

Foreign Trade (COMEX) show that the biggest imports were primary products, like wheat and coal. The fact that import revenues came from everyday products could reinforce the book's overall argument, but it is difficult to assume without further research who was paying for public goods, especially major public works, which were not locally funded. Moreover, the general assumption that more direct taxation, especially property taxes, would increase the supply of public goods is reasonable, but it also raises some issues that the book does not address. This is a methodological choice, as the author states that 'this book is not a typical economic history with testable hypotheses and counterfactual analysis' (p. xii), but why should we assume that taxing property was an alternative? Here, the example of the United States does not necessarily represent a viable alternative, because Brazil's fiscal structure was not decentralised; indeed, fiscal federalism was not common in countries with an income similar to Brazil's. Hanley's book, by dealing with the important themes of revenue raising and resource allocation by local governments, naturally raises questions about how other pre-industrial countries have faced their problems of financing public goods at the local level. It is difficult to draw conclusions without 'testable hypotheses and counterfactual analysis'.

These comments, however, by no means diminish the book's importance. On the contrary, Hanley encourages us to think more about the multiple causes of Brazilian economic stagnation during the nineteenth century and the possible lost opportunities for growth after the end of the monarchical period. Some topics, like Brazil's reliance on indirect taxes and the political reluctance to impose appropriate taxes on property, are of perennial interest and help us understand our history of inequality. This is a book that should attract anyone interested in Brazilian history. The Brazilian municipality has gained an additional historical narrative written with proper attention to detail.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X21000560

Fernando Teixeira da Silva, *Workers before the Court: Conflicts and Labor Justice in the Context of the 1964 Coup d'Etat in Brazil*

(Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), pp. xxviii + 263, £81.50, hb.

Andrés Stagnaro

National Scientific and Technical Research Council, La Plata, Buenos Aires

A few days before the 1964 *coup d'état* in Brazil, the Regional Labour Court declared that the agreement between the Union of Rural Workers of Assis and the Fazenda Nova América – a vast sugar cane plantation in São Paulo – was null and void. The judicial ruling allowed the communist Federation of Food

Workers trade union to institute a new arrangement, giving the cane cutters the chance to be considered industrial workers and therefore to claim the provisions of the decree regulating Brazilian labour law (the Consolidation of Labour Laws of 1943) giving them access to labour-mediated 'citizenship'; this, in turn, entitled them to social rights, which were denied to those in unregulated professions. This is only one of the hundreds of judicial actions that Fernando Teixeira da Silva analyses in *Workers before the Court*, the synthesis of a long-term research project presented in an orderly but engaging way. This particular case can be fully understood only after following Teixeira's argumentation through successive and related historiographical twists and turns, from industrial relations on a global scale to left-wing memoirs of labour justice.

Workers before the Court is built on a solid theoretical basis. E. P. Thompson's methodology is present in Teixeira's arguments and writing, but our author also expands on some Thompsonian concepts such as the courts as arenas of social conflicts and the active role of the actors – in this particular case workers – in the definition and expansion of their own rights. The book also subscribes to an extension of the notion of the working class that defies some reductionist academic definitions and their deterministic and evolutionary perspectives. By sifting through the empirical evidence, Teixeira concludes that the very notion of the working class is in constant dispute and expansion even within the institutionalised parameters of the labour courts – and most of the time because of them, as in the case of the cane cutters and the Union of Rural Workers.

The very inclusion of rural workers in a study about the working class succeeds in challenging Latin American labour historiography that is accustomed to treating urban and rural workers separately – sometimes even in opposition. Rural workers reclaiming their place as class rights holders and therefore as sharing the same identity as workers from the cities forms an important part of Teixeira's hypothesis about the *coup d'état* itself. The very existence of a 'community of workers' established by the labour courts, and the constant redefinitions of and struggles over its limits, had threatened employers' prerogatives in labour relations only months before the coup and the subsequent change in social relations.

The verification of this hypothesis reinforces the discussions in the first part of the book about the façade of labour justice in Brazil and its ideological links with the Italian fascist Magistratura del Lavoro, which similarly dispensed labour justice in appearance only. Both discussions are central to Brazilian historiography and politics; this has been demonstrated recently, with one of the consequences of the 2016 coup against Dilma Rousseff being an attempt to reform labour relations. *Workers before the Court* assumes a global scale not only in order to compare the different models of institutionalisation of labour courts in different countries, but also to respond to this national debate on the nexus between labour justice and fascist corporatism in Brazil. It also brings a global perspective to the perception of two distinct industrial relations models: one regulated by the law, and one resulting from contracts. Each has different consequences for workers' ability to press their claims. While the public regulation of industrial relations implies compulsory arbitration and therefore establishes limits to free negotiation, contractualism suggests greater collective autonomy. Teixeira's analysis suggests another path. Through a detailed review of examples from both systems he suggests that the

common tendency to see them as opposite and mutually exclusive is a mistake. The Brazilian case shows repeatedly that even normative power, the core of corporatist complaints against labour justice, does not lead to workers' loss of control and autonomy. In fact, the evidence presented in *Workers before the Court* suggests the opposite: labour courts incited workers to strike and fight for their rights, and they represented a recognition of the existence of class conflict. The path that leads to labour justice generally implies a failure of negotiations and even strikes – or the threat thereof – to get a good deal in court. The labour courts also played an important role in underwriting private agreements between the parties, presenting two models simultaneously: legislated labour relations with heteronomy; negotiated labour relations with autonomy.

Workers before the Courts challenges established ideas about labour justice in Brazil, and in doing so also defies preconceived ideas about the links between models of industrial relations and political systems. By placing debates about the nature of labour justice in their historical context and restoring the voices of the protagonists – especially those of workers – Teixeira dismantles a long-held ideological consensus linking labour justice with a corporatist political project and workers' subjection. This book is both a point of arrival for the author and an inescapable departure point for those approaching the study of work and workers in the future.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X21000572

Jeff Garmany and Anthony W. Pereira, *Understanding Contemporary Brazil*

(London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. xiii + 239, £29.99, pb.

Carlyn Rodgers

Centre of Latin American Studies, University of Cambridge

'Brazil is not for beginners.' Jeff Garmany and Anthony Pereira anchor their text, *Understanding Contemporary Brazil*, in the way many of us – experts, scholars and students alike – are first introduced to the study of the nation. In some ways, the phrase is wielded as a threat when we embark on the journey; from more familiar or experienced travellers, it elicits a chuckle. Scholars and students of Brazil all encounter this phrase, in one way or another, at one point or another. And with this phrase, the 252 pages of *Understanding Contemporary Brazil* serve both as threshold and as admission into the immersive and generous space that is the study of Brazil. Everyone is invited. Everyone is welcome.

The text is divided into ten thematic chapters, bounded by an Introduction and an Afterword. In the opening pages, Garmany and Pereira make clear the intent, the role and the function of the text. It is not to serve as an expansive and all-encompassing tome. It is an attempt to contextualise and frame key questions