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**The Political Sociology of a Concept:
Corporatism and the “Distinct Tradition”**

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Abstract

Corporatism is undoubtedly one of the major concepts in political science, comparative politics, and Third World studies of the last forty years. Along with developmentalism, dependency theory, state-society relations, center-periphery relations, rational choice, the new institutionalism, and, arguably, transitions to democracy, the corporatism literature has strongly shaped the discipline over the last four decades and influenced in profound ways how we think about sociopolitical relations in advanced industrial as well as developing nations. But there is still confusion over corporatism's precise definition, its various forms (traditional, "neo"), in what areas of the world it applies (Latin America, Southern Europe, Northern Europe, China, Japan, other developing areas), and, perhaps most importantly, whether corporatism is still relevant in an era of globalization, interdependence, and transitions to democracy – when, purportedly, democracy is "the only game in town." This essay seeks to provide new answers to some of these hallowed questions.

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Introduction

Corporatism is undoubtedly one of the major concepts in political science, comparative politics, and Latin American studies of the last forty years. Along with developmentalism, dependency theory, state-society relations, center-periphery relations, rational choice, the new institutionalism, and, arguably, transitions to democracy, the corporatism literature has strongly shaped the discipline over the last four decades, influenced in profound ways how we think about sociopolitical relations in advanced industrial as well as developing nations, and had a profound impact particularly on Latin American studies.¹

But there is still confusion over corporatism’s precise definition, its various forms (traditional, “neo”), in what areas of the world it applies (Latin America, Southern Europe, Northern Europe, China, Japan, other developing areas), and, perhaps most importantly, whether corporatism is still relevant in an era of globalization, interdependence, and transitions to democracy – when, purportedly, democracy is “the only game in town.” This essay seeks to provide new answers to some of these hallowed questions.

But the analysis provided here is more complex and, I believe, more interesting than that. For, along with Martin Heisler², Ronald Newton³, Philippe Schmitter⁴, James Malloy⁵, and others, the present author is one of the original architects of “the corporatist model.”⁶ And, just like dependency theory and the other approaches named above, corporatism has its gurus, specialized scholars, its apostles, and camp followers. There are many among these ranks who continue to believe that the corporatist approach offers rich insights into not just Latin American politics and society but the functioning of other political systems as well. Yet they wonder why this approach has not been sufficiently fleshed out, defined, a response to its critics formulated, and the continued relevance of this approach, in the light of both globalization and democratization, appraised.* This analysis seeks to shed light on these issues; since my name is so closely associated with the corporatist approach, part of the analysis must necessarily be autobiographical and in the first person.

Origins of the Corporatist Approach

At least four major influences came together in the original formulation of the corporatist model in the late-1960s, at least in my particular case. The first was a very strong background in Latin American area studies – five courses in Latin American and Spanish history, politics, and geography at the University of Michigan, plus two years of Spanish language training; then ten more Latin America courses at the graduate level,** another year of Spanish, two more of Portuguese, plus a TAship at the editorial office

* I have been asked by numerous of these scholars why I never responded to the critics, provided a better and clearer definition, and explained the background of the corporatism concept. I thought I had done all those things but maybe in obscure journals or books that were not reviewed in the right places, or that these things were self-evident (they, obviously, weren’t), or by then I had gone on to other research projects. It is now past time to correct these oversights.

** I am faintly amused today when some of my graduate students suggest that two courses on Latin America are sufficient to constitute a major field.

of the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, two grants while still a graduate student from the Rockefeller Foundation for field research and study in Latin America, and a three-year NDFL (National Defense Foreign Language and Area Studies) award to complete the Ph.D. degree. All this was done at the University of Florida which then (1961-65) had, arguably, the best Latin American studies program in the country.*

A second strong influence was the faculty comparative politics contingent at Florida. The group included Arnold Heidenheimer, perhaps the leading American scholar of comparative public policy; Alfred Clubok who taught courses on East Asia and the politics of developing areas; René Lamarchand, the budding African politics scholar; and, on Latin America, Harry Kantor and Alfredo Pareja. It was in Heidenheimer's year-long comparative politics seminar in 1962-63 that I first read about corporatism (although I did not fully realize its importance then) in the classic texts by Herman Finer,⁷ Carl Friedrich,⁸ and Karl Lowenstein;⁹ read Eastonian systems theory¹⁰ and Almondian functionalism as applied to developing areas¹¹ in Clubok's classes; learned about African patrimonialism and clientelism from Lamarchand; and absorbed all of Kantor's encyclopedic knowledge of and contacts in Latin America.

A special mentor at Florida, third, was historian Lyle McAlister. Though a scholar of colonial Latin America, McAlister's most famous writings were on the "*Fuero Militar*," or the corporate rights of the armed forces, which had both historical and contemporary implications¹². Alongside the *fuero militar* was the *fuero eclesiástico*, the *fuero universitario*, and the corporate rights of other groups that make up Latin American society. It was not a far step, in the writings of McAlister students Ronald Newton¹³ and myself, to a full-fledged theory of Latin American politics based on this notion of socio-political corporate group rights.

Reinforcing this perspective in my case, fourth, was a succession of research opportunities and case studies of Latin America and Iberia between 1962 and 1972. It is to be emphasized that my writings on corporatism were arrived at not deductively from some grand, all-encompassing, predetermined theory, but inductively from real field work in Latin America. I first went to the Dominican Republic in 1962 where I discovered and wrote about the corporatism in Trujillo's Dominican Republic;¹⁴ to Mexico in 1963 where I studied the corporatist, three-part structure of Mexico's Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI);¹⁵

to Central America also in 1963 where everyone referred to the corporate power of the armed forces;¹⁶ and back to the Dominican Republic in 1964-65 to study and write my dissertation on the persistence of corporatist forms of state-society relations even during the post-Trujillo transition to democracy.¹⁷

In 1966, 1968, 1970, and 1972 I was in Brazil working on a project on the Catholic labor movement¹⁸ that again forced me, as it did fellow corporatism scholars Kenneth Erickson¹⁹ and Philippe Schmitter,²⁰ to come to grips with the corporatist order of society, as distinct from a pluralist one or one of free interest group associability. That same year, 1966, that I first went to Brazil, I was also in Paraguay where I found in Alfredo Stroessner's a corporatist regime remarkably similar to Trujillo's;²¹ in Argentina where I was fascinated by Perón's and the Peronistas' adherences to corporatist, Mussolini-like politics; in Chile and Uruguay which had more a European-style system of democratic or societal (neo)corporatism; and in Peru where the dominant American Revolutionary Popular Alliance (APRA) party had a similar sectoral or syndical organization. Based on this research as well as briefer research and interviewing during this period in Panama and Venezuela, I began to formulate the ideas that would go into my "corporatist model" of Latin American politics.

It seemed clear to me almost immediately that Latin America did not conform to the supposedly universal models of economic development set forth by W.W. Rostow,²² Robert Heilbroner,²³ and the U.S. foreign aid program (which Rostow largely designed); nor to the social-mobilization-leads-to-democracy model of Karl Deutsch;²⁴ nor to the middle classness-yields-democracy model of S.M. Lipset;²⁵ and certainly not to the functionalism of Gabriel Almond.²⁶ Based on my own research and case studies in the field (at that time Latin America was the only developing area I had been to), Latin America seemed unique, distinctive (hence the subtitle of one of my books, "The Distinct Tradition"). It struck me as particularly significant that wherever I went in Latin America, whether in military regimes or democratizing ones; in quite well-developed countries like Argentina, Uruguay, or Chile and developing ones like the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, or Central America; and in leftist-populist regimes like Mexico or Venezuela or (then) authoritarian ones like Brazil, Paraguay, and Nicaragua, I found the same or similar corporatist, organic, patrimonialist theories and structures of the state and society.²⁷

I reasoned that this could not possibly be sheer coincidence.

* I am convinced that our training at Florida on Latin America was better than that of some of my contemporaries (who later became well known in the profession) from the more prestigious universities like Harvard, Yale, Berkeley, or Stanford, which either lacked Latin American studies programs at that time or had no or weak political scientists teaching Latin America. They may have gotten better training in international relations and global politics from such renowned scholars as Samuel Huntington or Stanley Hoffmann but Florida graduates were better trained on Latin America.

That the commonalities had something to do with the culture, structures, and systems that the colonial powers, Spain and Portugal, had brought to America, which were so different from those liberal-Lockean institutions Great Britain had brought to the United States.²⁸ So I began a research project that in 1972-73, 1974, 1976 and 1978 and virtually every year since then would take me to Spain and Portugal to study the corporatism of the Franco and Salazar regimes,²⁹ and that was carried over into studies of the persistence of corporate-organic forms even in the post-Franco, post-Salazar transitions to democracy.³⁰ In 1977 and 1979-80 I expanded this research project to study the continuing corporatist organization of labor relations in Southern Europe, encompassing Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, and (although I later excluded it from the study) Austria.³¹

This work adhered closely to the canons of the scientific method as it is known and practiced in political science and the social sciences more generally. First, I did initial, exploratory field work; as a novice scholar, I got my feet wet in the fields of Hispaniola, Mexico, and Central America. From those experiences I formulated some preliminary queries, puzzles, and eventually hypotheses. I then went into the field on a longer-term basis – Brazil especially, Mexico, South and Central America, the Dominican Republic, Portugal, Spain, eventually Italy, Greece, and Austria – to test these hypotheses. I came back not only with a series of case studies but also with some more general propositions about development, change, and sociopolitical institutions in Iberia and Latin America. From these case studies, not from a prior theory or ideology, I began to formulate “the corporatist model” of Iberia and Latin America.

What went into the formulation of this model? Four major ingredients, in my own mind as well as those of several other analysts of the concept. The first was systems theory. From my graduate training with Heidenheimer, Clubok, as well as political theorist Manning Dauer, I was strongly steeped in Parsonian, Rostovian, Lipsetonian, Eastonian, Almondian systems theory. I saw societies and polities as *systems*, their component parts inter-related. But I knew from my field work in Latin America

and Iberia that these countries did not conform to the particular, Eastonian-Almondian systems theory that I’d learned in graduate school.

Second, because of my own research and background, I was strongly interested not just in Latin American history, sociology, and politics but also in political theory, comparative religion, and particularly Catholic political theory. Because of my teachers at Michigan and Florida, I knew this “stuff” backwards and forward, particularly the great sixteenth Spanish century writers Suárez, Molina, Vitoria, and Soto, who provided the justification for a corporately-organized colonial-imperial state, as well as the revival of Catholic-corporatist thinking in the nineteenth century and in the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931).³² Third, I had rich case study materials, from a variety of countries and from a variety of types of countries, on which I could draw.*

And fourth, although this came a few years later, I had begun to formulate the ideas for a non-ethnocentric, non-Western theory (or theories) of development, as compared with the orientation and biases of so much of the Western development model. Mine was a model that verged on cultural relativism: it suggested that the writings of Rostow and others were so ethnocentric that they had little relevance to today’s, non-Western developing nations; that beginning with the landmark Iranian revolution of 1979 (not my favorite regime but we needed to recognize its historical significance), countries in the Third World were embarking on a course to find their own theory and model of development that was neither Soviet-Marxist nor U.S.-developmentalist; that we needed to broaden our purview to include distinct Islamic, Asian, African, and Latin American models of development; that there were some universals in this process but that each society or culture area, following Frank Sinatra, would have to find “their own way” to development and democracy.**

The corporative model was set forth in a series of papers, journal articles, and books that became more detailed and thorough as my knowledge and understanding grew. I had written a paper that included a discussion of corporatism in Paraguay as early as 1962,

* A Japanese colleague, Hiroshi Matsushita, who serves as an unofficial biographer and is the foremost exponent chronicler, and popularizer of corporatist theory and approaches in Japan, told me that he was studying Peronism in Argentina in the early 1970s when he first came across my World Politics article on corporatism. At that time he was taking two graduate seminars at the University of Mendoza, one on systems theory and the other on Catholic political thought. He saw immediately that what I had done was to wed systems theory to the foundations of Catholic political theory and culture in a way that provided a unique Latin American model of development. When he later read my work on ethnocentrism and the need for non-Western theories of development, the circle was complete in Prof. Matsushita’s mind: he now had not only a model of Latin American development but a method for constructing a distinctive Japanese or Asian one.

** I first published these ideas in widely accessible form while a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) in the early 1980s. Because AEI and some of its scholars did have what they saw as a universal model of development (free markets) and democracy (American-style pluralism), these writings got me in bad trouble with my colleagues and the Institute, and almost cost me my job there.

and my MA thesis on Trujillo that same year similarly contained a brief discussion of control over all corporate groups,³⁵ but the first detailed, published work on corporatism came out in 1968 in my book on Trujillo. That was followed in 1969 by a monograph on the corporatist origins of the Brazilian Catholic labor movement,³⁶ the next year I wrote and then presented in the spring of 1970 for the first time a full-blown version of the corporatist model at the Mershon Center for Education in National Security at Ohio State University.³⁷ An updated and shortened version of that paper was presented at the 1971 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association and published in *World Politics* in January, 1973.³⁸

There followed several other papers on corporatist theory and political sociology in the 1970s,³⁹ and a book on corporatism in Latin America collecting these early writings in 1981.⁴⁰ Meanwhile my large case study of corporatism and development in the Dominican Republic was published in 1975,⁴¹ and my book on Portuguese corporatism in 1977.⁴² In the 1980s and 1990s while working in Washington, D.C., I mainly wrote on foreign policy issues, but returned to the corporatism themes in *Transitions to Democracy in Spain and Portugal* (1988),⁴³ *Corporatism and Comparative Politics* (1996),⁴⁴ *The Soul of Latin America* (2001),⁴⁵ and *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America – Revisited* (2004).⁴⁶ The published record is a rather complete one; I'd like to think that my writings on the corporatism theme became more sophisticated and refined over the decades.

I can't presume to speak for the other early scholars of corporatism but I assume their trajectories were not altogether different from mine. For example, Ronald Newton similarly studied under McAlister at Florida and then did case study work on corporatism in Argentina⁴⁷ – historically, under Perón, and then continuing in the post-Perón opening to democracy. James Malloy was intrigued by the corporatist-syndicalist organization of the National Revolutionary Movement (NMR) in Bolivia, the subject of his doctoral dissertation and later books.⁴⁸ Martin Heisler studied the ongoing presence of corporatism in the postwar states of Europe and elevated it into a full-blown model of the European polity.⁴⁹

Philippe Schmitter, similarly, discovered corporatism in his case studies of interest representation in Brazil and Portugal.⁵⁰ In the earliest of these, the Brazil study, Schmitter focused on both the cultural and the institutional aspects of corporatism; but by the time he did the Portugal study he focused only on institutional factors and turned into a critic of corporatism's cultural underpinnings. Schmitter also had the advantage, along with Heisler, of discovering corporatism in Northern Europe before most of the rest of us did. Hence he could write of corporatism as a general theory devoid

of any regional or culture-area ties, while others of us – Malloy, Newton, Fredrick Pike, myself – were still focused on the Latin American or, in my case, Iberian-Latin American area study. Nevertheless Schmitter's definition of corporatism (a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports⁵¹) was still tied to the more authoritarian versions of his early case studies, Brazil and Portugal, and fit only uncomfortably with the democratic corporatism practiced in Germany, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries. His emphasis on institutions alone as *the* cause of corporatism and his scathing criticism of cultural backgrounds and approaches caused him to miss a great deal in the history and functioning of corporatism not only in Southern Europe but, it now turns out, in Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands, among others, as well – see below for more discussion.

The publication of the article on the corporative model in *World Politics* in January, 1973, had an explosive and immediate impact on the entire field of Latin American studies. For, like me, there was a whole generation of 1960s-1970s young scholars and graduate students who had been trained in both Easton-Rostow-Lipset-Almond systems theory *and* in Latin American area studies. Yet when these young scholars went out into the field to write their doctoral dissertations, they found almost to a person that the grandiose, universal systems theory of Easton and Almond in which they'd been trained "didn't fit" the countries where they did their research. Only two explanations were possible: either the systems theory they employed was correct and the countries they studied were, in the word of the time, "dysfunctional"; or else the theory was wrong and the countries involved had their own system but one that didn't conform to the Almondian scheme.

Eventually by the early 1970s enough dissertations and books on enough countries had been written that we'd concluded it was the theory that was wrong as well as, perhaps, the countries. That's why the corporatism model received such a warm reception in the field, for it managed to resurrect grand systems theory and comparative politics analysis but in a way that made it compatible with the particular Latin American experience. My contribution was to tie together the systems theory of the comparative politics field with the area studies experience of Latin America in new, innovative, and challenging ways. The model had a clear and major impact on a field that had long been struggling with the same issues as I: how to bring the broad field of Latin American

studies into mainstream political science,⁵² and at the same time how to fashion the main political science theory and approaches so that they had *relevance* for Latin America. That is what the corporatist framework provided.*

The Argument

When I first went to Latin America in the 1960s, I found few of the elements I'd been conditioned to look for from my graduate training. I found very little input-turnover-output à la Easton's systems theory; instead I found mostly disorganization, dysfunction, and chaos in the countries I studied, though I later came to understand there was a "system," of sorts, to the chaos. I didn't find much economic development leading to social justice and an age of high mass consumption à la Rostow; instead I found a lot of economic stagnation and poverty, coupled with corruption and bloated, inefficient, non-performing state bureaucracies derived from the ISI (import-substitution-industrialization) model. Nor did I find from Lipset and Deutsch much social mobilization and a growing middle class leading to democracy; rather, I found, à la Petras⁵³ and Huntington,⁵⁴ a fragmented middle class without a commitment to democracy and social mobilization that provoked the established and elite interests (Army, Church, oligarchy) to sponsor *coups d'état* and long-term military authoritarianism, and not any transition to democracy. Finally, I found very little of Almond's functionalism: almost no interest articulation or interest aggregation, as he described it, no real rule-making or rule-adjudication, but mostly disruption, clan and extended family rivalries, clientelism and patrimonialism, fragmentation, and national breakdowns into revolution, civil war, U.S. military interventions, and disintegration. After observing this in several countries, I concluded that something was clearly wrong ("dysfunctional") not just with the countries I studied but also with the very models I had initially used to study them.

So I began to devise my own model, derived not from some pre-conceived theory of how modernization *ought* to proceed, as above, but from my own field experiences. I discovered that the paradigms and systems theory I had been using didn't fit the countries I wanted to study. I discovered also, parallel to Islam

in the Middle East or Confucianism in East Asia, that in Latin America there was a whole *system* of thought, history, culture, religion, and economic and sociopolitical organization "out there" that failed to conform to the Western model. If I still wanted to be a systems analyst, I reasoned, I would have to formulate my own system paradigm. That is what the "corporative model" was all about.

What would be the ingredients in such a model? First I looked at political theory and discovered there was a rich history and tradition of Catholic political thought and sociology especially relevant to Latin America with which most scholars were unfamiliar and which lay outside the usual (and secularizing) tradition that ran from medieval to Machiavelli, to Hobbes and Locke, to Rousseau and the Enlightenment, to Kant and Hegel, and to the moderns: Marx, Mill, Durkheim, Weber, T.H. Green. Second I looked at class structure and social organization, discovering not only a hierarchical system of caste and class but also a vertical system of separate, segmented, *corporatist* estates and professional associations (Army, Church, oligarchy, bureaucracy, university, guilds, unions, peasant organizations, etc.) that remained in place and had not disappeared as modernization went forward. Third, I discovered in the political sphere a strong state system that regulated and sought to control the group life that swirled about it, either through cooptation in some cases or repression in others. This was a far cry from the inevitable-progression-to-democracy that Rostow, Lipset, Almond, and most of the development literature suggested. It was out of these three ingredients that I built my corporatist model.**

I defined corporatism as "a system of social and political organization in which major societal and interest groups are integrated into the governmental system, often on a monopolistic basis or under state guidance, tutelage and control, to achieve coordinated national development."⁵⁵ Note the role of the state in this system and its relations to the main *corporate* or societal interest groups that make up political society. I saw the Latin American and Iberian nations as a set of complex systems in which the state seeks to enhance and expand its power including over the corporate groups (still in Latin America more a medieval than a modern concept) that swirl around it, while the corporate groups and interests seek to maintain some degree of constitutionally or

* In my files I have an entire manila folder of letters from Latin America scholars telling me how much they appreciated the corporative focus, that it opened their eyes to new research possibilities, and, most importantly for the argument presented here, that it made what they saw as a critical connection tying the mushrooming field of Latin American studies (7000 members of the Latin American Studies Association) together with mainstream political science and comparative politics. This sheaf of supportive letters also help us understand why the early scholars in this field were so surprised and even dumbstruck for a time when the criticism of the model came.

** Space considerations rule out a longer treatment here, which in any case focuses on the anatomy and political sociology of the corporatism concept. Readers interested in more detailed exposition can pursue the items referenced above.

organic law-mandated autonomy from it, to gang up to resist the state, or perhaps, take it over for themselves. I purposely kept the definition quite general initially because I wanted it to be broad enough to cover a variety of institutional arrangements. And second, I wanted to keep it somewhat vague because, with corporatism, I sought to capture a mood, a style, a whole way of thinking and operating – a political culture – rather than any precise institutional arrangement. There could, in other words, be varieties of corporatism just as there were varieties of liberal democracies and of Marxist regimes.

What to call this model that I had fashioned? I was not, it may be surprising to hear, necessarily wedded to the term corporatism. I played around with several possibilities, including patrimonialism, organicism, “Mediterranean politics,” and corporatism – all of which as descriptive terms might have served quite nicely. I wasn’t thinking at the time of a precise analytic term, subject, by political science criteria, to rigorous testing and empiricism. Rather I was looking for a shorthand label that would describe what my field research was revealing. I chose the term “corporatism” because (1) it had a nice ring to it, (2) it described nicely albeit incompletely the main features I had observed about Latin American politics, and (3) while the other terms were already being used (“patrimonialism” by Riordan Roett, “organic statism” by Alfred Stepan), no one was employing the corporatism label. But the very use of this term descriptively set me up for the charges that I had used it too vaguely, without a rigorous definition, and without testable hypotheses. The term also carried connotations that in some quarters meant it was loaded.*

In my mind, then, corporatism was a way of looking at (a *verstehen* approach) and understanding Latin America and Iberia on their own terms, in their own language and cultural conditions, in their own sociopolitical context, rather than through the biased lenses of U.S. and European-based developmentalism. Among some colleagues in the 1960s and 1970s this repudiation of the developmentalist literature as ill-fitting and inappropriate in the Latin American context led to Marxian dependency theory; in my case, since I was equally critical of the Marxist categories as applied to Latin America, it led to corporatism – not in the politically charged way that the footnote on the previous page describes and not yet as a rigorously analytic and testable concept. That could come later, I thought, once we knew more and had done other case studies; at the time I sought to use corporatism only in a broad and descriptive sense, enabling students and

scholars to understand the Latin America area better through *its own* socio-political institutions and not from the point of view of ill-fitting imported models, be they Rostovian, Almondian, or Marxian. Too rigorous a definition at this early stage of the concept, I reasoned, was premature and could well lead to our missing important aspects that need to be better examined.

The Critics

In retrospect, now looking back over some thirty-five years, two things stand out concerning the criticisms of the corporatist model. The first is, how little criticism there has been. The second is, how predictable the criticisms that have been leveled have been, given both the flaws and the self-limitations in the model as it was originally presented. By now, corporatism is widely accepted as one of the major approaches within comparative politics as well as Latin American studies. At the same time, the concept has been refashioned, redefined, and reformulated over these three and a half decades in response to a number of the early criticisms. Precisely, in my mind, how the scholarly enterprise ought to proceed.

The first serious, scholarly criticism of the corporatist model came from Prof. Linn Hammergren, then of Vanderbilt University.⁵⁶ Based on her extensive field work studying local government administration in Peru, Prof. Hammergren argued that the approach was too “architectonic.” That by focusing only on institutions at the national political level, the model ignored that most government designs, corporatist or other, had little effect at local levels where the government’s reach and writ were small. It was all well and good, Prof. Hammergren said, for government at the national or center level to declare itself “corporatist” as the Peruvian government of 1968-75 did; but unless that government’s policies and programs reach down to the level of the local village, which it did not or at best only weakly, it does not make much difference what the government calls itself, what label it uses.⁵⁷

I agree with much of Prof. Hammergren’s comment. Most of the state systems in Latin America are strong in aspiration but weak in effective policy implementation. That is true whether the system is called corporatist or something else. Of course, the long-lived dictatorships in Latin America – Trujillo, Somoza, Stroessner, Castro – with spies, agents, or party organizations in every town and village, could maintain control and make their policies felt even at local levels. But in general Prof. Hammergren

* It was hard to write about corporatism as a neutral, social-scientific term because of its widespread association with 1930s fascism and World War II. That was brought home to me after a lecture in the Netherlands when an elderly gentleman came up to me afterwards and said he had “fought” corporatism in World War II. “And now you’re asking me to accept that as a neutral, descriptive term as applied to certain countries,” he went on; “I cannot accept that.”

is correct: what goes on at the national level in the Third World often has little immediate effect at local levels. On the other hand, no one would deny, including Prof. Hammergren, that who or what faction is in control at the national level, and the model, system, or policy they put in place, does make a major difference in the system as a whole.

A second criticism of the corporatist model and approach came from the Marxist left.⁵⁸ This took the form of a full-length critique in a radical-leftist journal, *Latin American Perspectives*. The author, Keith A. Haynes, was a young scholar strongly influenced by Marxian dependency theory. The critique, as would be expected, focused more on the “sins” of omission in my corporative model than any sins of commission, mainly the lack of attention to class factors, capitalism, and U.S. imperialism and interventions. Worse, from the critic’s point of view, the focus on corporatism detracted attention from the all-important factor of class structure and class struggle.

In response, as one who has long been a critic, first of all, of U.S. military interventions in Latin America, especially involving the 1965 Dominican Republic intervention which almost cost me my first academic job,⁵⁹ I don’t think I need to be apologetic on this score at all. Second, the corporative framework was aimed at uncovering the *internal*, *Latin American* political process – though I now agree it would have been enriched had I brought in such exogenous factors as U.S. Embassy machinations in internal Latin American affair or the impact of the IMF, World Bank, and global economic forces on domestic politics. Third, the model I presented sought to focus attention on both class-caste and corporate divisions in society and how these two are interrelated, with class structure demonstrating hierarchical social differentiation and corporatism showing the vertical, segmented, or “pillared” structure of society. I actually believe that is the correct way to view Latin American social structure, through both class-caste *and* corporate lenses and their interrelations, and I do not see any need to offer a corrective on that score.⁶⁰

A third criticism centers on the absence, in my original formulation of the model, of a clear definition of corporatism.⁶¹ To this charge I need to plead guilty, or at least partially so. In defense, two factors need to be taken in account. The first is that in later writings I did offer a clear definition of corporatism amenable to testable hypotheses.⁶² Second, at the time the original model was published in *World Politics*, my intention, as indicated, was to describe a mood, a certain way of thinking and organizing Iberian and Latin American national social and political life that was not present in the United States, and not to offer a rigorous definition focused on a particular set of institutional arrangements. My definition in other words encompassed political-cultural variables as well as institutional ones. I thought that persons who had had

serious academic training on Latin America area studies, and who had the extensive field experience in the region, would surely come to the same conclusions: that Latin American corporatism had been shaped by both political-cultural and by institutional or structured factors. To me this was so obvious as to be self-evident.

An accompanying criticism was that the approach was “culturalist.” And therefore subject to all the criticisms that cultural approaches are often subject to: that they are vague, tautological, involve national stereotypes, and are used as an imprecise, catch-all explanation when no other “serious” explanation is possible.

Well, first of all, I see no reason to apologize for emphasizing culture: not only is it important (maybe *the* most important factor) but it is also in a long and distinguished political-sociological tradition that includes Max Weber,⁶³ Margaret Mead,⁶⁴ Ruth Benedict,⁶⁵ Clifford Geertz,⁶⁶ Almond-Verba,⁶⁷ Peter Berger,⁶⁸ Samuel Huntington,⁶⁹ Harry Eckstein,⁷⁰ Aaron Wildavsky,⁷¹ Mary Douglas,⁷² David Landes,⁷³ and Ronald Inglehart⁷⁴ – not bad company, one would have to concede. Second, despite the effort to oversimplify and typecast my writings this way, I have never been an advocate for a purely culturalist approach. Careful readers of these writings, both case study and comparative studies as well as more theoretical materials, will know I stress multicausation, the *interrelations* of economic, social, geographical, historical, class, sociopolitical, institutional, and cultural variables.⁷⁵ No one of these may be used to the exclusion of others, nor should a single-causal explanation be elevated into an importance it does not have. I have *never* advocated a monolithic culturalist explanation, though it is true that in some writings I have emphasized culture more than the other factors listed. But that is a matter of taste and research preference, not a claim that culture as an explanation is necessarily to be privileged over other explanations.

As to whether culturalist explanations are vague, tautological, or faulty in other ways, I refer the reader to the recent works of Ronald Inglehart who has given us some of the most interesting and sophisticated work in the field, as cited above. Not coincidentally, Inglehart’s findings, scientifically derived, support my own research conclusions on Latin America; more than that, Inglehart’s work suggests that of all the explanations listed above, the political-culture one may carry the most explanatory power.⁷⁶

One other issue deserves mention in this context, and that involves the question of whether there is a “distinct tradition” in Latin America or not. Yes and no. Bear in mind that when I formulated “the corporative model” and wrote about the “distinct tradition,” my field research experience was limited to Latin America, Portugal, and Spain, with only brief tourist trips (*not* extensive research experience) in northern, western, and central Europe. So when I wrote of Iberia and Latin America representing

a “distinct tradition,” I had in mind three things: (1) Latin America with its Catholic history and corporatist sociopolitical structures was very different from the “Anglo-Protestant” (Samuel Huntington’s term) tradition of the United States; (2) Latin America failed to conform to the supposedly universal but actually quite Euro-American and ethnocentric models that Rostow, Almond, *et. al.* had concocted for them; and (3) Iberia and Latin America, as a product of sixteenth century Spain and Portugal, were predominantly “Western” in their main institutions but representing, à la Louis Hartz’s “fragments” thesis,⁷⁷ a distinct (“Catholic,” “Hispanic,” “Southern European,” “Mediterranean,” – all of these designations with rich literatures in themselves that we cannot go into here, but for starters see the extensive writings of Fernand Braudel⁷⁸) and unique history within the Western one.

It was only a few years later, by which time other scholars of corporatism had discovered and begun to dissect its manifestations in Northern Europe (Austria, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Scandinavia) that I myself was able to do extensive field research in both Austria and the Netherlands. In the Austria research, I wrestled with the issue of whether corporatism there was more Catholic and “Southern European” (like Italy or Spain) or Germanic and Northern European (more like Scandinavia). The answer was, a little of both. In the Netherlands, I was particularly interested in the corporatism writings of Calvinist scholar (and later prime minister) Abraham Kuyper,⁷⁹ (1) because he wrote at about the same time as the famous Catholic “corporatist” encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, and (2) because I had long known about the Protestant version of corporatism but had not previously had the opportunity to explore it further. The upshot of this research would be the conclusion that (1) the Iberian-Latin American version of corporatism was still unique and distinctive, but (2) corporatism per se was not, and (3) there was a greater variety of corporatism than I had earlier thought.

One further element in this part of the story is relevant, and that involves the fact that after I wrote the original *World Politics* piece containing the corporatist model, I received dozens of unsolicited letters (this is before email!) from all over the world saying, in effect, “thank you for your analysis; your model is relevant in my country as well.” The letters came from such diverse countries as the Philippines (not unexpected, since it, like Latin America, had had centuries of Spanish Catholicism and imperialism), Indonesia, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Egypt, and Tunisia. Once again, it was not until some years later that I was able to visit most of these countries and see their brands of corporatism for myself. I was fascinated by the rich variation in corporatist forms and institutions that I observed. But the conclusions were not much different from those I’d reached ten to twenty years earlier when working in Northern

Europe: (1) corporatism was not unique to Latin America or even to the Western tradition in its several varieties, (2) there were a variety of corporatist forms and practices relating both to the history and culture of the various countries and to their special sociopolitical or institutional arrangements, which were different from both my Iberic-Latin model and Schmitter’s neo-corporatist one; and (3) the particular Iberic-Latin American kind (Catholic, quasi-medieval) was still quite unique and distinctive, although there were parallels in other countries.⁸⁰

The Decline of Corporatism?

During the 1980s and 1990s, both corporatism and the study of it went into decline. Among the reasons for this were the following:

- 1) *Democratization.* The “Third Wave”⁸¹ of democratization that began in the 1970s and spread widely in the 1980s and 1990s (including Spain, Portugal, Latin America, Asia, Russia, Eastern Europe) led to far greater freedom for social, political, and corporate interest groups. Free associability and pluralism would, presumably, undercut state regulation and control of interest groups, or corporatism. “Transitions to democracy” became the new and attractive research focus.
- 2) *Greater mobility of labor and capital.* The lowering of tariff barriers and the greater mobility of both labor and capital (as in the EU) would, presumably, decrease the ability of national governments to control and regulate organized labor or business enterprises, thus reducing the hold of corporatism.⁸²
- 3) *The End of the Cold War.* The end of the Cold War ended the choice between democracy and Marxism-Leninism. Now, not only was democracy “the only game in town,” but there was no room or need for purported “third ways” between democracy and communism, such as corporatism.
- 4) *Privatization and state downsizing.* Privatization and state downsizing, which had the goals of creating more efficient capitalistic markets and reducing bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption, also had the effect of reducing corporatism. When you privatize and reduce the size and reach of the state, you also reduce the capacity of the state to regulate the economy as well as corporatist interest groups.
- 5) *The “Washington Consensus.”* The Washington Consensus, which triumphed as U.S. policy toward Latin America and elsewhere in the 1990s, championed free trade, democracy, and open markets. To the extent these policy initiatives were implemented, corporatism, for the reasons indicated above, would be reduced.
- 6) *Globalization.* Many of the trends indicated above can be subsumed under the heading of “globalization.” Globalization

as here used may have political (democratization) as well as economic (free trade, open markets, free movement of labor and capital, multinational corporations) aspects.⁸³ To the extent globalization triumphs, therefore, corporatism would also be reduced.

I have to say that I accepted most of these arguments for a time – and still do, but to a lesser extent than ten-fifteen years ago. My “biographer” and colleague, Hiroshi Matsushita, has recently conveyed to me how shocked he, his colleagues, and their students were when, in 1987, on a lecturing tour of Japan, I announced to several audiences that I had “abandoned” my earlier focus and writings on corporatism. Prof. Matsushita’s recollections may be better than mine, for I do not recall using the term abandoned; if I did use that word, it was a poor choice of phrasing because what I meant to convey was that corporatism had been partially eclipsed, not that it had been erased. Perhaps something was lost in the translation from English to Japanese.

Prof. Matsushita’s notes and writings from that period indicate that I had made three basic arguments. Note that these lectures were delivered before the end of the Cold War and before the attention to globalization, and therefore do not include all the arguments which, now with a longer historical perspective, are listed above. First, following Allan Bloom,⁸⁴ Francis Fukuyama,⁸⁵ and Samuel Huntington,⁸⁶ I had argued that on a global basis democracy was now becoming universal, enjoyed worldwide legitimacy, and therefore no other system or “ism,” including corporatism, was permissible. Second, specifically in Latin America, democracy had triumphed in nineteen of the twenty countries (all except Cuba) and therefore corporatism and authoritarianism – the “evil option,” about which I had earlier written – were no longer permissible. Third, I had justified U.S. pressure against Nicaragua when it was under Sandinista rule in the 1980s, and therefore, according to Prof. Matsushita, had also abandoned my earlier position of cultural relativism. But I had argued for at least some degree of cultural relativism on the basis that areas like East Asia, the Islamic world, and Latin America had to find *their own, indigenous* path to development, but I did not see the importation of a foreign ideology, Marxism or Marxism-Leninism, into Nicaragua as representing such an indigenous or home-grown model.⁸⁷

Authoritarianism and Corporatism – Revisited

Whatever the validity of Prof. Matsushita’s recollections of my evolving position on corporatism – he sees a dramatic shift, I see only a modest evolution – he and I agree that in recent books I have gone back to the original position. The first of these, *The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition* (Yale

University Press, 2001), is a book that I had been meaning to write for thirty years and only got around to, because of other writing commitments, in the late 1990s. It is the full-length treatment of corporatism and the corporatist model in Iberia and Latin America that scholars and colleagues had been urging me to write ever since the first iteration of that model came out in *World Politics* in 1973.

The book goes back deep into Iberian-Latin American history, political theory, sociology, and development. It shows the origins of Iberic-Latin civilization in ancient Greek political theory; Roman law, institutions, and the corporative organization of society; and medieval Catholic thought and social organization. It particularly focuses on the formative sixteenth century, the writings of Suárez and that quite remarkable group of Spanish Jesuits who presented a model of top-down, corporatist, Christian, state-society relations alternative to the secularist writings of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke; and the carryover of the institutions and the political culture undergirding it to the New World. It then proceeds to show how continuous this tradition and set of institutions were, surviving the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century, independence and the challenge of liberalism in the nineteenth century, and the rise of fascism and Marxism-Leninism, and the challenge of democratization, in the twentieth. But if Latin America presents a distinct model and tradition of development, the book asks in its last two chapters, then what are the implications of this often illiberal and only partially democratic culture and society both for Latin America and for U.S. foreign policy, which now has the advancement of democracy as its main operating premise?

The second book where we return to these and similar themes is an edited volume entitled *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America – Revisited* (University of Florida Press, 2004). The book is obviously a revised look at a well-known 1977 book with the same title, edited by James M. Malloy, written at the height of the scholarly attention to corporatism in the mid-1970s. But then, as Latin America undertook a major transition to democracy, Malloy’s work on corporatism, as did my own, went into eclipse for a time as new models of civil society, social movements, and democratization flourished. Nevertheless by the middle-to-end of the 1990s, not only was it clear that Latin American democracy was often incomplete, illiberal, and not very democratic (“democracy with adjectives”),⁸⁸ but it also became obvious to quite a number of scholars that corporatism was still alive and functioning, often in modified form, even in this era of supposed democratization. Hence the idea for a new, or “revisited,” look at the persistence of corporatism and authoritarianism in Latin America.

The book brought together some of the foremost scholars in the field, including David Scott Palmer, Brian Loveman, David Myers, Harvey Kline, Linda Chen, Timothy Power, Mahrukh Doctor,

George Grayson, and Steve Ropp. There were chapters on the Andes countries, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Central America. There were theoretical chapters by Paul S. Adams on corporatism and by Menno Vellinga on the state. I wrote an Introduction and Conclusion, first advancing the argument and then summing up the findings.

The main finding of the book was that while democracy and pluralism have advanced in much of Latin America, corporatism has also demonstrated a quite remarkable resilience and persistence even within ostensibly democratic regimes. This finding is quite in keeping with the conclusions reached by Fareed Zakaria in *Illiberal Democracy*,⁸⁹ Marina Ottaway in her studies of the persistence of authoritarianism in Africa,⁹⁰ and by other scholars who find either that the so-called “Third Wave” of democracy has stalled or even passed, and/or that it has produced many mixed or hybrid systems – such as “mixed,” “controlled,” “limited,” etc.

The specific findings of our book include the following:

- 1) While corporatism in many countries was formally abolished in law and constitution, little follow-up enabling legislation was ever passed, with the result that the old labor laws, labor courts, government arbitration panels, etc. of corporatism often continue to operate.
- 2) Many countries continue to treat such organized bodies as the Church, the armed forces, business associations (guilds), organized labor, and so on under the older corporatist rubric.
- 3) Many of the new, so-called “pacts” between business, labor and the state are still corporative in character.
- 4) So are many of the new “public-private partnerships” – corporatism in updated dress.
- 5) Corporatist practices are still prevalent particularly in the areas of labor relations, social welfare (group categories), and social policy in general.
- 6) Many government agencies – regulatory agencies, councils of state, administrative bodies – continue to have corporative, functional, or sectoral systems of representation.
- 7) The language of politics is still often corporatist: *gremios* (guilds), *sindicatos* (syndicates), *corporaciones* (interest groups), *fueros* (group rights), *verbas* (grants), *autonomias* (local or regional groups), and so on.
- 8) Newer social groups – women, peasants, indigenous, domestics – are being brought into the political process under many of the same corporatist repression/cooptation strategies that earlier were used with business, labor, and middle class professional groups.
- 9) While corporatism in many countries has been formally abolished at the national level, it is being resurrected at local or perhaps state levels where mayors, governors, and town councils are forcing religious, human rights, labor, indigenous,

and other groups to register, acquire juridical personality, and reveal funding and membership lists – all precisely what corporatist systems do.

- 10) Corporatism tends to emerge in times of crisis. As the Latin American (and other) countries experience economic and/or political crises, and as the state once again comes to play a larger role in the economy, we can expect corporatist regulatory controls over social groups to be resurrected as well.

All this, to my mind, makes Latin America very exciting and interesting again in a research sense. For if the only developmental outcome in the region were open markets, American-style democracy, and free trade – the Washington consensus – it would be a quite boring area to study. But all these mixed, hybrid, and crazy-quilt forms of democracy *and* corporatism, free markets *and* statism, and top-down controls *and* free associability make Latin America a very interesting place to study. Perhaps, contrary to Fukuyama, the “great systems debate” is not yet over, at least in Latin America.

Conclusions

The first thing to say in conclusion is that, looking back over thirty-five years, corporatism has now been widely accepted as one of the main approaches or theoretical frameworks in the political science / comparative politics field. Corporatism is no longer “exotic”; rather, it is now routinely used in discussions of sociopolitical organization and state-society relations in different countries and regions of the world. Corporatism is no longer so controversial and has become an accepted part of the comparative politics discourse: when we see corporatism we now call it that without much dispute or need for further explanation. Everyone knows what it is and uses the term. Such routinization in the use of the term and the corporatism literature is perhaps the best indication of its acceptance: where it is useful and sheds light on what we are studying, we use the corporatist literature and approach; where not, we search for other models. This is as it should be and how new approaches get incorporated into the field.⁹¹

A second conclusion relates to the persistence – surprising to some – of corporatism even under democracy. By the 1990s, a transitions-to-democracy paradigm, in Latin America and other areas, was beginning to replace the earlier corporatist one, on the assumption that corporatism and authoritarianism went together and once the latter was overthrown, the former would also give way to free associability and pluralism. That has indeed occurred in many countries but only partially so. By now we have come to understand that most of the transitions to democracy of the past

two decades were only partial and incomplete, producing mainly illiberal democracy and many mixed forms. But those mixes, as outlined in the previous section, contain many corporatist features; indeed the persistence of corporatism, and now the rise in some Latin American countries of neocorporatism, even *within* democratic regimes, is one of the great unstudied issues of these times.

Third, it is striking that in the new literature, the old debate between the cultural versus the structural-institutional basis of corporatism is still alive and even well and flourishing. In Austria, for example, often cited as the most corporatist country in the world, and therefore the one where globalization, EU policy, the multinationalization of business and labor, etc. should have produced a decline of corporatism, that has not necessarily happened. Corporatism may be as strong as ever. Austrian scholars attribute that both to the strong institutionalization of corporatism in Austria, *and* to its history and culture as a Catholic, Hapsburgian (like Spain), “pillared” (*lager*), medieval guild-state, and bureaucratic-top-down society and country.⁹² Similarly in Latin America: clearly one of the impediments to greater, deeper democratization has been institutional weaknesses, but part of the answer lies also in the fact that even now Latin America has not fully or completely embraced democracy, and certainly not in its liberal, atomistic, individualistic, Lockean, North American form.⁹³ To the extent Latin America is undemocratic, it tends to be corporatist and organic-statist.

Fourth, we need to specify where and how, precisely, the corporatist model is still useful. Clearly Latin America has democratized at least partially over the last thirty years, incorporating the political party, electoral, and representational arenas. Those are what political scientists, institutionalists, and the transitions-to-democracy literature have both concentrated on and championed. But I wish to suggest that there are entire other arenas of social and political relations “out there” that are not particularly democratic and may be more corporatist than democratic. These include, in whole or in part, the realms of labor relations, state-society relations, government social policy, the role of the state and government decision-making, and the role and position of the armed forces, religious groups, labor unions, business groups, university, bureaucracy, etc. (all corporatist or semi-corporatist groups) *vis-à-vis* the central authority. Indeed I would submit there are two main arenas of politics in Latin America, one liberal-democratic, one corporatist, existing side by side. Part of the job of a Latin American leader these days is to manage and reconcile both of these arenas as well as the overlaps, conflicts, and interrelations between them.⁹⁴

Finally, let me emphasize that the corporatist model as here and elsewhere⁹⁵ presented should be viewed as a changing and

dynamic model, not a static or immobile one. New groups rise and need to be accommodated to the system while old ones may fade in influence. New issues need to be faced and the outside world (globalization) keeps imposing. Perhaps most important for this discussion is that while an older form of authoritarianism or closed corporatism in Latin America is in decline, a newer form of European-style open or neocorporatism may be gaining ground. Working in favor of that trend are both institutional tendencies and the cultural continuity themes discussed earlier. Working against it is the fact that Latin America’s earlier experience with authoritarianism and corporatism was such an unhappy one that it does not wish to hear that word again, even in its “neo” forms. But if that is the case, if Latin America’s liberal-democratic institutions, as seems evident, are still weak and inchoate, and it would prefer not to mention its other or corporatist history and tradition, then one could probably predict that area will face ongoing problems of governance, effectiveness, and stability.

Endnotes

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- 14 The thesis was written in 1962; it came out in book form as Howard J. Wiarda, *Dictatorship and Development: The Methods of Control in Trujillo's Dominican Republic* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1968).
- 15 Howard J. Wiarda, "Mexico: The Unraveling of a Corporatist Regime," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 30 (Winter, 1988-89) 1-28.
- 16 Steve C. Ropp, "What about Corporatism in Central America?" in Howard J. Wiarda (ed.), *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America – Revisited* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2004) 256-81.
- 17 Howard J. Wiarda, *Dictatorship, Development, and Disintegration: Politics and Social Change in the Dominican Republic* (Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilm, for the Center for Latin American Studies, University of Massachusetts, 1975) 3 volumes.
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- 35 Wiarda, *The Methods of Control*.
- 36 Wiarda, *The Brazilian Catholic Labor Movement*.
- 37 Howard J. Wiarda, "Elites in Crisis: The Decline of the Old Order and the Fragmentation of the New in Latin America," Presentation at the Mershon Center, Ohio State University, 1970. Half of that paper became the *World Politics* article of 1973; the first and introductory part, "Elites in Crisis," was incorporated as the introductory theoretical chapter in Wiarda, *Dictatorship, Development, and Disintegration*, and was later published as a separate chapter in Wiarda, *Corporatism and Development in Latin America*.

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