H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ronn F. Pineo. *Social and Economic Reform in Ecuador: Life and Work in Guayaquil.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996. xviii + 245 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-1437-1.

Reviewed by Marc Becker (University of Kansas)

Published on H-LatAm (February, 1997)

Urbanization in Ecuador

As the title implies, this is a history of the impact of social and economic governmental policies on the people of Guayaquil, Ecuador, from 1870 to 1930. This was a period of dramatic changes in Guayaquil, a port city on the Pacific Coast. Ronn Pineo locates his analysis in a discussion of the changes in the city occasioned by a monoculture export economy and massive migration to the city.

As Pineo notes in the introduction, "the entire field of social history remains in its absolute infancy" in Ecuador. Until recently, Ecuador has received little attention from historians, and most studies of the country have focused on the colonial period, on the highlands, and on political history or partisan biographies. "Indeed," Pineo concludes, "for the whole field of Ecuadorian historiography there is much, much left to do" (p. xvii). The difficulties of conducting such a study on Ecuador are further complicated by the lack of proper archival and synthetic sources. In addition, frequent fires have destroyed many documents in Guayaquil. Nevertheless, this book begins to fill gaps in our knowledge of this history.

Pineo lays out three themes he wishes to explore in this book: 1) the economic growth of the Ecuadorian coast, in particular the port of Guayaquil; 2) the social dilemmas resulting from rapid urbanization; and 3) city policies that sought to address these economic and social issues. Pineo successfully combines these economic, social, and political aspects into a social history that approaches the history of Ecuador's largest city from the perspective of ordinary people.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The second chapter explores the economic geography of the coast, which allowed for the development of an export economy. In particular, changes in land tenure patterns in the highlands forced a migration to the coast, with a corresponding shift in the demographic and socio-economic nature of the entire country. The following chapter is an economic history that explores the structure of Ecuador's cacao export economy. In the late nineteenth century, Ecuador became highly dependent on cacao exportation. The country produced two-thirds of the world's cacao, and cacao comprised three-fourths of Ecuador's exports. As could be expected, Ecuador's economy rose and fell with the price of cacao on the world market.

Pineo notes in chapter 3 that, because of the lack of a proper infrastructure in Ecuador, it was cheaper for Guayaquil to import food than to transport it from the Sierra highlands. He develops these themes further in the fourth chapter, "The Political Economy of Regionalism." Regional division between Quito and the highlands and Guayaquil on the coast is a major theme in Ecuadorian history. Because most archives in Ecuador are located in the capital of Quito and most historians live and work there, Pineo's work provides a somewhat unique perspective on this theme of regionalism by approaching the issue from Guayaquil. Quito consumed much of the central government's resources, while not providing its proportional share of revenue. These economic dynamics underlay much of the political conflict between the two regions.

In chapters 5 and 6, Pineo provides a rich cultural description of society in Guayaquil. Chapter 5 provides a demographic history of the city. The city had a high population growth, even though the humid coast provided an unhealthy environment for its inhabitants. This growth was not due to a natural increase (the city had a high death rate), but rather to internal migration from the highlands. Guayaquil attempted to attract Europeans in an attempt to "whiten" the population, but disease and wars kept "desirable" immigrants away. Chapter 6 continues this discussion of life in the city and describes the lack of infrastructure, continual problems with fires, rising violent crime rates, and an underfunded educational system. Although Pineo attempts to paint a picture of Guayaquil as the "pearl of the Pacific," there is no hiding that it was truly a pesthole (p. 100).

Earlier versions of chapters 7 and 8 were previously published in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*. Together these two chapters comprise over a third of the text of the book and provide the heart of the study. The seventh chapter ("Disease, Health Care, and Death in Guayaquil") includes extensive tables on disease and death rates that were not included in the November 1990 HAHR publication. Because of the climate and rapid population growth, Guayaquil faced a continual struggle for potable water and against the onslaught of yellow fever and other diseases. Anyone interested in issues of public health, medicine, disease, and epidemics will find this material useful, not only for studies of Ecuador but also for use in comparative analyses of other regions in Latin America.

Chapter 8 ("Collective Popular Action: Unions, the Collapse of the Export Economy, and the General Strike of 1922") is a more heavily revised version of the article originally published in the November 1988 issue of HAHR. The November 1922 general strike in Guayaquil is generally understood as the birth of Ecuador's leftist popular movement. Scholars interested in labor history will want to re-read the treatment of the strike in this book, not because Pineo presents new material on or interpretations of the strike but because the book allows him to construct a much richer social history surrounding the strike than was possible in the article. In the article, Pineo challenges traditional interpretations that stress the role of foreign anarchist leaders in strike activity. In the book, Pineo is able to explain more fully the failure of policies to attract European settlers to Guayaquil and how the collapse of the cacao export economy led to a lower standard of living and subsequent strike. The strike thus was the result of local economic and social conditions and not of foreign ideological influence. The chapter becomes not a labor history but a complex social history that examines the stresses on the fabric of society as it underwent massive urbanization.

Unfortunately, the book is plagued by a series of small but annoying copyediting problems. The Contents page lists the title of the second chapter as "Cconomic Geography" (spelled with a "C"), and chapter 8 contains 72 endnote numbers, but the notes section only goes up to 69.

Anyone interested in Latin American urbanization history will find this book particularly useful. It would also work well in a graduate seminar on Latin American urban history. Pineo concludes that "Guayaquil was just one South American example of early capitalist urbanization in the periphery of the international economy" (p. 161). It is, however, an important example, and Pineo does a capable job of examining this history.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied in whole or in part for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and to the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam

Citation: Marc Becker. Review of Pineo, Ronn F., *Social and Economic Reform in Ecuador: Life and Work in Guayaquil.* H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. February, 1997.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=826

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.