining, for example) collective contracts sometimes contain clauses stipulating that sons of workers must be given preference in hiring. Over time, this segmentation of labour markets is likely to produce cumulative effects, diminishing social mobility within the working class and leading to the crystallization of privileged strata. This phenomenon has been much commented on, particularly in terms of the notion of a dichotomous split between a labour aristocracy and a marginalized mass.³⁵ But the existence of such a division in the labour force cannot be taken as given. Much will depend on patterns of job tenure. For example, in Mexico, where turnover in the automobile industry is very low and wages quite high, many firms are contractually obliged to give preference in hiring to sons of employees. In this situation, one might expect the formation of a privileged stratum of workers. However, in both Brazil and Argentina, where labour turnover in the automobile industry is high, and wages are not exceptionally high, one would not, therefore, expect the formation of a privileged stratum.³⁶

One important set of factors in relation to labour markets is the process of urbanization. There are significant differences between Latin American countries in terms of the size of the urban sector vis-a-vis the rural sector, the rate of rural-urban migration, the availability of employment outside the metropolis (regional industrial or mining centres), etc. These factors affect not only the supply of labour, but also the previous experiences of the labour force.

Another differentiating factor is industrial development, not merely the absolute size of the manufacturing sector, important though this is, but also the structure and composition of manufacturing and mining. Here it is important to consider size distribution of enterprises, as well as their geographical distribution, and the process of development of the leading sectors. It has been argued that patterns of change in industrial relations begin in the export-oriented sectors of societies which are integrated into the international economy.³⁷ This is a plausible and interesting hypothesis, though possibly a rather restrictive one, and I would suggest a broader notion of leading sectors, which might at times, but need not, coincide with the export sector. Industries will differ in terms of their political importance, with the state more concerned in some than others about growth and about labour relations. The state is likely to intervene in the settlement of labour disputes in those industries where it has interests, although this does not necessarily mean it will intervene directly on behalf of the employers. It is not difficult to envisage situations in which the state views the employers as an obstacle to regularized industrial relations and economic growth.

Let us consider the leading sector industries (those which are defined by the state as leading the growth process). These tend to be industries experiencing fairly rapid expansion, supported by the state in terms of measures for an appropriate growth environment. Such leading sector industries are likely, if successful, to retain economic predominance for periods of twenty to forty years. Thereafter they are likely to enter a long period of slow decline. The textile industry in many Latin American countries provides a good example of this phenomenon in the first half of the twentieth century though mining would obviously be the leading sector in some countries. Wages and working conditions in these leading sectors will not necessarily be higher or lower than in other industries. It may be hypothesized that in the initial stages of these leading sector industries, when

industrial conflict emerges on a large scale, the state is likely to intervene in disputes between labour and management. Intervention will not be an *ad hoc* manner, but, to restructure labour relations in the long term, it will institutionalize a specific pattern of labour relations. The next step in the argument is to assert that this model will be diffused to the rest of the economy in a relatively short time. This diffusion may occur in two ways. Either the workers in other industries will take the leading sector (correctly or incorrectly) as a model of what is possible and effective, or the state will impose this pattern throughout the rest of the economy by legal enactment.

As the leading sector shifts over time from one industry to another, there will be a break in the institutional pattern of class relations. As a new leading sector emerges, the state will once again intervene in this sector to regulate the pattern of class conflict. The older pattern will almost certainly be substantially modified in the process, and labour organizations will be restructured. This model asserts that discontinuity, rather than continuity, will characterize Latin American labour movements, which means that any attempt to find an original moment in history when the pattern of labour relations was set, once and for all, will be fruitless. This is worth emphasizing because some analysts seem to think that, at least in several key countries, the pattern of labour relations was definitively set at some key juncture in the first half of this century, and that this somehow sets and defines the essence of that country's labour movement.³⁸ Obviously, I disagree fundamentally with such a perspective. The point that is often made, that the institutional patterns of the labour movement were profoundly altered in the first decades of this century in several countries, is quite valid. But this did not set industrial relations in an immutable mould. In particular, it could well be argued that there were major shifts in the 1940s and 1950s in some of the more industrially advanced countries, such as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. And most analysts would accept that the late 1960s and 1970s saw widespread attempts at restructuring labour relations as part of the process of internationalization of capital.

So far, the model has been presented in an entirely formal way: discussion of the patterns of institutionalized class conflict has been omitted. Which form of labour relations is adopted in the leading sector will depend partly on the models available to the state, and partly on the particular form of organization of the working class in that industry. What is meant by the models available is that Latin American states, by and large, draw their inspiration from the stock of ideas and practices currently available. The obvious example is the influence of Italian fascism on the adoption of corporatist practices in several Latin American countries in the 1930s, the form of working class organization in the industry relates to the so-called objective factors mentioned above. It will be apparent that this model has little space for certain economic variables: wages; economic cycles; inflation; rate of profit; rate of capital accumulation; etc. These factors enter into the model only in two ways:

(a) as background factors contributing to the development of a leading sector and affecting the dimensions and timing of industrial conflict in that sector; (b) as factors which influence the volume and timing of conflict once an institutional pattern has been established, but which do not directly determine which institutional solution is adopted.

Other factors, however, do play an important role in this model. These have to do with the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of the work force in the leading sector and its relations with the work force in other sectors of the economy.³⁹ It has been argued that work forces vary from industry to industry, with the most well-known analysis along these lines perhaps the Kerr-Siegal hypothesis.⁴⁰ In attempting to account for what they believed to be the high levels of strike-proneness in certain industries (mining, lumber, etc.), Kerr and Siegal developed what they call the isolated mass hypothesis. Drawing directly on mass-society theory (best exemplified by Kornhauser),⁴¹ they postulated that isolated and homogenous work forces were likely to develop high levels of solidarity, and that this would be a factor disposing them to high levels of collective conflict with management.⁴² Other theorists have talked about dual markets, or about a supposed split in the subordinate classes between a marginal mass and a labour aristocracy. What all these distinctions have in common is some notion of heterogeneity of the working class. Juan Carlos Torre, for example, makes homogeneity one of the lynchpins of his work, stressing, for example, the homogeneity of the Buenos Aires working class as compared with the Brazilian working class. Hetero/homogeneity is clearly a useful notion, but it is often rather imprecise. If we are to talk of a working class, some kind of homogeneity is clearly implied either in terms of position in the labour market, or in terms of life chances, or in terms of shared perceptions.

In discussions about homogeneity in terms of life chances and experiences, many writers have stressed the existence of a radical cut within the working class between a stable labour force in manufacturing and an unskilled, migrant, marginal labour force in the rest of the economy. Some have even implied that residential patterns mirror this disjuncture, with the economically marginal living in favelas and the core industrial labour force presumably living in some other form of housing. As far as the housing question goes, however, a large body of literature criticizes such a straightforward dichotomy as far as housing is concerned with the recognition that residential neighbourhoods contain varying mixes of occupational types.⁴³

Nevertheless, the occupational disjuncture continues to be accepted widely. I think we need to reconsider this matter carefully. This supposed disjuncture within the Latin American working class is based on assumptions about the tenure of occupational roles. Specifically, it is assumed that once a worker has a job in modern manufacturing industry, he or she will keep it permanently, i.e. that the rate of turnover of the labour force will be very low. This is an empirical question, which for instance may be true in Mexico. However, as mentioned above, such fragmentary evidence as there is for Argentina and Brazil suggests that labour turnover in the modern manufacturing sector is quite high,⁴⁴ though it should be stressed just how little we actually know empirically about the operation of labour markets in Latin America. If it is assumed that turnover rates are high, what does this imply for working class homogeneity? Surely a high rate of turnover must increase the homogeneity of experience within the working class, as people move between occupational roles.

The homogeneity of the working class has two important effects: within any given industry or labour force, it increases the workers' capacity to organize effectively against the employer. (I am not saying that homogeneity is the only,

or indeed, the most important factor in determining worker resistance, nor am I saying that there will be no worker resistance when the labour force is heterogeneous.) Secondly, within the working class as a whole, the degree of homogeneity will be one of the factors making for a rapid transmission of the lessons of industrial conflict in the leading sector to the rest of the economy. (Again, I am not saying that homogeneity is the only factor involved here.)

To summarize the preceding argument: any adequate analysis of Latin American labour movements must begin with a multivariate approach. In this article I have attempted to discuss some of the factors which account for variations among labour movements in Latin America, factors such as type of internal union government, the degree of integration of the labour market, the degree of homogeneity of the working class, rates of labour turnover, differing forms of corporatism, etc. Clearly, the list of variables is a long one, and many combinations could be devised to create typologies. I have refrained from suggesting such typologies here because I wish to stress the complexity and variability, both in time and space, of Latin American labour movements. While the elaboration of ideal-types is a necessary part of intellectual enquiry, it should not lead to premature codification and oversimplification. At this stage, we are a long way from even being able adequately to describe Latin American labour movements, let alone explain them.

NOTES

1. This is particularly the case with Brazil and Mexico, and to some extent Argentina and Peru. To give an illustration: UNAM and Siglo XXI are currently publishing a 17-volume collection on the history of the Mexican working class. This article is not intended as a systematic survey of the literature; rather the aim is to illustrate selectively what I believe to be general theoretical problems in the area of labour history.
2. Hobart A. Spalding (1977), *Organized Labor in Latin America*, New York University Press, (New York).
3. *Ibid.* p. 282 and p. ix.
4. A. J. Hexter (1979), *On Historians*, Collins (London), p. 242.
5. At a broader level, the difference between 'lumpers' and 'splitters' is exemplified by James Malloy (1977), 'Latin America, the modal pattern'. In: J. Malloy (ed.) *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America*, University of Pittsburgh Press (Pittsburgh), versus the multiple path analysis of F. H. Cardoso and E. Faletto (1979), *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, University of California Press (Berkeley).
6. I would include as examples of this perspective L. Martins Rodrigues (1974), *Trabalhadores Sindicatos e Industrializacao*, Brasiliense (Sao Paulo), K. P. Erickson (1977), *The Brazilian Corporative State and Working Class Politics*, University of California Press (Berkeley); H. Wiarda (1978), 'Corporative Origins of the Iberian and Latin American Labor Relations Systems', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, vol. 13, No. 1.
7. The analysis of the role of the state, and of corporatist institution, in the USA and Western Europe is hardly a novelty. Works which deal with this include, *inter alia*, A. Shonfield (1965), *Modern Capitalism*, Oxford University Press (London), N. Harris (1972), *Competition and the Corporate Society*, Methuen (London), C. Crouch (1979), *The Politics of Industrial Relations*, Fontana (London).
8. That is, the contrast is not between state intervention and its absence, but between *types* of state intervention.
9. Spalding (1977), p. 282.
10. Cf. R. Hyman (1975), *Industrial Relations*, Macmillan (London).

11. What I have in mind here is the difference between a form two- or three-party democracy and plebiscitarian democracy, and the difference between bureaucratic oligarchies and mafia-like union bosses. Cf. the discussion in J. Edelstein and M. Warner (1975), *Comparative Union Democracy*, Allen and Unwin (London).
12. It is sometimes asserted, often on the basis of some kind of Fei-Ranis, 'development with unlimited supplies of labour' model, that the economic behaviour of trade unions in Latin America has no discernible effects on wages. This is, I think, an open question. The same applies to the possible effect of the state of the economy on wages.
13. James Payne (1965), *Labour and Politics in Peru*, Yale University Press (New York). Payne's model has been picked up by *inter alia*, K. Erickson (1977), *The Brazilian Corporative State and Working Class Politics*, University of California Press (Berkeley); M. Urrutia (1969), *The Development of the Colombian Labor Movement*, Yale University Press (New Haven); S. Sigal and J. C. Torre 'Una reflexión en torno a los movimientos laborales en América Latina'. In: R. Katzman and J. L. Reyna (eds.) (1979), *Fuerza de Trabajo y Movimientos Laborales en América Latina*, Colegio de México (Mexico).
14. See also L. Martins Rodrigues (1974).
15. By institutional restrictions on labour market entry, I have in mind, for example, the provision in Mexican labour law that job applicants in a unionized plant be proposed by the trade union.
16. The Payne model may also have some utility for early periods of industrialization in some European countries.
17. The distinction between integrative and exclusionary forms of corporatism is now widely accepted. Cf. the important article by R. B. Collier and D. Collier (1979), 'Inducements vs. Constraints: Disaggregating Corporatism', *APSR*, vol. 73, No. 4.
18. There is a considerable debate on the meaning of the term. One of the clearest statements of the standard notion of populism is Nicos Mouzelis (1978), 'Ideology and Class Politics: a critique of Ernesto Laclau', *New Left Review*, No. 112. That I disagree fundamentally with this conception of populism will be apparent from the discussion in my book, I. Roxborough (1979), *Theories of Underdevelopment*, Macmillan (London). I have searched in vain Octavio Ianni (1972), *La Formación del Estado Populista en América Latina*, ERA (Mexico), for a definition of the term. It is not clear whether Ianni is referring to an ideology, a movement, a state, or merely everything that happened in Latin America after 1930.
19. This will be discussed in more detail below. A typical exposition of this dichotomy is A. Quijano (1974), 'The Marginal Pole of the Economy and the Marginalized Labour Force', *Economy and Society*, vol. 3, No. 4.
20. Malloy (1977).
21. A. Alonso (1972), *El Movimiento Ferrocarrilero en México*, ERA (Mexico), p. 98.
22. R. Michels (1962), *Political Parties*, Collier (New York). Michels argued that a number of factors would predispose trade unions towards oligarchy. This thesis was basically accepted by S. M. Lipset *et al* (1956), *Union Democracy*, Doubleday (New York). Edelstein and Warner, *op cit.*, present a rather different picture.
23. H. Handelman (1979), 'Unionization, Ideology, and Political Participation within the Mexican Working Class'. In: M. Seligson and J. Booth (eds.) *Political Participation in Latin America*, vol. 2, Holmes and Meier (New York); H. Handelman (1977), 'Oligarchy and Democracy in Two Mexican Labour Unions', *ILRR*, vol. 30, No. 2; J. C. Torre (1974), 'La Democracia Sindical en la Argentina', *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 14, No. 55; S. Gomez Tagle (1980), *Insurgencia y Democracia en los Sindicatos Electrecistas*, El Colegio de México (Mexico).
24. T. Harding (1973), 'The Political History of Organized Labor in Brazil', Ph.D. Thesis, Stanford University.
25. C. Berquist (1979), 'Bourgeoisification and Proletarianization in the Semi-Periphery: Working Class Politics in Argentina and Chile Compared', unpublished MS.
26. M. Thompson and I. Roxborough (forthcoming), 'Corporatism and Union Democracy in Mexico'. In: K. Coleman (ed.), *The Politics of Labor in Latin America*, Holmes and Meier (New York).
27. See, for example, in the Brazilian case, Eli Diniz (1978), *Empresario, Estado E Capitalismo No Brasil*, Paz e Terra (Rio de Janeiro); L. Werneck Vianna (1977), *Liberalismo e Sindicato no Brasil*, Paz e Terra (Rio de Janeiro).

28. T. Skidmore (1979), 'Workers and Soldiers: Urban Labor Movements and Elite Responses in Twentieth Century Latin America'. In: V. Bernhard (ed.) *Elites, Masses and Modernization in Latin America 1850-1930*, University of Texas Press (Austin).
29. *Ibid*; J. A. Moises (1978), *Greve de Massa e Crise Política*, Polis (Sao Paulo).
30. L. Medina (1979), *Civilismo y Modernizacion del Autoritarismo*, vol. 20 of *Historia de la Revolucion Mexicana*, El Colegio de Mexico (Mexico).
31. F. Delich (1970), *Crises y Protesta Social*, B. A. Signos; B. Balve *et al* (1973), *Lucha de Calles, Lucha de Clases*, B.A. Rosa Blindada.
32. This is, in many respects, similar to the position advanced by E. Laclau (1977), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, NLR (London).
33. This is precisely Laclau's point. Given the omnipresence of populist strains, it is hardly worthwhile talking about movements which are exclusively populist in supposed opposition to movements which are untainted by populist ideological themes.
34. S. Sigal and J. C. Torre (1979), 'Una reflexion en torno a los movimientos laborales en America Latina'. In: R. Katzman and J. L. Reyna (eds.), *Fuerza de Trabajo y Movimientos Laborales en America Latina*, El Colegio de Mexico (Mexico).
35. Quijano, *op. cit.*; R. Trajtenberg (1978), *Transnacionales y Fuerza de Trabajo en la Periferia*, ILET (Mexico).
36. J. Nun (1979), 'La industria automotriz Argentina', *Revista Mexicana de Sociologia*, vol. XL, no. 1, J. Humphrey, 'Operarios da industria automobilistica no Brasil', *Estudos Cebrap*, no. 23.
37. J. Cronin (1979), *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain*, Croom Helm (London).
38. For example, Skidmore (1979); P. de Shazo (1979), 'The Valparaiso Maritime Strike of 1903', *JLAS*, vol. II, no. 1.
39. For analyses which use a homogeneity/heterogeneity dichotomy, see *inter alia*, J. C. Torre (1979), 'El movimiento sindical en la Argentina', mimeo; E. Jelin (1977), 'Orientaciones y ideologias obreras en America Latina'. In: R. Katzman and J. L. Reyna (eds.), *Fuerza de Trabajo y Movimientos Laborales en America Latina*, El Colegio de Mexico (Mexico); B. Fausto (1977), *Trabalho Urbano e Conflito Social*, DIFEL (Sao Paulo).
40. C. Kerr and A. Siegal (1954), 'The Inter-industry Propensity to Strike'. In: A. Kornhauser *et al* (eds.), *Industrial Conflict*, McGraw-Hill (New York).
41. W. Kornhauser (1959), *The Politics of Mass Society*, Free Press (New York).
42. Despite some attractive features of this theory it has been strongly criticized on empirical as well as theoretical grounds. See P. Edwards (1977), 'A Critique of the Kerr-Siegal Hypothesis', *Sociological Review*, vol. 25, no. 3.
43. Bryan Roberts (1978), *Cities of Peasants*, Edward Arnold (London).
44. Cf. n. 36.