

Osterling, Jorge Pablo. *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1989.

Jorge Pablo Osterling's book *Democracy in Colombia* was written to show the inner forces that constitute governance in Colombia, and in doing so it succeeds admirably. It tackles the tremendous problem of reconciling Colombia's political stability (the long tradition of civilian government) with military violence (the long tradition of quickly resorting to an armed solution). The result is a complex study that, while difficult to read, does explain this seeming contradiction. In the author's own words, "this book has shown how complex a working democracy in the Western Hemisphere can be."

The first chapter could easily have been entitled "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Colombia in Less Than 50 Pages." Osterling has written a delightful geographical description of this wonderfully diverse country. He provides a good background from which the rest of the book can be understood, though there is not much connecting this chapter with the rest of the book. The text suffers somewhat from the compression of data, as the chronological sequence of events do not lend themselves easily to the topical format presented. Another difficulty is Osterling's habit of starting to describe a situation and then not resolving it. For instance, he points out that "changes in the new nation's name reflect continuous political debate." These changes are listed, but they are not related to the political debate: the reader is left to make the correlation alone.

At the core of the dichotomy that is Colombia's political arena are two situations: the closed democratic framework and the tendency to quickly resort to violence. Colombia's party system is inflexible, and access to the upper layers of government is through the entrenched political parties and the political class. This precludes many people from participating in their government, so they perpetuate the tradition of attempting to resolve political and ideological differences on the battlefield and later ratifying the solution at the polls. In politics, the victor has always interpreted electoral success as the right to control and change everything, while the loser will not admit defeat and the surrender of all power and influence. Osterling quite ably analyzes this type of zero-sum game and how it permeates Colombia's political structure; he did not go far enough, however, as he could have easily shown how this also permeates society on an individual level. This analysis could also explain such episodes as *La Violencia* and the subsequent change-over from banditry to formalized insurgency.

According to Osterling, there are at least nine reasons for Colombia's high level of violence. These are, in no particular order: political fanaticism; passion; sectarianism; rivalry on an individual level (which leads to murder as the resolution of problems); inherited vendettas from the above four points; unequal distribution of wealth; the existence of a small, powerful elite; unequal distribution of land; and the lack of reliable government institutions (i.e., strong in the cities, absent in rural areas such as the Llanos, leading to the creation of defense groups, bandits, etc.). These nine situations are exacer-

bated by the clientelist nature of the government: "the sound and political process characterized by an unwritten, asymmetric, didactic control between an influential political party boss and his followers – the so-called "clients" - - is one of the most widespread political phenomena in contemporary Colombia." In other words, political bosses guarantee the flow of influence, power, and spoils; the clients remain loyal and vote as told.

After a lengthy and, quite frankly, tedious paraphrasing of Colombia's current constitution, Osterling describes several institutions that in some way affect democracy. These include the political parties, lobbies, labor unions, the church, and the guerrillas. The political parties have become institutionalized by the constitution, thus leading to the inflexibility mentioned earlier. "Gremios" are the informal "old boy" networks used for informal lobbying through specific mediums. Unlike US lobbyists, Colombian lobbyists are never seen in the office of a politician. There is, apparently, a traditional series of posturing that must be conducted to properly apply political clout. Labor unions are weak, a result of traditional alliance with the political parties. Political party membership is hereditary, which results in a conflict of alliances: "as a result of the permanent confrontation among each of the confederations or their member federations, the very small and weak Colombian labor movement has not yet been able to organize itself into a single unified bloc."

The Catholic church of Colombia has traditionally been ultra-conservative. Osterling mentions liberation theology briefly, but does not point out why it grew so quickly. The liberal clergy were the most radical in Latin America, possibly as a result of the traditional ultra-conservatism of the church hierarchy. The latter, in fact, got into trouble for failing to implement the Vatican II resolutions, which they felt were too liberal for the good of their situation, while the former was repulsed for being too liberal. In religion as in almost everything else, Colombians tend to the extreme.

The chapter on violence is the best and most useful part of this book, in that it provides a concise, if somewhat complex, history of the different guerrilla groups. It also chronicles the growth of the narcotics industry. It falls short, however, in analyzing how these have affected Colombia's history or its ability to cope with these violent institutions.

Osterling makes some good comments on the Che Guevara's Foco theory, and how the guerrillas early on accepted and unsuccessfully attempted to adapt it to Colombia. Even into the 1970s, some of the guerrilla leaders still attempted to salvage this discredited methodology and put it to use. Osterling also provides good insights into the ties between academics and guerrilla warfare, by providing the names of idealistic leaders and how they turned to violence (and training in Cuba) to implement their ideals. Unfortunately, the author seldom carries his argument through to a logical conclusion, leaving the reader in the very vexing position of having to decipher just what message the analysis is meant to convey. One exception to this is the study of the *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* (ELN) and their belief in the Foco theory. The leaders organized the group on the belief that the peasantry of Santander

was ripe to become the revolutionary vanguard of Colombia, though they failed miserably because of the lack of political or organizational work with the peasantry prior to the incursions. Osterling completed the argument, showing that the belief in this theory was carried through to a logical conclusion, in this case a failure.

The growth of the narcotics trade is described in a somewhat superficial and quick manner, though that may be more from a lack of useful material than anything else. Osterling states that the connection between narco-traffickers and traditional guerrillas is usually made on the basis of need: narcos needed protection, and guerrillas needed money. It would be interesting to see how he would analyze the Ochoa brothers' acceptance of Gaviria's amnesty offer.

One problem with the book's treatment of the narcotics problem is the question of how it affects Colombia. By the mid-1980s, drugs had become not only a threat to the United States and Northern European societies, but also to Colombia's own society. According to a quoted *Miami Herald* editorial, cocaine is a scourge because ". . . American demand drives the Colombian supply. American users lie, cheat, steal, and sacrifice family, career, and health to obtain cocaine. The Medellin cartel viciously kills anyone -- police officer, judge, cabinet member, journalist -- who attempts to loosen its pernicious grip on Colombian life." While this theory accurately states that Colombia suffers from the cocaine trade, the evidence used points to US consumption driving Colombian production. Domestic consumption and the effects of the narco-terrorism on the nation's institutions are not satisfactorily analyzed. But one accurate point is brought home: the narcos are ruthless and quickly eliminate any competition or resistance (judges, reporters, etc.). Medellin's current 20 murders a day testifies to that. Such a level of violence is indeed having a dramatic effect on the politics of Colombia, and may even threaten its long tradition of democracy.

The chapter on the guerrillas also provides many interesting insights. For instance, the reader learns that the ELN carried out the first hijacking of a commercial aircraft to Cuba when they diverted an Avianca flight en route from Barranquilla to Barrancabermeja. Another example is President Ospina Perez' initiation of a vigorous program to introduce Asian *Cannabis sativa* for the production of hemp, while at the same time mounting an effort to combat the problem of smoking marijuana in Medellin. Apparently the connection between *Cannabis sativa* and marijuana was not made for quite some time, and then it was possibly too late.

This is a very useful book, though it has its problems. Osterling has taken on a tremendous task in attempting to describe governance in Colombia. The introductory chapter is good, but perhaps not required by the rest of the study. This is not a book for someone not intimately acquainted or interested in Colombian history and society, which leads to the argument that the introductory chapter could have better been left for another publication. The description of the party system, the constitution, and the governmental structure of Colombia proved difficult to read, which is more a matter of writing

style than of content. Providing a copy of the constitution and annotating it with footnotes might have made the reading easier.

Perhaps the best chapter of this book is the conclusion. In seven pages Osterling restates, in a concise and understandable manner, what it took him the first 335 pages to state in a rather complex and confusing manner. Colombia's inherent violence is demonstrated quite accurately: "violence in Colombia has taken many forms and has special characteristics. The interparty violence of the earlier part of this century up to the 1950s appears to have been replaced by various forms of common crime, guerrilla warfare, and the most brutal murders committed by the narcotraffickers." Each of these types of violence has its own variations of ideology, tactics, culture, and economy. Generalizations regarding violence in Colombia are virtually impossible. Osterling, through a highly detailed description of the nation's entire political system, from the *cabildo abierto* to the president's office, has succeeded in showing how Colombia has attempted to deal with the situation. One could only wish it had been presented in a more coherent and readable manner.

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Andrew, Christopher, and Oleg Gordievsky. *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990.

Winston Churchill once described the Soviet Union as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma," an apt description for one of the world's largest and most secret organizations, the former USSR's Committee for State Security, or KGB. This state institution and its predecessors represented a fearful and foreboding service with long roots in Soviet and Tsarist society, and is one of, if not the most, studied Soviet state organs in the West. Any mention of the KGB conjures up images of clandestine meetings between agents and their controllers, as well as a host of names that have been popularized in the West by scholarly works and espionage novels. Among these famous names are the Cambridge Spies, Igor Gouzenko, Oleg Penkovsky and John Walker, to name but a few among a veritable rogues gallery.

From this labyrinthine world of secret intelligence rises a new book, *KGB: The Inside Story* co-authored by Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky. Given the era of *glasnost*, *perestroika*, and the demise of the Cold War, *KGB* is a very authoritative work which breaks new ground in the study of the KGB's foreign operations. It is an extremely well researched and timely book.

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