
Reviewed by Laurence Goodchild

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) is a political, economic and social alliance founded by the governments of Venezuela and Cuba in 2004. Over the last decade there had been considerable interest in Latin America’s ‘pink tide’ and renewed debates around ‘Twenty-First Century Socialism’; despite this, the ALBA has been notably absent from research agendas. *Counter-Globalization and Socialism in the 21st Century* does an excellent job of amending this situation. The 13 chapters of this edited volume combine primary research with theoretical depth to explore the progress and limitations of the ALBA, challenge existing assumptions and emphasise its importance beyond the region.

After giving a brief history of the ALBA, Thomas Muhr uses the introductory chapter to establish a theoretical framework and explain the shortcomings of previous literature. Referencing a range of theorists, Muhr emphasises the importance of transnational processes, the need to take into account structural context and the idea of revolution as a process rather than event. As such the book is positioned with a clear sense of purpose: the ALBA is constructing a ‘rival structure to capitalism’, but to understand this we need to move beyond asking ‘is country X socialist?’ and view the ALBA as a global counter-hegemony within structural constraints (p. 21). This bold stance conceptualises the ALBA in a unique manner and is a clear challenge to some orthodox socialist positions.

Reflecting the ALBA’s holistic approach to development, the contributors’ chapters avoid focussing solely upon the organisation of production and instead address how this ‘rival structure’ is being constructed across a broad range of fields. For example, Rosales and Cerezal discuss the ALBA’s alternatives to traditional international financial architecture (p. 142), Cardozo and Strauss speak about a new ‘decolonized’ education led by Bolivia (p. 203), while Villazana explains how the ALBA is resisting the audiovisual hegemony of the USA over the continent (p. 188). As well as the ALBA’s multifaceted nature, what becomes apparent is the plurality of actors involved. States retain a key role, such as Cuba’s contribution of its expertise in achieving human development under immense imperialist pressure, as accentuated by Helen Yaffe. Yet it is the participation of sub-national governments in non-member countries such as El Salvador and the USA, alongside social movements from across the continent, which really give weight to Muhr’s theoretical considerations.
The progress made by the ALBA in reversing the damage caused under neoliberalism, something well detailed throughout the book, is profound. Nevertheless, what is considered one of the ALBA’s most progressive aspects – the participation of social movements alongside governments – also highlights key contradictions within the alliance. In what stands out as one of the most innovative chapters, Martinez proposes that a ‘double-turn’ in counter-hegemony is occurring, whereby social movements are playing a dual role of simultaneously supporting left-wing governments via the ALBA, but also trying to act autonomously of them to resist specific policies (p. 63). This conceptualisation captures the complexities of this relationship exceptionally well, especially so with regards to the ALBA’s continued involvement in ecologically destructive resource extraction. Although the ALBA may work to transform this historical dependency over time as suggested by Muhr (p. 7), it remains a difficult issue which is likely to reappear in future research.

At a time of capitalist crisis, *Counter-Globalization and Socialism in the 21st Century* compellingly argues that the ALBA is already working towards an alternative world. Detailing the progress so far, while remaining realistic about limitations, this book should be of interest far beyond Latin American Studies.

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