

TWO LEFTS IN LATIN AMERICA?

- 1. Jorge Castañeda**
- 2. James Petras**
- 3. Teodoro Petkoff**
- 4. Carlos M. Vilas**
- 5. Steen Fryba Christensen**

1. Jorge Castañeda

(“Latin America’s Two Lefts”. December 2004)

Leftist backlash after neo-liberalism

Category 1	Chile, Brazil, Uruguay
Category 2	Venezuela, Argentina, Cuba

Lagos’ Socialist Party, “Lula’s” Workers Party, Vázquez’ Frente Amplio.
Their background as political parties, leaders and movements has truly socialist and progressive roots. They follow pragmatic, sensible and realistic paths. They have respect for democracy. Exile, realism and resignation have tempered their anti-Americanism. This category of leftism is a good thing for Latin America

Chávez, Kirchner, Castro (and López Obrador in Mexico) arise from a purely populist and nationalist past. They are less open for modernizing influences. Rhetoric is more important to them than substance. Power more important than how it is exercised. Chávez and Kirchner belittle the US by aligning with Fidel Castro instead of promoting their countries’ real interests. However, they “speak loud” but “carry a little stick”. They should keep back on their dangerous and destructive nationalist and authoritarian tendencies

(Latin America's Two Left Wings. January 2006)

Category 1	Chile, Brazil, Uruguay
Category 2	Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba

- 1. Is good. Often in disagreement with USA, but within the permissible.**
- 2. Is bad. Exaggerated rhetoric and fight with Washington. Populism and irresponsible public spending will lead to economic crisis, rising poverty and social inequality. A gradual loss of democratic leadership and human rights can also be expected.**

2. James Petras

(“Nuevos vientos desde la izquierda o aire caliente desde una nueva derecha”; March 2006)

The argument of a leftist backlash against neo-liberal policies is greatly exaggerated. The overall tendency points at continuity rather than radical change.

Category 1	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, (Chile)
Category 2	Cuba, Venezuela.

The method for defining the left is to look at the political essence instead of focusing on symbols and rhetoric.

14 criteria are used (see below).

He concludes that the “left” in category 1 countries has been seduced, and has associated itself with the elites.

There is an enormous distance between “words” and “deeds”.

Policy shows continuity of neo-liberalism. Choosing between “lite” or “hard” subordination to imperialism.

Therefore category 1 does not belong to the political left.

The 14 criteria

1. Reduction of social inequality. 2. Increasing living standards. 3. General interest and national property instead of private and foreign property. 4. Progressive taxation. 5. Budget priorities favour social spending and public investment, not subsidies to exploiters and payments on the foreign debt. 6. National property of natural resources. 7. Production is diversified towards more value-added activities. 8. Focus on the domestic market instead of exports. 9. Popular participation in decision making and opposition to decisions made by elites negotiating with foreign bankers (IMF) and political elites. 10. Mass movements consulted when filling key ministries. 11. An anti-imperialist foreign policy against free markets, military bases and imperialist wars. 12. Rolling back privatizations. 13. Increasing the minimum wage against excessive payments on the foreign debt. 14. Promote unions + universal and free education and health services.

Teodoro Petkoff

(“Las dos izquierdas”. In Nueva Sociedad 197. 2005)

There is a deep change in the political atmosphere in Latin America. This is a highly significant historical tendency that can be seen as a reaction to recent development experiences.

Category 1	Chile, Brazil, Uruguay (Arg)
Category 2	Cuba, Venezuela (MAS)

Parties in category 1 have dropped infantile leftism and radicalism. They have internalized democratic values. Macro-economic policy needs to be responsible and sensible. Advanced reformism assures compatibility between a) social sensitivity, and b) economic development. Tension between ideological position and pragmatic/responsible attitude.

Parties and leaders in category 2 have a romantic appeal. Chavez: militaristic, authoritarian, Messianic, Marxist-Leninist currents. Social redemption/revenge and political antagonism. Inflammatory rhetoric against domestic elites and US “imperialism”. Venezuela’s expansive force. The leadership of the left in some countries (Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador) and radical social movements (MST and some Piquetero groups) are attracted to them. Outside these sectors there is some sympathy but mass currents of the South American left are more pragmatic.

Both groups seek a multi-polar world order and to build a common future with more autonomy from US hegemony

3. Carlos M. Vilas

(“La izquierda latinoamericana y el surgimiento de regimens nacional populares”. In Nueva Sociedad 197. May-June 2005).

Vilas compares “old” historical national-populist left with “new” left in Latin America. He characterizes the “new” left and emphasizes significant challenges for it. He does not create categories of the left.

- 1. The political “left” as an uncomfortable category.**
- 2. The historical Latin American left.**
- 3. The new Latin American left: 1980s and 1990s.**
- 4. The new Latin American left: A new cycle of political change after the failures of neo-liberalist approaches.**
- 5. Similarities and differences between “Old” and “New” left.**
- 6. Criticizing rightist criticisms of the new left. Populism and new economic nationalism leads to social conflict and questions hemispheric democratic governance.**
- 7. Tendency to “speak softly” but “mark differences firmly” in international politics: the intervention in Iraq and the opposition to the US approach to a FTAA. Differentiation from the hegemonic vision. More regional cooperation and coordination of international policies is seen as a way to increase national room of manoeuvre.**

1. The political “left” as an uncomfortable category.

Criticism of Norberto Bobbio’s distinction between a (leftist) horizontal and egalitarian vision for society and a (rightist) vertical vision for society.

2. The historical Latin American left.

Focus: the social organization of production questioned and larger degree of autonomy in the international system of power desired.

Positions more or less radical or reformist.

Tendency: national-populist regimes with roots in urban and rural mass populations and in middle class sectors with an emphasis on national development, social and political democratization and a certain inclination towards economic nationalism.

Power gained through elections, revolution, coups.

3. The new Latin American left.

Focus: improved life quality (anti-poverty; reduced social inequality; job creation; health system and education for everybody).

Tendency in 1980s and 1990s to subordinate representative democratic institutions and procedures.

Creation of “market democracies” (Bill Clinton) (DD).

Do not suggest socialism as a form for the organization of society but seek a more equilibrated capitalism.

4. Socially negative impact from two decades of neo-liberal reforms leads to a new development. A new cycle of political change with a sense of social progress. A gradualist and pragmatic left without hard ideological definitions.

Aim: A more equilibrated capitalism with a state that intervenes more. It seeks to improve competitiveness while

articulating demands for profitability and requisites of investment of capital with the social aspirations of the population and maintenance of democratic institutions and human rights. Power through a war of positions and the accumulation of force.

5. Similarities and differences between “Old” and “New” left. Additional elements in the new left.

6. Rightist (Condolezza Rice etc.) criticisms of the left. Populism and new economic nationalism lead to social conflict and question hemispheric governance. Not fair. The new left is successful. It acknowledges the complexity in the scenario. It should seek national integration, social security, popular participation and social effectiveness of democracy.

Steen Fryba Christensen

The “New” left reacts to the crisis of development and questions extreme versions of neo-liberal ideology

Category 1	Cuba
Category 2	Venezuela
Category 3	Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay

Cuba is a dictatorship. Its economy is a planned economy with some capitalist enterprises.

Venezuela is a politically polarized country. It is a democracy, but a troubled one. More effective pluralism is desirable. Economic nationalism and the anti-imperialist are qualitatively deeper than in category 3. Venezuela’s leftism is reminiscent of the “old” left as in Peron’s Argentina.

Category 3 countries belong to the “new” left of Carlos M. Vilas. This category could be divided into two sub-categories. A) Chile, Brazil and Uruguay. B) Argentina and Bolivia. Governments in 3B gained power following episodes of deep legitimacy crises. Their economic policies are more nationalist than in the case of 3A.

There is a general tendency towards applying more “autonomous” policies inspired by home-grown doctrines and towards enhancing multi-polarity and room of manoeuvre.