

COFFEE AND REGIONAL POLITICS IN BRAZIL

THE BRAZILIAN COFFEE VALORIZATION OF 1906: REGIONAL POLITICS AND ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE. By THOMAS H. HOLLOWAY. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Logmark Editions, 1975. Pp. 112. \$8.50.)

Thomas Holloway has demonstrated that there is a good deal yet to be learned about regional politics in turn-of-the-century Brazil, particularly as they relate to national economic policies. This monograph deals in considerable depth and detail with the first coffee valorization of 1906. A slightly revised version of his Master's thesis, it bears strong resemblance to that genre, with diligent footnoting, carefully drawn graphs, tables, and charts, and a bibliography dominated by secondary sources.

The book has some unevenness, perhaps the result of the original having been written as a thesis for a committee. On one hand, it is an extremely specific, detailed description of the Taubaté Agreement and the coffee valorization of 1906. This is certainly not the sort of monograph for reading assignment in an introductory survey course; undoubtedly the author had no such intention. Such a piece is valuable, to say the least, for historians already somewhat versed in the subject. However, the first two chapters dealing with introductory material and background leading up to Taubaté are overly long and in places elementary for such historians. Without doubt, some introduction is certainly warranted in order to present the political and economic milieu of the decade preceding Taubaté, but devotion of over half of the book's text is unnecessary. There are a great many more interesting and exciting roads to pursue.

What seems to be seriously lacking in this monograph is a "schema," a thematic framework on which to hang the considerable weight of material that Holloway has collected. The amount of detailed information on the coffee industry at the turn of the century is outstanding. However, except for the concluding chapter, "An Evaluation of Valorization," the author does not seriously attempt to explore any of a number of themes to which the material lends itself. Many of these center around the economic trends of the period, as well as some specific economic theories concerning elasticity of demand, world market and supply, and economic dependence. The term "economic dependence" has come to mean many things to different scholars. Holloway does not develop a concrete definition to help the reader set the story he presents into either a generalized picture of economic dependency or a specific aspect of that picture. The term is used loosely and without clear definition, so the reader is never quite certain just exactly how economic dependence is operating in the case of coffee.

As an illustration, coffee was one of the best examples of a boom-bust cycle, an economic fact in Brazil since the days of *pau brasil*. Brazil was experiencing two such booms simultaneously during the 1896–1906 period, the other

product being Amazonian rubber. Yet the context and causes of valorization (to borrow the author's term) do not include the boom-bust cycle as an economic trend, nor its relationship to the world market and demand for raw materials, nor the effect, if any, on national politics of a simultaneous boom in a separate region. Valorization, according to Holloway, is a political response to the economic problem of overproduction. But what other types of politico-economic responses were tried? Did they vary according to product or period? Were they more or less successful than the coffee valorization of 1906? In short, valorization must be put into the greater context of Brazilian history and the economic history of the Atlantic world.

The wealth of information contained in the book could also be used in a comparative study. For example, valorization was the chosen means in 1906 and subsequently. But what responses have been tried in other coffee-producing countries? Why has Brazil remained so dominant in world coffee supply? Has overproduction been uniquely a Brazilian problem; and if not, have other nations used the Brazilian experience as a guide to their own policy, or have they embarked on independent means of control? In another comparative context, much could be said about colonization and settlement during a boom period. Here again, comparison and contrast could be made within Brazil in the case of rubber. Perhaps even more illuminating would be a comparison of the Brazilian *colono* system and the Argentine *medianeros*, or the Australian colonists. What sort of settlement patterns emerged in coffee-producing areas of Africa and Spanish America? All this is admittedly tangential to the specific topic of the monograph, but enough time is devoted to such background material that it brings these questions to mind. A discussion of such themes might make the background chapters more meaningful.

Another topic, more central to the Taubaté Agreement and the 1906 valorization, is that of foreign capital. Here again there is a great deal of raw material eagerly awaiting a thematic approach. More needs to be said about the multifaceted role of foreign capital in a country economically dependent upon a fluctuating world market in which to sell its raw materials. One of the most intriguing and exciting sections of this book is that dealing with the participation of foreign capital in the valorization plan. Foreign capital in Latin America from roughly 1880 to 1914 is usually discussed in terms of purchase and direct investment. Yet here is an outstanding example of the way in which foreign capital dramatically influenced national economic policy in a more subtle and less risky fashion. Such a theme is presented indirectly in the book and clearly needs elaboration.

A rather serious lacuna can be detected in relation to foreign investment in valorization. There was obviously a good deal of foreign participation in the plan, yet Holloway scarcely mentions official foreign reaction to the Taubaté Agreement or the actual workings of valorization. This reader constantly kept asking questions about the response of nations such as Great Britain, the United States, and Germany to a form of international price fixing. If in fact there was no formal diplomatic correspondence concerning Brazilian plans to control coffee prices, it should be stated. Since the decade ending in 1906 was characterized

by a world situation in which prices of raw materials were largely controlled by the purchasing nations, it would seem that a move such as valorization would have generated some comment.

Another topic suggested in the first two chapters of this book is the social and political implications of valorization and participation of foreign capital at a more local or regional level. The ties between Brazilian *comissarios* and coffee merchants in the United States and Europe were obviously strong and of a purely business nature, while ties between *comissario* and *fazendeiro* were more apt to be social and political as well as economic. In turn the linkage between *fazendeiro* and *colono* involved an entirely different set of rules and responsibilities. In terms of social history there is a good deal to be said about the manner in which the machinations of national economic policy and the indispensable role of foreign capital in that policy affect the social and economic institutions at a micro, or local, level. Such a discussion would definitely strengthen this study and add force to the economic dependency argument. In short then, the book does not generally live up to the expectations of the "economic dependence" portions of its subtitle. Only the concluding chapter really deals with that topic in a schematic or synthetic fashion.

The "regional politics" portion of the subtitle is handled somewhat better. Chapter 2 on the political economy of coffee and chapter 3 on the Taubaté Agreement devote a great deal of research and writing to the subject. Yet even here the same general problem remains: a lack of theme. One can move month by month through the political in-fighting and bickering leading up to Taubaté and the haggling over the agreement itself. However, the material begs for more analysis. Even the most casual student of Brazilian history knows that the *paulista* planters had a tight rein on regional and national politics during the Old Republic. Others reading this monograph would probably have a considerably more detailed and sophisticated knowledge of the subject. Why did the paulistas have so much power when, for example, the rubber barons of the North were contributing almost as much revenue to the national coffers? Was it strictly a matter of distance? In short, what was the nature of regional politics and its control of national policy? Admittedly this monograph cannot undertake to answer such questions fully without digressing from its stipulated title and purpose. Nevertheless, more analysis and synthesis are desperately needed when discussing regional politics as they related to the coffee valorization of 1906.

Lest this review appear overly negative, some strong points of the book should be noted. It is basically well-written in a clear and fairly concise fashion. The sheer quantity of detail reveals a considerable amount of serious research. The illustrations, in the form of graphs and charts, are generally good. The last chapter is well-written and replete with interesting ideas. In short, the book is an invaluable addition to the available knowledge of political affairs in relation to coffee during the Old Republic. With some condensation it would have made an excellent article. Far more valuable would be an elaboration of some of the broader themes suggested by the material into a larger book which would have greater implications for both studies in economic dependency and regional politics.