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Marc Becker, *The FBI in Latin America: The Ecuador Files* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, \$26.95). Pp. 336. ISBN 978 0 8223 6908 0.

Marc Becker's *The FBI in Latin America* is an interesting book that suffers from a minor identity crisis. The title suggests that the book will be about the FBI in Latin America – or, more specifically, in Ecuador – but in the introduction Becker explains that what he actually intends to do is use FBI records “not for what they reveal about the nature of U.S. political intervention in Latin America but, rather, for what they divulge about leftist struggles for a more equitable and just world” (4). It is somewhat ironic, then, that the strongest and most original elements of Becker's book are the sections about the FBI and the sections about leftist movements that do not use FBI sources.

The first chapter examines the history of the FBI's intelligence-gathering operations in Latin America. Whereas other work on this topic has focussed on US efforts to counter the Nazi menace in the region, Becker uses the case of Ecuador to demonstrate that even during World War II, J. Edgar Hoover and his bureau frequently paid more attention to the political left than to the far right. Furthermore, Becker argues that “the agency was more concerned with labor leaders who might be positioned to challenge U.S. economic interests than ideological communists who forwarded radical critiques of society” (15). This chapter provides not only an innovative and convincing interpretation of FBI and US priorities in Latin America, but also a useful overview of how the bureau operated in the region. In so doing, it helps uncover the deeper history of US anticommunist intervention in Latin America, a story that usually begins with the onset of the Cold War.

The remaining six chapters trace the growth and activities of leftist movements in Ecuador, as well as US interpretations of their struggles. Becker examines the origins of the Communist Party of Ecuador and other leftist organizations in chapter 2, the efforts of the country's labor movement in chapter 3, and the Glorious May Revolution of 1944, or “La Gloriosa,” in chapter 4. Chapter 5 relates the debates surrounding the creation of a new national constitution, chapter 6 analyzes the consequences of President José María Velasco Ibarra's *autogolpe* (coup against his own government) in 1946, and chapter 7 describes the FBI's departure from Ecuador and Velasco Ibarra's removal from power in 1947. Throughout these chapters, Becker focusses on debates within the left that essentially boiled down to whether it was better to legislate political reform in collaboration with the government and other groups, or to demand radical structural change through social movements.

The book's identity crisis arises from the tension between the title and Becker's stated goal of utilizing FBI records to write a new history of Ecuadorean leftist movements. Intelligence sources are by their nature unreliable; Becker acknowledges multiple times throughout the book that the FBI had a “partial and superficial understanding of Latin American realities” (63), operated with “a degree of arbitrariness” (70), and provided “incomplete and inaccurate information” (142). As a result of these shortcomings, intelligence sources frequently tell us more about their authors than about their subjects. When Becker uses the FBI records to gain insight into the bureau and the larger US project in Latin America, he is on relatively solid footing and is able to provide new and valuable interpretations. He is on shakier ground when he

tries to use the “superficial,” “arbitrary,” “incomplete,” and “inaccurate” FBI reports to shed light on leftist activities and debates. In fact, the most illuminating discussions of leftist activities in the book, such as the analysis of the 1943 National Labor Congress and the 1944 Constituent Assembly to write the new constitution, draw not on FBI reports but on newspaper accounts.

*The FBI in Latin America* is an important and original book, even if Becker doesn't quite deliver on the contradictory promises that he makes in the title and the introduction. It offers new interpretations and information about both the FBI's operations in Latin America and Ecuador's leftist movements, and should attract attention from those who study these subjects as well as wider issues of US–Latin American relations and Latin American social movements.

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