

An East German Survey Concerning Recent Soviet Historical Writings on Latin America

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MANFRED KOSSOK'S summary of significant Soviet historical publications on Latin America mainly covers the period from 1945 to the present.¹ Kossok takes note of Russia's growing interest in Latin American history but points to the need for more "pioneer labor" toward formulating a Marxist perspective in this field of study.

Kossok maintains that recent Soviet authors have at least set a pattern for working out a more definitive Marxist approach. For example, emphasis has been placed recently on the colonial period, notably in order to counteract, according to Soviet historians, a pro-Spanish approach which had been encouraged by "the reactionary circles within the Latin-American republics" and by the Hispanidad movement. It follows of course that Soviet writers have felt themselves obligated to stress the negative, especially economic and social, consequences of Spanish and Portuguese rule.

Kossok points subsequently to Soviet interest in "... the economic and ideological preparation as well as the events and characteristics of the independence movement and also finally the extent and results of the socio-revolutionary movements of the masses before and during the war for independence from Spain." Proud note is taken in this connection of studies dealing with Miranda's stay in Russia.

Soviet authors appear to have a special fascination for the topic of the Negro revolt in Haiti. One of them states: "The successful revolt of the Negro slaves . . . was at its time an event that shook the world of colonialism, signaled the inevitable collapse of slavery, [it was also] an event that challenged the legend of the slavish submission of Negroes and their inability to operate as a historical force."

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¹ Manfred Kossok, "Zum Stand der sowjetischen Geschichtsschreibung über Lateinamerika," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, VII, 2 (1959), 426-441.

Several topics connected with the national period seem to have evoked considerable Soviet interest. On the subject of U.S.-Latin American relations, for instance, there emerges a denial that the Holy Alliance constituted a real threat to the New World when the Monroe Doctrine was formulated. In addition, United States policy at the turn of the twentieth century is given close and hostile scrutiny. The history of Mexico during the twentieth century has attracted Soviet historians. Works dealing with the labor and Aprista movements have been stressed. Some attention has also been given the Vargas period in Brazil and the Perón era in Argentina.

Kossok's survey reflects an alertness of Soviet historians to top-flight works that have been published internationally; however, the use that is sometimes made of these sources may require critical scrutiny.² Kossok himself cites a certain American article as a source for his statement concerning Cuba's final struggle for independence to the effect that the American government was willing to use any means to make Cuba's enthusiasm for independence serve its own expansionist schemes.³ A close examination of the cited article did not make evident any such findings by its author. Just as questionable is the criticism of a popular American text for having reduced the complicated process of Haiti's emergence as a nation to a "pseudoscientific problem of the elite class."⁴

² For other examples of bibliographical work at Karl Marx University, see: Manfred Kossok and Walter Markov, "Konspekt über das spanische Kolonialsystem," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl Marx Universität*, 5. Jahrgang (Leipsic, 1955-1956). Gesellschaft-und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, Heft 2, pp. 121-268; Manfred Kossok, "Grundzüge der sozialökonomischen Struktur des Vizekönigreiches Río de la Plata," *ibid.*, 6. Jahrgang (1956-1957). Gesellschaft-und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, Heft 4, pp. 341-385; and Walter Markov and Manfred Kossok, "Zur Stellung der Philippinen in der spanischen Chinapolitik," *ibid.*, 8. Jahrgang (1958-1959). Gesellschaft-und Sprachwissenschaftliches Reihe, Heft 1, pp. 7-21. A valuable recent publication is *Latin America in Soviet Writings, 1945-1958* (Hispanic Foundation, Library of Congress, 1959), compiled by Leo A. Okinshevich and Cecilia J. Gorokhoff. Nos. 900-950 of a total of 2385 items are classified as history. No annotations are provided but in the Foreword Sergius Yakobson states that Soviet postwar writings on Latin America "hardly make per se any distinct contribution to scholarship or even to a better general understanding of the Latin American peoples." (p. xii). [Ed.]

³ Kossok, p. 434, makes reference to J. C. Appel, "The Unionization of Florida Cigarmakers and the Coming of War with Spain," *HAHR*, XXXVI (1956), pp. 38-49.

⁴ Kossok, p. 431, refers to Hubert Herring, *A History of Latin America from the Beginnings to the Present* (New York, 1956), pp. 412 ff.