

Anarquismo, educación, y costumbres en la Argentina de principios de siglo. By DORA BARRANCOS. Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1990. Bibliography. 329 pp. Cloth.

Politics and ideology have been central topics in Argentine labor history since the early 1970s; but in more recent years, social and cultural dimensions have burst onto the historical agenda. This book fits easily into that trend. It builds on the dominant assumptions that mark the new historiography of Argentine anarchism: the existence of an anarchist subculture with distinctive and unique contours on the one hand, and its countercultural traits on the other. Dora Barrancos has done a painstaking and imaginative reading of anarchist newspapers and magazines, the main source for her study and others of both the traditional and newer approaches.

The book is organized around two main sections that can be read as two separate, long essays. The first centers on education, and follows the ups and downs of several alternative schools for both children and adults from the first decade of this century to the 1930s. The goal of regenerating human society as a whole was at the core of these efforts, which emphasized empirical knowledge and its utility in daily life, the formation of “free” spirits, and the values of science, nature, physical exercise, and manual work. Students were assumed to be active and critical people, though there was not always consensus on what final goals their school experiences were supposed to achieve. As a result, a debate flourished between those interested in forming militants for social change and those who stressed the task of educating human beings with the ideal of mutual respect.

The second part—previously published in a collection of essays on Argentine urban social history—focuses on a variety of very new topics, such as sexuality, eugenics, sexual hygiene, free love, and criticism of promiscuity. In dealing with feminism, Barrancos subtly uncovers an initial dominant discourse centered on the anarchist women as mere companions of anarchist men in their epic militancy. This was displaced during the 1920s by another discourse, focused on a public and female-verbalized demand for women’s right to control their own bodies, as well as a revision of men’s tutelary role. Both these discourses, the author asserts, were part of a vast attempt to subvert mainstream customs. Unfortunately, her discussion leaves aside the question of whether these changing discourses had a real impact on workers’ daily lives.

The book is worth reading. But while the information Barrancos provides is significant and useful, her analytical framework—the countercultural attributes of a distinctive anarchist subculture—is debatable. Curiously enough, Barrancos refers to the alternative schools as efforts shared by socialists, liberals, and free-masons (pp. 132, 220). Similarly, she remarks that in their attempts to subvert customs, anarchists were not alone (p. 241).

The book tempts the reader to think twice about the distinctive traits of the anarchist subculture and its countercultural messages. This is particularly apparent

in the case of education, and two examples provided by Barrancos underline these objections. For one, the alternative schools used official government textbooks; and the most important advocate of these efforts at the beginning of the century, Julio Barcos, ended up, in the 1920s, deeply involved in the extremely successful effort to expand a state-sponsored education system.

Barrancos' book reveals where we stand in our knowledge of anarchism from a sociocultural perspective. On the one hand, it offers a somewhat misleading analytical framework that overestimates anarchism's unique attributes. On the other hand, it provides the necessary information to move ahead in trying to understand both the specificity of anarchist contributions and their pertinence to a wider movement for social change. There, the ideological rhetoric might have defined boundaries, but the concrete cultural efforts mixed with each other and even dialogued with the mainstream culture.

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Amazon Conservation in the Age of Development: The Limits of Providence. By RONALD A. FORESTA. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991. Table. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. x, 366 pp. Cloth. \$49.95.

This is contemporary environmental history at its best. Ronald A. Foresta has constructed a compelling panorama of the makers of Brazilian nature preservation policies from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. His study evaluates the social and political forces arrayed in favor of economic development at any cost, and enlists a sympathetic understanding of the environmentalists who obstructed their path.

Foresta's narrative centers on the two most strategic figures of the period, Maria Tereza Jorge Pádua and Paulo Nogueira Neto, respectively heads of the National Park Service and the federal Special Secretariat of the Environment (SEMA). The military government they served, heedless of environmental precepts, was driven by doctrines of national security, which dictated the massive invasion of the Amazon basin so as to deny it to foreign conspirators; and of development, which advocated the fastest possible conversion of standing natural resources into raw materials for industry. Pádua and Nogueira Neto were supported by a smattering of natural scientists in universities and research centers and a scant few thousand lay, middle-class environmentalists. Ranged against them were not only bureaucratic development planners and the moneyed interests of logging, mining, and construction firms but also the Left, the church, and the advocates of Indians and backwoods peoples. For them, the forest was merely the objective of frontier land reform and the environmentalists merely dilettantes, compromised by their military connections.

Pádua was largely responsible for planning the expansion of the national park system, according to scientific principles; for signing decrees adding 20,000 square