

Latin America

International Affairs Programme

Latin America rarely makes the headlines in the UK media. Although much of the region was economically close to Britain in the nineteenth century, today it seems peripheral; China, Afghanistan, Iraq usually get the most attention. Until recently, this was reflected in academia as well: Latin American history, for example, was not even taught in the International History department at LSE until this academic year.

The Latin American International Affairs Programme has been stepping into this void and quickly establishing the LSE as a centre for the study of Latin American history and contemporary politics. Growing out of the Latin American Initiative founded by the Cold War Studies Centre (the predecessor institution of LSE IDEAS), the programme is now fully engaged with the debates surrounding recent history and current developments in the region.

Tanya Harmer, the current head of the programme who co-founded the original initiative with Martin Gonzales when they were both PhD students, says she was motivated by a desire to tell the Latin American side of the Cold War story, usually written from Washington's perspective. The wave of democratisation in the post-Cold War period and declassification of documents in Latin American capitals as well as the US helped make this possible.

Harmer, who was born in Mexico and grew up 'attending solidarity concerts for victims of the Pinochet dictatorship' has a life-long interest in the region. It was her MA studies at the LSE that convinced her to pursue research on the region. Her book, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* will be published by University of North Carolina Press in 2011. Now a lecturer in International History, Harmer launched a course on Latin American history this year – the department's first. 'The demand has been tremendous,' she says. 'We were expecting one section and ended up with three.'

This academic year the programme has organised a number of events on current affairs, including a roundtable on the elections in Chile and one on the new US bases planned

to be built in Colombia. The programme also has an active web site, which solicits book reviews and analysis from its network of scholars in Latin America, the USA, UK, and the rest of the world.

Harmer and her team are also organizing a number of major international conferences. A generous grant from the British Academy will allow the programme to run two conferences on Brazil's foreign policy during the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods. The first conference will take place in September 2010 in Rio de Janeiro, to be followed by one hosted at LSE IDEAS in April 2011. The conferences will include training components for researchers as well as secondary school teachers and are being organized in cooperation with the Fundação Getúlio Vargas. The programme's international links also include Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, which helped host a conference on Chile in the Cold War in April 2009.

Helping Harmer has been George Adelman, the programme assistant and a MSc student in International Relations. He first became interested in Latin America as an undergraduate, and eventually went to Buenos Aires to start a non-profit that taught English in youth centres, a convent for single mothers, hospitals, and other organizations. He plans to do a PhD one day; for now, he is devoting his free time to the programme, which he sees as an integral part of his education and an important stepping stone for his career. 'It is a fantastic opportunity to meet people who know so much about the region, to interact with specialists not just in academia, but on the practical and political side as well.' ■

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