

100th anniversary of the death of Max Weber: Commemoration from the Americas (Introduction)

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Since the end of the 1990s, the so-called “left turn” has been gaining ground in Latin America, breaking with the “Washington Consensus” for two decades. On the basis of rising commodity prices and strong economic growth, social and labour policies were expanded and reshaped. While the West held on to its neo-liberal model and faced growing social and political distortions due to the financial crisis of 2008, poverty in Latin America was reduced by almost half. These achievements were accompanied by broad social mobilisation and in some cases complemented by new models of political participation. The region became more independent and gained international influence.

Since the middle of the last decade, this political trend has reversed. With the fall in commodity prices, the region has fallen into an economic crisis, which has quickly worsened the social situation and fuelled political conflicts. Progressive forces have lost legitimacy and influence. Social dismantling and discrimination against the weak and minorities have become a part of the political programme, and in some countries, such as Brazil, politicians on the extreme right have been elected into government.

Over the last two decades, Latin America has had a century’s opportunity to embark on a new path of development in politics and the economy. This option has been weakened, but has not yet failed. It is now necessary to learn from the mistakes of the last decade of progressive governance, for those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it.

To do so, it is necessary to analyse the internal factors for the recent failure of progressive governments that contributed to this social and political crisis. The left’s loss of confidence and legitimacy has hardly been analysed so far. What is particularly striking is the silence of

many intellectuals who, not so long ago, strongly supported progressive governments. For this reason, CALAS launched a dialogue platform in Guadalajara in early October 2019 entitled “The Latin American Left in the 21st Century: Looking Back to the Future.” There it became clear that the relationship between state and society plays a central role in the failure and must be discussed anew, but also that new projects committed to the political and social participation of all must be a part of this process.

One of the most influential state theorists to date is Max Weber. It is necessary to take into account that Max Weber, albeit from a “culturalist” reading that distorts his work, is the most important author for hegemonic social science in the Americas as a whole. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Max Weber’s death, the following volume presents various contributions that explore the significance his ideas continue to have for the analysis of the state, where it could be expanded or replaced and what significance Max Weber still has for Latin America today.

The set of texts presented here discuss Max Weber’s work at two different levels of abstraction. The texts by Wolfgang Schluchter, Hans-Jürgen Burchardt and Boike Rehbein are dedicated to discussing methodological and philosophical aspects that are considered essential for the understanding of Weber. In the case of Rehbein the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, in the case of Schluchter the relationship between ideal and material causality, and in Burchardt’s case the need to criticize the Weberian concept of the modern state.

The set of texts by Jessé Souza, Marcos Abrão and Francisco Colom refer, on the contrary, to Max Weber’s application to the concrete Latin American context. Souza questions the „culturalist“ use of Max Weber in