

demands of decision making. None of the authors necessarily identifies pluralism with multipartyism. Rather, according to Dilla, the Communist Party should be "reconstructed on the basis of consensus between autonomous organizations and supported in a program which includes the ideological and cultural diversity which exist in the society."

Other articles worth noting are "1999. La lógica democrática y el futuro de las relaciones entre los Estados Unidos y Cuba," by Rafael Hernández of the CEA, and "El futuro de la democracia en Cuba," by Joel C. Edelstein (also published in *Latin American Perspectives* in fall 1995). Hernández discusses the consequences of the hostility of the United States government toward Cuba and the possible impact of economic and political changes in Cuba and increased contact between the two countries. Edelstein argues for economic decentralization with collective property in Cuba, maintaining that the need for and feasibility of centralization has passed. He puts forth a modified plan as to how this would work which seems a bit presumptuous. He also makes some doubtful assertions such as that a decentralized paradigm would involve "giving over functions to the people as in the first years of the 1970s," and that abolishing municipal executive committees was a step toward decentralization.

This book is essential for those interested in the possibilities for political development in Cuba, since it contains the ideas on this and related subjects of some of the best minds in Cuba.

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Susan Eva Eckstein. *Back from the Future: Cuba under Castro*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. xix + 286 pp.

Susan Eckstein stakes out a niche of her own in a crowded scholarly field by focusing on the contextual factors that shaped economic and social policy at the major crossroads in Cuban socialism. The distinctiveness of her contribution is not due to her periodization, which is standard: the "push for communism" (1966–1970), which emphasized egalitarianism and mass mobilizations; the "retreat to socialism" (1970–1985), during which there was greater effort devoted to building political and economic institutions; the "rectification campaign" (1986–1990), when the government took action against markets and for renewed "moral" purpose; and the post-1990 "special period in peacetime," a time of adaptation to the post-cold-war world. Unlike most other Cubanists, however, she minimizes the weight of ideology in explaining these turnabouts and locates their logic in the functioning of the state.

Eckstein also aims to forge a better understanding of state socialism by

highlighting the Cuban case. The story she tells is one in which social institutions, economic constraints, global realities, and ordinary people effectively prevented a charismatic leader from shaping society to his will. Rejecting theories of totalitarianism, with their emphasis upon global ideologies, Leninist parties, and charismatic leaders, as well as theories of modernization, which anticipated convergence in industrialism and pluralism, she embraces instead the institutional perspective that gained acceptance in the 1980s. This view looks to the distinct patterns formed by the nuanced interplay of state and society rather than to ideology to explain policy making in socialist societies. *Back from the Future* proposes an ambitious revisionist agenda for the field of Cuban studies and the study of state socialism; unfortunately, three major flaws undercut its commendable intentions.

The first is the author's implicitly static understanding of state socialism. She nowhere recognizes that socialist societies responded to varied dynamics at different moments in distinct settings. Only when Communist parties attempted to liberalize central planning and "normalize" society—after 1956 in the cases of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, or 1978 in that of China—did social scientists find fertile ground to sow the theoretical seeds of institutionalism. The new perspective was also nurtured by the opportunities for field work in socialist societies (and thus new sources of data) that the 1970s and 1980s afforded. Applied to the Soviet Union of the 1930s, Hungary during the early 1950s, or China in the 1960s, institutionalist theories would clearly not display the same analytical power as they do when used in relation to Eastern Europe or China during the 1980s. Eckstein, however, appears oblivious to this crucial developmental dimension. Since no theory, so far, illuminates this social formation throughout its variegated history, downplaying the weight of ideology in policy making before "normalization" may carry considerable interpretive risks.

After the unanticipated collapse of socialism, social analysts rushed back to the drawing board. Since 1989, not a few observers have analyzed Communist party regimes and centrally planned economies as if these had been on an inevitable track toward breakdown. Even more recently, however, social scientists have undertaken to explain the relatively long stability of state socialist societies (e.g., the April 1994 issue of *Theory and Society*). By favoring an institutionalist framework, Eckstein tacitly aligns herself with those who argue that how socialist societies functioned is as critical as how they collapsed. But, in not theoretically contemplating the irrefutable fact of their collapse, she again misses a temporal dimension, which imbues a cardboard quality to her analytical perspective. Only by grappling with the dynamics of breakdown and stability will we better understand why state socialism decomposed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and why it has not—thus far—in China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba. Surely, social scientists aiming to shed new

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light on the study of socialist societies need to incorporate this dual dynamic into their accounts.

Back from the Future's second major weakness lies in the uncomfortable fit between the Cuban experience and the institutionalist theory of state socialism. Eckstein proposes to adapt this theory to Cuba as an alternative to what she sees as ideologically tilted interpretations of post-1959 Cuban development. She labors under a disadvantage, however, since Cuba was not host to a "boom" in social science field work comparable to that which buttressed institutionalist analyses in Eastern Europe and China. While Eckstein takes into account Cuba's pronounced international vulnerability by placing greater emphasis on global factors than does institutionalist theory, she does not similarly adjust for the island's domestic distinctiveness. Cuban socialism was never fully "normal," and treating it as if its "cycles of decentralization and centralization, expanding markets and restoration of bureaucracy" (p. 8) responded to almost the same structural dynamics as those of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after 1956, or China after 1978, plainly distorts more than it clarifies.

Starkly stated, Eckstein simply does not apprehend the complexity of the Cuban Revolution. That she makes an acceptable case for the material basis of the "retreat to socialism" in the 1970s and early 1980s is not surprising; most of the existing literature does as well, even if not necessarily in the institutional terms she prefers. Her challenge lay in crafting a combination of material and ideological factors into an innovative and layered interpretation of the "push for communism" in the late 1960s, the rectification of the mid-1980s, and the "special period in peacetime" of the 1990s. Instead, Eckstein goes to extraordinary lengths to reduce the ideological determinants of Cuban policy making at these crucial moments, emphasizing the preeminence of fiscal and economic considerations. In effect, she denies the Revolution its dreams and its nightmares, the drama that has so captivated supporters and enraged opponents.

The "push to communism" — the attempt by Cuban leaders to defy Soviet orthodoxy and construct communism with a Cuban face — did not, according to Eckstein, originate in "ideological fervor" but in "the government's economic and political priorities" (p. 37). The ten-million-ton harvest, the mass mobilizations, the revolutionary offensive, the campaign against bureaucracy, and the emphasis on exemplary workers — are all supposedly better explained by the mundane exigencies of revenues and expenditures. Eckstein largely attributes the moral crusade to the state's need to mobilize labor for the sugar harvests, contain the wage bill, and expand the productive sector. While these economic imperatives were undoubtedly real and serve as correctives to the "over-ideologic" interpretations of the late 1960s, they do not begin to explain why Cuban leaders could conceive of a moral crusade in the first place: precisely because so many Cubans "believed" and supported them in their quest for social justice and national sovereignty. Although Eckstein ably underscores the

role of ordinary people (e.g., through absenteeism and foot-dragging in their places of work) in undermining the radical strategy and forcing the "retreat to socialism," she is blind to the "elite-mass" connection that allowed the leadership to "push for communism" in the first place. Without the will, energy, and passion of the Cuban people (or "islanders," the awkward if geographically correct term the author frequently uses), the "push for communism" would have been inconceivable.

Finally, *Back from the Future* is marred by lapses in accuracy and facile interpretations. In Eckstein's analysis, Cuba's external-sector vulnerability is centrally important to an institutional explanation of the cycles of policy making. Yet, at a signal moment — the failure of the "push for communism," the evidence appears wanting or ambiguous. "Unanticipated unfavorable conditions in the external sector," Eckstein argues, significantly contributed to derailing the "push for communism." As evidence, the author mentions in passing Soviet reductions both in oil deliveries and in the number of economic agreements signed with Havana as two of these conditions (p. 39). The same article Eckstein cites as the basis for these data, written by Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Fernando Gil, includes others she does not consider that, nevertheless, seem decidedly pertinent. Between 1966 and 1970, Cuba's merchandise trade with the Soviet Union increased 53 percent, the weakest link in Cuba-USSR transactions being Cuban exports (declining by 133 million pesos in 1967-69), not Soviet imports (declining only in 1968-69 by 14 million pesos). What was the cause-and-effect relationship between the failure of the radical policies of the late 1960s and the decline in oil deliveries and signed agreements? Was the downfall in Cuban exports due to a politically motivated lack of Soviet demand or to insufficient Cuban supply? Did the increase in the total value of trade between Cuba and the Soviet Union hinder the realization of the communist utopia on the island?

While Eckstein's story is largely focused on economic and social policy making, she secondarily brings politics into it in ways that undermine her institutionalist perspectives. Eckstein accepts political institutions and official pronouncements on politics at face value. While most scholars consider the organization of the Organs of Popular Power (OPP) in the 1970s as a mark of institutionalization, the democratic character of these assemblies is quite another matter. Eckstein simply states — "At the municipal level the OPP operated democratically in practice and not merely theory" (p. 27), and points to the high electoral turnover of delegates and the intense discussions by constituents in some municipal assemblies as evidence. However, she observes that in the early 1990s "measures were taken to democratize governance" (p. 113), including the Popular Power assemblies that had supposedly functioned democratically since the 1970s. Nowhere does Eckstein allude to the scholarly controversies about OPP. Neither does she inform her readers that the assemblies

were intermittently subjected to official criticism in the interim fifteen years. Nor does she address the bearing of Popular Power on the major economic and social policy changes she claims are better understood in an institutional context.

Although Eckstein painstakingly looks beyond official ideological proclamations regarding socioeconomic policies to find their material bases, she does not apply the same insight to those about politics. In 1993, the government for the first time held direct elections for national and provincial deputies in Popular Power assemblies. Eckstein says these elections "functioned as a plebiscite" (p. 116), notes that Castro acknowledged them as such, and cites high, positive voter turnout as a meaningful manifestation of citizen consent. Would a "plebiscite" held anywhere else in the world be taken seriously if government opponents faced the same restrictions as in Cuba and official candidates were prohibited from discussing issues with the electorate?

Eckstein further affirms that "an increasingly nationalist inclusionary political system" was taking form (p. 127)—a declaration common among government officials. Yet she also mentions increasing repression against dissidents and the continuing passive defiance of ordinary people, without making a critical analysis of the inclusionary claim or connecting politics to the analysis of policy-making that is the heart of her book. Eckstein turns a politically blind eye to the interplay of state and society that is fundamental to institutionalist theory.

Cuban studies sorely need richer comparative and theoretical perspectives. Even against our best intentions, we have all been guilty of the cursory recourse to "Cuban exceptionalism," which ultimately taxes our understanding of the Cuban historical experience—before and after 1959. Susan Eckstein deserves credit for often having reminded her fellow Cubanists of this need. But, readers will be disappointed to find that *Back from the Future* does not fulfill it. Other scholars, I hope, will pursue her laudable objectives to a more successful conclusion.

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Recent Work in Cuban Studies

Agriculture

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- Adams, Chuck, and Anicia E. Garcia Alvarez. *The Commercial Fisheries Industries of Cuba and Florida*. International Working Paper Series, IW96-6. Gainesville: Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida, January 1996. 106 pp.
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- Spreen, Thomas H., Armando Nova González, and Ronald P. Muraro. *The Citrus Industries in Cuba and Florida*. International Working Paper Series, IW96-2. Gainesville: Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida, January 1996. 93 pp.

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- Buzzanell, Peter. "Cuba's Role and Position in the World Sugar Market." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Agricultural Economics Association and Association of Environmental and Resource Economists, Indianapolis, Indiana (7 August 1995).
- Deere, Carmen Diana, et al. "Household Incomes in Cuban Agriculture: A Comparison of the State, Co-operative, and Peasant Sectors." *Development and Change* 26 (April 1995): 209-34.
- Dierksmeier, G. "Pesticide Contamination in the Cuban Agricultural Environment." *TRAC—Trends in Analytical Chemistry* 15 (1996): 154-59.
- Douzant Rosenfeld, Denise, et al. "Se nourrir à Cuba: Les enjeux de l'agriculture dans la région de La Havane." *Cahiers Américaine Latine* 19 (1995): 35-64.
- "Oranges and Lemons." *See* Economics, Industry, and Planning.