

ineficacia del contraespionaje mexicano, que les permitió actuar con total impunidad hasta 1946 cuando, durante la presidencia de Miguel Alemán, fueron expulsados del territorio nacional la mayoría de sus agentes.

El servicio de contraespionaje norteamericano no tuvo un papel activo en México hasta 1939, y se enfrentó a las luchas internas entre sus diferentes servicios de información. Ante la posibilidad de un ataque japonés en la costa oeste, el propio Roosevelt designó a la Oficina Federal de Investigaciones (F.B.I.) como único responsable del espionaje en el Hemisferio Occidental. No obstante, los servicios de información de la Marina y del Ejército dirigieron las principales actividades de espionaje en México, y en numerosas ocasiones se enfrentaron al F.B.I. El resultado de esa rivalidad impidió que sus actuaciones fuesen lo suficientemente espectaculares y perdieron la ocasión de sentar bases sólidas en América Latina para reforzar su poderío mundial.

El libro se basa en una amplia bibliografía y la autora utiliza una recopilación de abundantes fuentes documentales. Sin embargo, una de las reglas básicas del espionaje es falsificar sus propios documentos e informes, de modo que el mejor secreto tal vez sea aquél que no queda reflejado en el papel. Por ello, resulta difícil comprobar la veracidad de las informaciones que la autora analiza, si bien hay que valorar muy positivamente el estudio metódico que ha realizado para desvelar en parte esa historia, siempre sorprendente, de las actividades de los servicios de información y sus repercusiones en la política de los gobiernos de México y de los Estados Unidos.

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ROBERT M. LEVINE: *Father of the Poor? Vargas and his Era.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

"Why did Fernando Henrique Cardoso [Brazil's current president] after his election in 1994 announce that his presidential administration would represent 'the end of the Vargas era' in Brazilian history?" – asks Levine (p. 132). Whatever the reason(s), Cardoso's reference to Vargas on such a solemn occasion, forty years after Vargas's suicide, is emblematic of what Levine himself calls "Vargas as enigma" –the unmatched influence that this elusive man has had on Brazil for most of this century.

There are many aspects to the Vargas enigma. He was a man who seized power in the wake of a bloodless revolution that he didn't initiate (1930), and whose liberal ideology he abandoned in order to become the dictator of an authoritarian regime (1937), despite having been elected president in terms of

a constitution that he himself had engineered (1934). He was ousted (1945), yet made an impressive comeback with nearly 50% of the vote (1950), albeit lacking enough public support to prevent his dramatic suicide on the eve of a military coup (1954). He flirted for quite a long time with the Axis, but was able to obtain from the Americans substantive infrastructure investments and economic support in exchange for finally joining the Allies (1942) after six Brazilian merchant ships were torpedoed by German submarines. He was zealous of Brazil's independence; his nationalistic economic policy boasted as its flagship the establishment of state-owned monopolies such as Petrobrás (the Brazilian petrol monopoly), which soon became economically impractical, state-controlled job providers, yet are still cherished by many Brazilians as symbols of independence. He implemented well-intentioned but ineffective social legislation; although his policies undoubtedly improved the lot of industrial, urban workers –while completely ignoring the semi-feudal conditions of Brazil's rural workers–, he retained in his iron fist control of the labor unions. He was a wealthy Southern rancher, who addressed the crowds only from a safe distance, but was nevertheless perceived as "reaching out" to the people and is remembered to this day as "the father of the poor." Getúlio or Gêgê – as he was affectionately dubbed by the people – was (and still is) all of these, and still more contradictory *personae*.

Levine's book skilfully guides the reader through this maze of events and incongruities. And while he does not shirk from the task of solving the enigma, neither does he try to do so by minimizing the contradictory aspects of the man, his policies, his public image, or his legacy. Levine should be praised for this; for otherwise he might have produced a coherent explanatory account, but not a phenomenologically adequate description of how the Vargas era was lived and perceived by Brazilians themselves. Since, personally, I was attracted to the book as someone who lived through part of the events that the book covers, I was glad to find in its pages echoes of my own perplexities, as well as possible explanations for them. As a child in the late forties, I have clear memories of popular singers and comedians (especially those that imitated the *caipira* style, characteristic of rural areas) who strongly criticized the dictatorial practices of the *Estado Novo*, which was particularly harsh towards popular artists. But then, I also remember equally well the incredible manifestations of grief at Getúlio's funeral, only comparable, in my memory, to the nationwide mourning that followed Brazil's defeat by Uruguay in the final match of the 1950 World Cup, at Maracanã stadium.

Levine's key to explaining the enigma is the claim that Vargas's was an "incomplete revolution." As with all others, the 1930 revolution that put him in power was united in its demand for change, especially regarding the

removal from power of the *paulista*-dominated elite that had ruled the country since the establishment of the republic in 1889. But these forces – Levine writes – were "sharply divided over what results they sought" (p. 112). I would venture, instead, that they were not quite clear as to the results they sought. In fact, Vargas himself did not have a very clear idea of his own aims and managed to stay in power by being, first and foremost, a pragmatist, able to negotiate with supporters and opponents alike by playing "political poker by dealing from different hands" (p. 113).

True, the elites in power prior to 1930 were removed – momentarily, at least – but as Levine points out, they were quickly replaced by new oligarchies. True, Vargas at first implemented democracy beyond anything Brazil had known before by extending citizenship to a large number of Brazilians, but in reality what they got was "limited citizenship" (pp. 113-116), a right granted only on condition of "good behavior" (i.e., loyalty and docility). True, Vargas introduced advanced social legislation (minimal wages, a social security system, etc.), but the new laws applied only to (a part of) the urban working population, and there were never enough funds to implement them because employers had "many ways of getting around regulations" (p. 121) – the well-known Brazilian *jeitinho*; as a result, "many of Vargas's reforms ended up *para inglês ver*" (p. 114), that is, remained only a matter of façade. True, Vargas increased the number of jobs (especially government-dependent ones) and made public employment accessible to "legions of persons lacking traditional patronage connections" (p. 132), but these jobs did not pay well and were sought mainly for the various social benefits that accompanied them, such as tenure – a situation that forced public servants or "functionaries" to supplement their income with additional jobs, or with bribes. True, in the Vargas era there was *some* improvement in the economic situation of *some* Brazilians, but more than half of the population still remained below the poverty line.

In short, Vargas's incomplete revolution is a story of (potentially) good intentions that materialized in the form of new legislation and other symbolic acts, as well as in the corresponding institutions they gave birth to, but which did not actually fulfill their declared aim of substantially improving the life of Brazilians at large, especially the poor. In this sense, Levine is certainly right in summarizing Vargas's social and economic legacy by saying that "his reforms almost never reached those who needed it [sic] the most" (p. 131). Insofar as intentions and symbolic gestures, well publicized by efficient public relations, count more than actual achievements, this explains, at least in part, Vargas's enigma. But, as the book makes clear, no single explanation can account for the entire enigma.

However, what concerns me more than solving Vargas's enigma as such is

its long-term effects on Brazil. In this connection, it may be worthwhile to return to president Fernando Henrique Cardoso's reasons for wanting to put an end to the Vargas era. According to Levine, "what Cardoso meant was that he hoped to terminate the interventionist nature of Brazil's government and its corporatist framework" (p. 132). Assuming that this is indeed what Fernando Henrique Cardoso meant, one should further ask why he would want to do so. It seems to me that Cardoso, the *sociologist*, correctly identified the deleterious effects of Getúlio's "incomplete revolution" on Brazilian society. Consider, for example, the enormous expansion of the public sector (bureaucracy, state-owned enterprises) and most of the jobs it generated. The overall result was the institutionalization of *clientelismo* in Brazil. This kind of socio-economic structure is catastrophic, not only because of its costs, but also because of the dependency relation it creates between the state (as supplier of the needs of its "clients", the functionaries) and the functionaries, who cling to the meager benefits they are "entitled" to receive from the state and become entirely dependent upon the latter. This is a form of inbuilt corruption of the most valuable resource of a society – human creativity and productivity. What Cardoso, the *politician*, did not evaluate correctly was the nearly unbeatable power of such a system, which seems to combine in a seamless way the interests of the dominated and the dominant. (Cardoso certainly remembers the lessons of Marx and Hegel regarding the master-slave dialectics, learned at the *Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras* in São Paulo during the sixties. So why did he not apply these lessons in this case?) As far as I can see, because of this mis-evaluation, Cardoso's government did not manage to put an end to the Vargas era. In fact, the system of *clientelismo*, which Vargas probably created quite unintentionally, may well turn out to be one of the reasons of his success, as well as his *perennial* –and most nefarious– legacy to Brazil.

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STEPHEN C. RABE: *The Most Dangerous Area in the World. John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

This is an excellent, careful, and critical account of John F. Kennedy's Latin American policies, which Kennedy intended as a liberal, reform alternative to "Communist revolution." Although Rabe purposely omits a retelling of Kennedy's unrelenting war against revolutionary Cuba, it haunts his narrative – as it did every one of Kennedy's policies – throughout.