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Enhancing Democracy: Public Policies and Citizen Participation in Chile by Gonzalo Delamaza

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Delamaza, Gonzalo. *Enhancing Democracy: Public Policies and Citizen Participation in Chile*. New York: Berghahn Press, 2014). xi + 308 pages. Hardcover, \$99.00.

Gonzalo Delamaza, a Chilean sociologist, has participated with many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in designing and implementing plans to bring his native Chile ‘democratization’ in political processes and ‘competitive markets’ in the economic spheres. Delamaza has seen the bright hopes for democracy in the days of Salvador Guillermo Allende (elected popularly, 1970; assassinated in U.S. supported coup, 1973), and the bright hopes for economic growth under the Augusto Pinochet military (coup in 1973; stepped aside in 1989). He has also witnessed the economic disarray of the popular Marxist Allende and the economic growth under the successful but disproportionate dictatorship of Pinochet. Delamaza has seen enough to think that neither a functioning democracy nor a functioning economy may ever come; however, he writes in his introduction: “Yet democracy is still standing” (p. 5) and Chile is in the Third Wave of ‘neoliberal’ and ‘top down’ economic development with a growing gross domestic product and a sizable middle class of consumers who live better than they once did. It is, then, a very western and capitalist-oriented book, as well as a warmly optimistic one.

Delamaza marks the stability and steady economic growth of his native land. From 1973 to 1989, the military junta of the murderous Pinochet brought injustice, including torture of the disadvantaged dissidents, but the “Chicago Boys,” who developed macroeconomic policy, delivered steady growth of the gross domestic product (GDP). Despite the rhetoric, Allende’s Marxist policies never made an impact on the sizable middle class, and Pinochet’s selective violence made no threat to the same class as long as its members relinquished freedom of expression. After all the bloodshed, Pinochet’s junta gave over the country to a civilian-controlled, peaceful government of ‘sectors’, and the GDP continued to grow apace as social stability continued. In 2006, student demands for educational reform—specifically, high levels of technical training to include genuine opportunities for those so educated—produced the peaceful Penguins’ Rebellion (so named because the massed demonstrators in school uniforms looked like penguins on parade). However, the schools and other educational training did not change much. Since 2010, yet more military interference and more scheming continue to give the lie to any notion of substantive democracy. The question of who *actually* rules is unhappily settled. It is ‘techno-pols’ who are expert at getting certain things done for the militaristic elite.

Delamaza rightly describes things as ‘governance that perpetuates itself.’ Withal, a solid bourgeoisie of well-educated, middle class folk have continued to live comfortably, *free from* much economic oppression but not particularly *free to* do or say much in protest. And withal, a huge bottom group of poor people live lives of grinding poverty and quiet desperation unaffected by the impressive data showing overall macroeconomic growth. The organized elites have few incentives to open anything up to the masses in the way of work, schooling, or other roads to improvement. In agreement with the ‘Pinto Thesis,’ Delamaza states that powerful social actors concurrently create political forces that insure social and political stability at the national level, but completely frustrate development of an economy capable of employing the huge group of lower class workers (Pinto, 1970). There is no organized political avenue of redress for the laboring classes.

Delamaza remains hopeful that heavy foreign investment will bring a ‘top down’ industrial development, speeded-up economic growth, and eventually an improvement in both wealth and income for the huge portion of Chileans who live in awful poverty. The recent, complex study, *Capital*, by Thomas Piketty (2014) demonstrates quantitatively that no country

has successfully used such foreign investment, more ‘top down’ growth, to improve income or wealth equality. Indeed, the worldwide record is spectacularly *worsening* inequality in wealth and income. Little in the chronicle here disproves Pikity’s argument that evolving economies fare better with the Chinese model, that is, using *their own capital* to finance infrastructure and other long-term developmental ‘public goods,’ especially roads, schools and hospitals. That limitation in Delamaza’s thesis is severe. For all that, his explanation of terms and his narrative of Chilean problems and prospects remain judicious—and essential.

The title of Delamaza’s originally published monograph was *Tan lejos tan cerca*, well translated as *So near yet so far*, a phrasing that would call to mind a film famous in both languages. Another good, possible translation is *So near to the wall*, which suggests that progress could always be stopped by structural forces, that is, a *cerca* or wall. The English title, *Enhancing Democracy*, is hopeful yet nuanced with a connotation that democracy is not an accomplished actualization, but rather a constantly evolving process, with miles to go before Chileans sleep.

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