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*Britain and Latin America
'Hope in a Time of Change?'*

Louise Fawcett and Eduardo Posada-Carbó

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Britain and Latin America 'Hope in a Time of Change'?

Introduction

In a 1990 House of Commons debate, the MP Barry Porter, while welcoming the aid given to El Salvador, asked Lynda Chalker, Minister for Overseas Development: 'should we not take into account those countries that are greater friends of the United Kingdom and especially, in West Africa, the small, but very friendly country of Sierra Leone?'¹ Porter's opinion did not, of course, represent the official position. However, it did typify a large section of public perceptions throughout the country, which viewed Latin America as secondary if not peripheral to the main concerns of British foreign policy.

This is a view that has prevailed since 1945, if not since even before then. Certainly, in the immediate post-war era Latin America did not feature in the three interlocking 'circles' where Winston Churchill perceived Britain's primary overseas interests to lie: the United States, the Commonwealth and Europe, in that order. Some five decades later this order of priorities had changed, with Europe finally taking the lead over both the cherished special relationship with the United States and the beleaguered Commonwealth.² But Latin America has remained very much on the periphery. Indeed the short-term effects of the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, which brought to the fore new and more immediately pressing concerns in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, seemed to reinforce the impression of Latin America as a continent which had become increasingly marginalised from the mainstream of not only British, but international concern generally.³

¹ *Parliamentary Debates, Hansard* (163), London 1990, p. 18.

² See Stephen George, *An Awkward Partner. Britain in the European Community* (Oxford, 1990), p. 14; and David Saunders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role. British Foreign Policy since 1945* (London, 1990), p. 1. British policy over Europe remains, however, a source of serious controversy. Churchill's words to de Gaulle still find echoes in many quarters: '...Each time we have to choose between Europe and the open sea, we shall always choose the open sea'; quoted in David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled. British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (London and New York, 1993), p. 303.

³ See, for example, Jorge G. Castañeda, 'Latin America and the end of the Cold War', *World Policy Journal*, vol. 7, no. 3 (Summer 1990), p. 491.

It would seem, therefore, that any analysis of British-Latin American relations in the 1990s must begin with an appreciation of the relatively low and even declining priority accorded to the continent by different British governments since 1945. Yet, as this paper will argue, developments since the late 1980s somewhat contradict this impression. Global changes at both the economic and political level, moves towards deeper integration in Europe and the radical transformation of the international order brought about by the end of the Cold War have fundamentally altered the context of British foreign policy.⁴ One result of this forced reordering of priorities has been a renewed and growing interest towards Latin America. This mood has been reflected in various official statements. In a 1988 speech optimistically entitled 'Latin America and 1992: Hope in a time of change', Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe promised that the 'period of neglect' was over, sentiments echoed two years later by his successor Douglas Hurd who spoke of Latin America as 'an essential part of the new world order'. And early in 1994, Prime Minister John Major suggested that after decades of 'relative decline' in the British presence in Latin America, 'in the last few years things have begun to change, and change quite dramatically'.⁵

What lies behind this rhetoric? Has British diplomacy towards Latin America really changed, and if so why, and in what ways? Has the 'rediscovery' of Latin America affected the old order of priorities, bringing in a new sphere of interest? What, in short, does the future hold for British-Latin American relations as we approach the end of the twentieth century? This essay will attempt to sketch out an answer to these questions. In the first section we propose briefly to look at the history of British-Latin American relations since the 1930s to emphasise what is perhaps common knowledge: the steady decline in the relationship, which reached its lowest point during the war in the South Atlantic in 1982. Although this story has already been told elsewhere, we summarise it here both to provide a backdrop and to illustrate the contrasts with the later period. We will then turn to an examination of the recent signs of revival. Using parliamentary records, some official unpublished documents, newspaper publications, and other secondary material, we will look at the evidence that points to a relative

⁴ See William Wallace, 'British Foreign Policy after the Cold War', *International Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 3 (1992), pp. 423-42.

⁵ 'Latin America and 1992: Hope in a time of change', Foreign Secretary's speech at Canning House, 14 December 1988; and 'Latin America: an essential part of the New World Order', Foreign Secretary's speech at Canning House, 30 October 1990; 'The United Kingdom and Latin America', Prime Minister's speech at Canning House, 10 March 1994.

renewal of Anglo-Latin American relationship in the past decade.⁶ The last section of the paper will consider the limitations of this revival before speculating about the prospects for the long-term strengthening of British ties with Latin America.

Between abandonment and indifference: British-Latin American relations, 1930-1985

It has become a commonplace to speak of the gradual demise of British-Latin American relations since the First World War, a process reinforced during the 1930s by the effects of the Depression and then by the consequences of the Second World War.⁷ Yet there are a number of recent studies of British imperialism that somewhat contradict the impression of an imperial system in decline. For example, the imperial historians P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins have argued that South America should be reintegrated into the study of British imperialism in the period 1914-1939, which they characterise as 'a new era of colonial ambitions', in which Great Britain sought to retain its position as banker of the world. It is certainly true that, until the late 1930s, South America remained an important trading partner for Britain, with interests focused on Argentina, Brazil and, to a declining extent, Chile.⁸ However, the nature of the relationship with Latin America overall remained substantially different from that of Britain with other regions in the world.

Even if Britain did manage to retain considerable influence in the continent in the inter-war period, despite rival claims by other powers, the Second World War was to have the effect of accelerating what was a visible trend towards a gradual and perhaps inevitable retreat from South America. The

⁶ For a review of the challenges and opportunities in British-Latin American relations at the end of the 1980s, see Victor Bulmer-Thomas 'British relations with Latin America into the 1990s', in Victor Bulmer-Thomas (ed.), *Britain and Latin America: a changing relationship* (London, 1989), pp. 205-29. The present paper builds on some of the themes and arguments developed there.

⁷ For brief historical accounts, see D. C. M. Platt, 'British Diplomacy in Latin America since Emancipation', *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1967); and Leslie Bethell, 'Britain and Latin America in Historical Perspective', in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 1-24; see also the more recent work by Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London and New York, 1993).

⁸ P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism. Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 146-70. See also John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation. The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (London, 1988), pp. 3-33.

collapse of Britain's export trade and the liquidation of its overseas assets during the war were decisive, as was the United States' effort to undermine the British position. A succession of post-war economic crises further ensured the speedy disintegration of Britain's position in Latin America, ushering in a period of US hegemony. With US exports soaring, Britain's share in the Latin American market had, by 1950, declined to half its pre-war level. In subsequent decades it would decline even further.⁹

To be sure, important commercial and financial interests remained. And concerned individuals periodically argued the need for Britain to reassess its attitudes towards the continent. Victor Perowne, head of the Foreign Office's South American Department, was the author of a 1945 internal document entitled 'The Importance of Latin America'.¹⁰ One of Perowne's arguments for a return to Latin America was the abundant availability of raw materials, a point picked up some five years later by the MP Peter Smithers who argued that 'the twin pillars of our policy towards Latin America should...be, first, to endeavour to fortify the position of those Republics as members of the free community of nations, and, second, to increase our trade and commerce with them'.¹¹ Yet different governments seemed slow to act on such advice.

Part of the problem, as a 1952 British trade mission to five countries in the region confirmed, was that the conditions prevailing in Latin American markets in the post-war period were quite different from those to which Britain had previously been accustomed.¹² Other industrialised countries like West Germany and Japan were far more successful in restoring their Latin American trade levels – so successful that Britain soon slipped from being the region's third to its fourth most important trading partner. The findings of the Crosland Mission may have led to 'a clearer understanding of trends which were general throughout Latin America',¹³ but this was not translated into any effective policy that produced dividends in the short term. As one

⁹ The impact of the Second World War is discussed in Bethell, 'Britain and Latin America in Historical Perspective', pp. 18-20 and Miller, *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 222-5.

¹⁰ See Robert Graham, 'British Policy towards Latin America', in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 53-4.

¹¹ See 'Latin America (British interests)', *Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons* (475), London, 1950, 2420.

¹² The trade mission, led by Brigadier W.H. Crosland, visited Venezuela, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Mexico. See George Pendle, 'Latin America', in Peter Calvocoressi (ed.), *Survey of International Affairs 1953* (London, 1956), p. 363.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

speaker in a 1972 House of Lords debate on Latin America and the United Kingdom lamented, 'by the 1950s...Britain had very little left in Latin America, except immense good will'.¹⁴

Arguably, even that 'good will' was in short supply: in Argentina the nationalist regime of Perón was in place by 1946.¹⁵ Other South American republics, quick to perceive the limited interest, as well as the greatly limited capacity, of the British government in its dealings with them had turned increasingly to the United States. There was little sympathy, furthermore, for Britain's stern action in Georgetown in 1953,¹⁶ sounding a note of warning not only about the future of British Guiana (Guyana) but also Britain's two other remaining colonies in the region: the Falkland Islands and British Honduras (Belize). The British Government, for its part, had other more pressing concerns. As Lord Gore Booth, another speaker in the 1972 House of Lords debate observed: 'with withdrawal from Empire, problems with Eastern Europe, relations with Western Europe and all those other problems crowding in on Ministers, week after week, year after year, it has been very difficult to give Latin America the priority which many people would have wished'.¹⁷

There were, of course, a number of occasions on which Britain's generally flagging interests in Latin America underwent at least a partial revival. The interest aroused in Europe by the Cuban revolution, for example, occasioned such a revival in the mid-1960s. While Britain did not entirely share the United States's rather stark Cold-War vision of the world, nor its commitment to containing communism worldwide – as its reaction to events in Cuba

¹⁴ See Earl Cowley's speech in 'Latin America and the United Kingdom', *Parliamentary Debates. Lords* (327), London, 1972, p. 334.

¹⁵ See C. A. MacDonald, 'The United States, Britain and Argentina in the Years immediately after the Second World War', in G. di Tella and D. C. M. Platt (eds.), *The Political Economy of Argentina, 1880-1946* (Basingstoke, 1986). For Perón's nationalist programme, and British reactions to it, see J. G. Lomax (Overseas Economic Surveys), *Argentina. Economic and Commercial Conditions in the Argentine Republic* (London, 1948). Concerns of Latin American 'latent animosity' towards the United Kingdom were raised in an address at Chatham House by J. A. Camacho in 1958; see his 'Latin America and the English-speaking World', *International Affairs*, vol. 35, no. 1 (January 1959), pp. 24-32.

¹⁶ In Guyana (then British Guiana), the constitution was suspended and subsequently revised following the electoral success of the People's Progressive Party. Pendle, 'Latin America', pp. 358-9.

¹⁷ 'Latin America and the United Kingdom', p. 363.

itself showed¹⁸ – the Castro revolution nonetheless excited curiosity and concern, and a desire to learn more about Latin American politics and society.

As a result of this new-found curiosity a Committee ‘to consider the further development of Latin American studies in the Universities’ was created in 1962. The Committee, which was chaired by Dr J.H. Parry, produced in August 1964 a lengthy report which found that: ‘The state of Latin American studies in British universities entirely fails to reflect the economic, political and cultural importance of Latin America.’ Its recommendations included *inter alia* the promotion of Spanish and Portuguese language teaching at schools and universities and the establishment of Centres of Latin American Studies at selected British universities where ‘a tradition of Latin American studies already exists’.¹⁹ Five such centres were duly created, forming the backbone of teaching and research on Latin America, while a number of related developments also helped to raise the profile of Latin America in Britain: the expansion in 1964 of Reuters’ Latin American press service, the introduction in 1967 of a Spanish language version of *The Economist*, and the appearance in 1969 of the *Journal of Latin American Studies*.²⁰

Interest in the state of British-Latin American relations stemmed not only from official quarters. Since the 1970s, a proliferation of different pressure groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were active in trying to raise Latin America’s profile in Britain and to expose pressing social, economic and political problems in Latin American societies.²¹

¹⁸ Britain did not, for example follow the USA in imposing a trade embargo on Cuba in 1960, nor did it subsequently attempt to constrain trade relations. See David Thomas, ‘The United States factor in British relations with Latin America’, in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, p. 70.

¹⁹ University Grants Committee, *Report on the Committee on Latin American Studies* (London, 1964), pp. v, 1-2.

²⁰ See also Gerald Martin, ‘Britain’s cultural relations with Latin America’, in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 35-6; Herbert Goldhamer, *The Foreign Powers in Latin America* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 142-3.

²¹ The London-based Latin America Bureau, for example, was established in 1977. Concerned with human rights and related social, political and economic issues, it initiated a series of publications on Britain, and later Europe and Latin America. These publications were designed to ‘increase public awareness of the continent’, and to promote government policies which would ‘assist and not hinder the changes necessary in the political, economic and social structures of Latin America’. See *Britain and Latin America. Annual Review of British-Latin American Relations (1978)* (London, 1978 and 1979); and *Europe and Latin*

Alongside educational and cultural measures came a set of economic and political initiatives reflecting also a desire on the part of the British government to recover something of its former position in South America. In 1966, some thirteen years after the Crosland Mission had highlighted the need for Britain to adjust its export policy to Latin America's requirements, Foreign Secretary Sir Michael Stewart visited the region as part of the Labour government's policy of promoting exports. Two years later, there was a royal visit – by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh – to Brazil and Chile, still recalled in old photographs in discreet hotels tucked away in Chile's lake district. In 1972 there was evidence also of a renewed political offensive, marked in January by the House of Lords debate on Latin America and the United Kingdom, and in May by a seminar on Latin America organised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at Lancaster House. The latter, according to Robert Graham, marked the 'coming of age of Latin America in official British thinking'.²²

Yet the results of the Lancaster House meeting, like those of the Latin American offensive generally, did not meet expectations. As Sir Robert Marett, a participant at the conference, observed, 'perhaps more significant than what was actually said at this Conference was the eminence of the speakers who addressed it'.²³ He went on 'what came out clearly from the discussions was the firm determination of the Latin Americans to secure a better deal for themselves in world trade'. The mood of economic nationalism that had grown throughout the region since the Second World War – a mood that was reflected at a collective level in the greater assertiveness displayed by the Third World in different international fora²⁴ – was certainly one of many obstacles that hindered the government's diplomatic and commercial initiative. Also damaging were the consequences of the 1973 oil price rises. Meanwhile with Britain focusing attention more firmly on the European stage, efforts to improve trade links with the four most important economies of the region, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela, petered out. The displacement of Argentina from its position as Britain's most important Latin American supplier – it first fell behind Venezuela, then behind Brazil and

America (London, 1980).

²² Robert Graham, 'British policy towards Latin America', in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, p. 59. For an official account of what at the time appeared to be a renewed interest in Latin America, see Reference Division, Central Office of Information (ed.), *Gran Bretaña y la América Latina* (London, 1972).

²³ Sir Robert Marett, *Latin America: British Trade and Investment* (London, 1973), pp. 226-7.

²⁴ On this theme see Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton, 1987), especially Chapter 7.

Chile also – was symptomatic of this general decline. Indeed, as Laurence Whitehead notes, in the 1970s commercial interchange between the two areas had, in relative terms, fallen ‘to the lowest level since the days of Iberian mercantilism’.²⁵ To many the situation seemed irreversible. In one study in 1973, Alec Nove pessimistically concluded: ‘Plainly there is no likelihood of Great Britain ever again becoming a major trading and investment partner for Latin America.’²⁶ Subsequent developments would do nothing to contradict this impression. Indeed the consequences of the Falklands War in 1982 and the onset of the debt crisis added a decidedly negative image to British perceptions of the continent, making the prospects for any new British-Latin American relationship ever more distant.

Trade and investment figures for the period 1950-1986 provide the most eloquent evidence of this steady decline. In 1950 the Latin American market accounted for 7.1% of British exports, in 1970 3.5% and in 1986, a mere 1.4%. Similarly, Britain absorbed a sharply diminishing share of Latin American exports: 7.8% in 1950, 3.7% in 1970 and 1.5% in 1986. With regard to investments, between 1930 and 1962, Latin America’s share of Britain’s total overseas investments fell dramatically from 35% to 3.8%. And despite some fluctuation in the two following decades, the figure for the early 1980s was similar. Perhaps most striking was the change in the location of British overseas investments: by 1981 not only the United States, Europe and Canada, Australia and South Africa combined, but also Asia and Africa had overtaken Latin America as the principal sites of UK overseas investment.²⁷

In the forty or so years between the end of the Second World War and the end of the Cold War all the evidence suggests that Latin America had become increasingly marginal to British interests. Despite the intermittent economic and political initiatives of different governments and the urgent prompting of concerned individuals, the pattern of relations in this period wavered between abandonment and indifference. Only certain developments in the area of cultural relations appeared to contradict this general trend, such as the foundation in 1943 of the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Council – today

²⁵ Laurence Whitehead, ‘Britain’s Economic Relations with Latin America’, in J. Grunwald (ed.), *Latin America in the International Economy* (Washington, 1978), p. 77.

²⁶ Alec Nove, ‘Great Britain and Latin American Economic Development’, in V.L. Urquidi and R. Thorp (eds.), *Latin America in the International Economy* (London, 1973), p. 77.

²⁷ See David Atkinson, ‘Trade, aid and investment since 1950’, in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 104-17.

known as Canning House²⁸ – and the establishment of the different centres of Latin American studies recommended by the Parry Report (see above). Other institutions were to embark on similar ventures in the following years. All this has amounted to an impressive academic infrastructure and stimulated the research and training of an array of specialists in diverse fields of Latin American studies. In a study on Britain's cultural relations with Latin America, Gerald Martin noted that the 'volume and quality of research and publication on Latin America... is remarkably high and stands comparison with that from any comparable country'.²⁹ There were some very practical limitations to this cultural and educational offensive, mainly of a financial nature, and Victor Bulmer-Thomas draws the distinction between official relations, maintained on a 'shoestring' budget, and unofficial relations which were 'quite healthy'.³⁰ It is nonetheless somewhat paradoxical that Britain's cultural and educational efforts to promote Latin American links came at a time when its political and economic relationship had reached an all time low.

For a country involved in redefining its global interests there is no necessary contradiction in retaining a strong cultural and intellectual interest in areas where a physical presence has been all but abandoned. And there was also a feeling, sometimes expressed in official as well as unofficial circles, that Britain's moment in Latin America might return. Indeed, one of the achievements of an institution like Canning House, whose original motivation had been to re-establish some of Britain's traditional commercial links in Latin America, has been 'to maintain interest in this field despite the failure of government and industry to develop a constructive and continuing policy towards British economic involvement in the continent'.³¹

Such considerations aside, some distancing of Britain and Latin America after 1930 was, in many respects, inevitable. Changes both at the domestic and international level help to explain why the two took such widely divergent paths. The Second World War and its consequences displaced Britain from its great power status, drastically reducing its ability to act on the broader international stage. Outside the United States and Europe, Britain now focused more narrowly on the countries of the Commonwealth and the Middle East, where a significant presence was retained East of Suez until the

²⁸ For a survey of the work and achievements of Canning House see Nicholas Bowen, *A History of Canning House* (London, 1979).

²⁹ Gerald Martin, 'Britain's cultural relations with Latin America', in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 27-51.

³⁰ Victor Bulmer-Thomas, 'British relations with Latin America into the 1990s', in *ibid.*, pp. 218-20.

³¹ Bowen, *History of Canning House*, p. 23.

early 1970s.³² Further, the need to fortify the 'special' – if now highly unequal – relationship with the United States, on whom Britain came so heavily to depend in the post-war period, implied a dovetailing of interests in a region which was after all now peripheral to its international concerns.³³ Even if Britain did not always follow the US line, as the Cuban case demonstrated, on no occasion during the Cold War did Britain seriously question the pretensions of the Monroe Doctrine. And Britain was duly rewarded by US support in the Falklands/Malvinas crisis, despite the obvious difficulties this raised for US relations with Latin America. In similar fashion, although this time in a Caribbean rather than Latin American context, Margaret Thatcher's uneasiness over the US invasion of Grenada in 1983, in particular her bitterness over the 'lack of consultation', was soon overcome.³⁴ The price of opposition to such a move was simply judged to be too high.³⁵

1985-1995: decade of rediscovery?

At first sight, as the above account suggests, the prospects for any improvement in British Latin American relations in the 1980s and beyond appeared bleak. UK investment in the region, as well as trade between Britain and Latin America, had become relatively insignificant. The debt crisis had further damaged the image of Latin America among British businessmen. And the war in the South Atlantic added another barrier to the relationship. As late as 1988, in welcoming a 'long overdue' debate on Latin America in

³² See W.R. Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1935-1951* (Oxford, 1984).

³³ On the special relationship in this period see Bradford Perkins, 'Unequal Partners: The Truman Administration and Great Britain', in W.R. Louis and Hedley Bull (eds.), *The Special Relationship. Anglo-American Relations since 1945* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 43-64; see also David Reynolds, 'Rethinking Anglo-American Relations', *International Affairs*, vol. 65 (1989), pp. 89-111.

³⁴ The embarrassment of the government was clearly exposed when Geoffrey Howe, having told MPs on 24 October 1983 that he had 'no reason to think that American military intervention is likely', was obliged to reveal only the following day that US troops had, in fact, landed on the island. *Parliamentary Debates, Hansard* (47), London 1983: 30, 143.

³⁵ Thomas, 'The United States factor', pp. 78-9; for a discussion of US-British relations in Latin America in the late Cold War period, see also William D. Rogers, 'The Unspecial Relationship in Latin America', in Louis and Bull, *The Special Relationship*, pp. 340-53.

the House of Commons, Jacques Arnold MP complained that 'so often foreign affairs debates in this place centre strategically on East-West relations, fashionably on Europe, nostalgically on the Commonwealth and indifferently on the remainder'.³⁶ Yet this picture of indifference had already begun to change. As Tim Sainsbury, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, declared in July 1989, British-Latin American relations had started to gain 'momentum'.³⁷

In this section we examine the various 'signs of rediscovery' which lend support to the argument that British relations with Latin America have experienced a period of renewal during the last decade. We look, among other issues, at the higher profile given to the region in Westminster, the increasing interest shown towards Latin America within governmental circles, and the stronger economic ties developed in the 1990s. We also look at the significance of some bilateral relationships and at the role of the United Kingdom in multilateral diplomacy in the region. But before turning to these 'signs of rediscovery', let us briefly consider, first, how the conflict in the South Atlantic gave a paradoxical impetus to British-Latin American relations, and second, how changing perceptions of Latin America's process of political and economic reform conditioned UK renewed interest in the continent.

The war with Argentina, while initially appearing to weaken further what was already a fragile and limited relationship, helped to provide a new dimension to British policy.³⁸ For all the short term disruption it caused, the conflict was to stimulate a new diplomatic offensive designed to limit the damage done to Britain's position in the continent. Geoffrey Howe's visits to Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico between 1984 and 1987 should be seen in this light. His was a remarkable agenda for a British Foreign Secretary, given that only two such visits – by Michael Stewart in 1966 and Lord Carrington in 1980 – had hitherto been made in the entire postwar period. The extent to which the Falkland/Malvinas islands question features in the British relationship with Latin America as a whole may be open to debate.³⁹ In any case, by the mid-1980s, the issue had diminished in importance. Moreover by the end of the decade, British relations with Argentina seemed to be entering into a new phase, a 'period of tangible

³⁶ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (138), London, 1988: 708.

³⁷ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (157), London, 1989: 1329.

³⁸ Robert Graham, 'British policy towards Latin America', p. 65.

³⁹ See, for example, comments by Jacques Arnold and Ray Whitney during the 1988 House of Commons debate, in *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (138), London, 28 July 1988: 709 and 718.

achievement', as forecast in Parliament by Tim Sainsbury on 27 July 1989.⁴⁰

Similarly, the debt crisis, despite its potentially serious implications for British banks which had lent considerable amounts to Latin American countries, proved less damaging than feared. Of course the debt problem discouraged even further British confidence on the economies of the region. Nevertheless, as the Brady plan was being implemented and, above all, as the signs of economic progress became visible, the government acknowledged that Latin America was 'beginning to emerge from the debt crisis'.⁴¹

What provided the real incentive to Britain to cultivate new ties with the region were the profound political and economic changes experienced by Latin America during the 1980s – the twin processes of political democratisation and economic liberalisation, dubbed the 'quiet revolution' by Minister Tristan Garel-Jones, among others.⁴² These reforms created a more favourable environment for UK-Latin American relations. They encouraged a new perception of Latin American reality. 'Latin America, lost and found', declared *The Financial Times* in the spring of 1992, sentiments that were shared elsewhere in the British media.⁴³ Rather than being dismissed as the 'lost decade', the 1980s were now characterised as a period where change and upheaval have given way to quiet progress and consolidation of economic and political reform.

These positive, even 'euphoric' perceptions were tempered by a gloomy mood following the Mexican crisis of December 1994. However, the region seems to have overcome the worst of the crisis – a 'quick' recovery 'from what was undoubtedly a serious shock', in the words of Ray Whitney.⁴⁴ Not all countries were equally affected, a point recurrently raised by the British media. 'As the process of genuine economic reform establishes itself', a recent survey in *The Economist* stressed, 'Latin America's diversity is

⁴⁰ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (157), London, 27 July 1989: 1328.

⁴¹ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (138), London, 28 July 1988: 725.

⁴² Tristan Garel-Jones, 'Latin America: the Quiet Revolution', in Oxford International Institute, *Latin America – Recovery, Investment and Growth* (Bath and Oxford, 1991), p. 7.

⁴³ *The Financial Times*, 27 March 1992; see also 'Latins ride high', *The Economist*, 18 July 1992, and 'Latin American promise', *The Times*, 9 August 1993.

⁴⁴ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (264), London, 18 October 1995: 271.

increasing'.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in spite of its shortcomings, there seems to prevail an impression that the profound economic reforms are here to stay, and that the foundations for economic development are now more solid than in the early 1980s.

The extraordinary optimism of the early 1990s was also tempered by security problems in the region, particularly by border disputes between Peru and Ecuador, and to a lesser extent between Venezuela and Colombia.⁴⁶ In addition, doubts about the solidity and durability of democracy are widely expressed. So too are concerns about the role of the military. Further, the weak judicial systems and the widespread corruption that prevail in many countries must be set against the achievements of a reform movement whose benefits are still to be felt by the poorest sectors of the population.

There prevails nonetheless a mood of greater optimism about Latin America's prospects. Admittedly, the 'widespread euphoria' of the early 1990s, as Moisés Naím has pointed out, has 'vanished'. But the prospects are far from gloomy. In Naím's own words: 'after the hangover, a more sober, realistic view is already beginning to emerge'.⁴⁷ Within British official circles, this view was still a positive one by the end of 1995. 'The United Kingdom remains confident that Mexico specifically and Latin America as a whole have laid the basis for an increasingly prosperous and stable future', Sir Nicholas Bonsor told Parliament on 18 October 1995.⁴⁸ The previously cited critical survey by *The Economist* concluded on a cautious yet optimistic note about the continent's future.⁴⁹

All in all, the ongoing process of reform has also meant that politically, economically and culturally, Latin America – in sharp contrast to some other

⁴⁵ 'Still Volatile: A Survey of Latin American Finance', *The Economist*, 9 December 1995, p. 4.

⁴⁶ For an example of recent concerns, see 'Latin America's Frontier Alarms', *The Economist*, 20 January 1996. Such conflicts aside, the prevailing and indeed favourable image of the region, and of the inter-American system generally, remains one of a zone of peace or a 'Kantian pacific union of liberal states'. See, for example, Mark Peceny, 'The Inter-American System as a Liberal "Pacific Union"?', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1994), pp. 188-201.

⁴⁷ Moisés Naím, 'Latin America the Morning After', *Foreign Affairs*, July-August, 1995, p. 61.

⁴⁸ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (264), London, 18 October 1995: 279.

⁴⁹ See footnote 45.

regions of the world – has been brought closer to the West, a fact that has not been lost on British and European policy makers. ‘Our policy towards Latin America will increasingly be seen in a European context’, declared Donald Anderson MP, in the 1989 House of Commons debate on Latin America. One year later Lord Thomas referred to Latin America as ‘a department of European culture’.⁵⁰ This was a far cry from Earl Cowley’s reference in 1972 to Latin America as ‘an area of the world where European concepts and ideas do not really apply’.⁵¹ Certainly from the perspective of the 1990s, compared with the pitfalls and uncertainties of Middle Eastern or African politics (the Islamic threat is but one example⁵²), Latin America appears relatively reassuring. These new British perceptions of Latin American realities have been accompanied by a higher profile of Latin American issues in Westminster, a stronger interest on the region in governmental circles and, more significantly, closer economic ties. Let us turn briefly to each of these points.

The institutionalisation of an annual Latin American debate in the House of Commons is an innovation worthy of note. On 28 July 1988 the first in a series of such debates was held, providing a formal opportunity to discuss the government’s policies towards the region.⁵³ The Commons’ Latin American debate has since become a regular event taking place usually in July, although often at a time of night unlikely to attract the attention of more than a handful of MPs.⁵⁴ While the establishment of its own debate does not in any way mean that Latin America has suddenly gained importance at the expense of Britain’s other traditional areas of interest, it is nonetheless a significant development and represents a break with the past. It has also become possible

⁵⁰ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (157), London, 27 July 1989: 1323; *Parliamentary Debates. Lords* (524), London, 19 December 1990: 846.

⁵¹ *Parliamentary Debates. Lords* (327), London, 26 January 1972: 334.

⁵² ‘The Islamic resurgence in Asia, the Middle-East and North Africa will be particularly challenging’, in Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 306.

⁵³ Since 1988 eight such debates have taken place, the last one in October 1995. See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (138), London, 28 July 1988: 708-728; (157) 22 July 1989: 1312-1329; (170), 32 July 1990: 248-262; (177), 22 July 1991: 841-862; (210), 9 July 1992: 585-603; (211), 26 July 1993: 817-837; (229), 20 July 1994: 453-470; and (264), 18 October 1995: 263-284.

⁵⁴ The 1988 and 1989 debates started well after midnight, those between 1990 and 1993 at a more civilised early evening hour; the 1994 debate again at 1:30 a.m., and the most recent one (in October 1995) at 10:40 a.m. See above references from 1989-1995; see also Victor Bulmer-Thomas, ‘Britain and Latin America: Closer in the 1990s?’, *The World Today*, vol. 45, no. 11 (1989), p. 198

to identify a core of MPs who feature prominently in the above debates, and who regularly concern themselves with Latin American issues: Conservatives Jacques Arnold, Ray Whitney and John Wilkinson, and the Labour MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Tony Lloyd, among others, have all visited the continent and follow its development closely. Under the chairmanship of Ray Whitney an umbrella British-Latin American parliamentary group has been formed which holds an annual parliamentary seminar at Canning House, and hosts visits to Parliament of high officials from Latin America. Some MPs have started to move away from the old stereotypes in discussing Britain and Latin America, although the common references to Bolívar, Lord Cochrane or Canning remain – appearing as simple attempts to fill a vacuum of appropriate knowledge of the continent.

If, as Victor Bulmer-Thomas has suggested, the number of official visits is a good indicator of British commitment to a particular region,⁵⁵ then Latin America has certainly gained priority in government circles. Minister Tristan Garel-Jones's 14 visits to the continent between August 1990 and May 1992 may have been something of a record, but even Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe's relatively crowded Latin American agenda had already broken with a previous pattern of neglect. Howe's successor, Douglas Hurd, showed no intention of reversing the trend towards intensifying diplomatic relations, as his own visits to Mexico, Chile and Argentina showed. In his last four years as Foreign Secretary, Hurd made three trips to the region, visiting several countries. Overall the number of high-level visits to Latin America has increased sharply in recent years. In 1989 nine ministers visited Latin America compared with 22 in 1993. Peter Lilley, Kenneth Clarke, Michael Heseltine and Michael Howard are among those who have made at least one visit to the continent.⁵⁶

Amid this increasing official interest, the continuing failure of a British

⁵⁵ Bulmer-Thomas, 'Britain and Latin America: closer in the 1990s?', p. 200.

⁵⁶ For example: as Secretary of State for Trade, Peter Lilley visited Venezuela in 1991; Kenneth Clarke visited Mexico as Secretary of State for Education, and Venezuela, Colombia and Peru as Home Secretary in 1992; Michael Howard visited Brazil as Secretary for the Environment in 1992; and Michael Heseltine visited Mexico and Argentina as President of the Board of Trade in 1993. 'Ministerial visits to Latin America', FCO, American Section, Research and Analysis Department, 13 November 1992; *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (229), London, 20 July 1994:465. This contrasts with Lord Greenhill of Harrow's recollections of his experience in the Foreign Office: 'it was always difficult to interest ministers in South America'; *Parliamentary Debates, Lords*, London, 1991:838.

prime minister to visit the region was seen as 'an extraordinary omission'.⁵⁷ MP Jacques Arnold in the 1989 debate on Latin America urged the Prime Minister to make such a visit, claiming that it 'would make a major impact' in a region where the Government's economic policies had excited great interest.⁵⁸ In both practical and symbolic terms therefore, John Major's visit to Colombia in June 1992 prior to his attendance at the environment summit in Rio de Janeiro – part of an extensive programme of overseas travel that the Prime Minister embarked on during his first two or so years in power⁵⁹ – was of particular significance. Since Major's visit the trend has continued.

In July 1993 Treasury Minister Michael Portillo headed a commercial mission to Chile, one of a 'glittering array' of ministers to travel across Latin America in 1993-94 in what was described as 'another good year for Latin America and in particular for Britain's relations with it'.⁶⁰ Leading a trade mission in September 1995, the Minister of Trade and Technology Ian Taylor became 'the first senior official from London to visit Cuba in 20 years'.⁶¹ In January 1996 the Chancellor Kenneth Clarke visited Brazil 'to find out more about its privatisation programme', accompanied by British bankers and representatives from the UK's privatised utilities. And in April, Malcolm Rifkind, Foreign Secretary, visited Mexico and Argentina.⁶² Of course the flow of official visits has not been only in one direction. In contrast to the limited exchanges of earlier decades, the 1990s have seen a parallel increase in the number of visits made by Latin American presidents to London. The period 1990-1996 has seen visits to the UK by Mexican, Brazilian, Chilean, Peruvian, Uruguayan, Paraguayan and Colombian heads of state.⁶³

At the ministerial level, foremost among those who have made a significant contribution to the promotion of British-Latin American relations is Tristan

⁵⁷ Bulmer-Thomas, 'Britain and Latin America', p. 200.

⁵⁸ *Parliamentary Debates, Hansard* (157), London, 27 July 1989: 1321.

⁵⁹ Martin Gilbert, 'Globe-trotting Major keeps the lion roaring', *The Times*, 13 July 1993.

⁶⁰ *Parliamentary Debates, Hansard* (162), London, 20 July 1994.

⁶¹ 'Britons head for Cuba as Marx gives way to the market', *The Times*, 21 January 1995. See also 'UK business wants our man in Havana' and 'Cubans bullish over UK trade delegation visit' in *The Financial Times*, 25 May and 10 September 1994

⁶² *The Financial Times*, 8 January and 12 April 1996.

⁶³ 'Visits by Latin American Presidents to UK', FCO, American Section, Research and Analysis Department, 3 March 1993; also various newspaper clippings.

Garel-Jones, former Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. A fluent Spanish speaker, Garel-Jones visited the continent extensively while in office. In Douglas Hurd's words he was a man who was 'extremely difficult to distract in any way from the affairs of Latin America'.⁶⁴ More importantly, to Garel-Jones can be attributed the impetus behind the decision to reverse the process of winding down Britain's presence in Latin America. As he later recorded:

Who decides? Ministers do. When I arrived at King Charles Street, the British Government was putting the final touches to winding down our presence in Latin America. I was determined to stop and reverse this process, so my private secretary pointed me in the direction of the planners... They took up the task with relish. A paper was produced within a few months; a submission went to the Secretary of State, who agreed with it. Resources were redirected. Britain, I hope rightly, began to take this continent seriously again for the first time in nearly 100 years.⁶⁵

Garel-Jones may be overstretching the point. But there is no doubt, as the records show, that the region has been given a higher profile in British official circles during the last decade. As in the past, this renewed interest is based foremost on economic considerations: 'the driving force for Britain's involvement in the region ... was, and still is, trade and investment', Sir Nicholas Bonsor, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has pointed out.⁶⁶ The Mexican crisis in December 1994 did not deter the British government from launching its 'Link into Latin America' campaign the following month, a campaign to promote business links with the region in close association with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). Since its launch, on 17 January 1995, more than 30 events have been organised with the attendance of more than 1,200 UK companies and representative bodies.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ 'Latin America: an essential part of the new world order', Foreign Secretary's speech at Canning House, 30 October 1990.

⁶⁵ Tristan Garel-Jones, 'BBC dispels "chinless" image of Diplomatic Service', *The Independent*, 30 April 1994.

⁶⁶ Nicholas Bonsor, *Britain and Latin America: Economic Prospects*, Institute of Latin American Studies Occasional Paper No. 13 (London, 1996).

⁶⁷ See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (264), London, 18 October 1995: 281-2; and Department of Trade and Industry, 'Link into Latin America. Your Next Big Market', 1995. The campaign was referred to as 'a partnership between government and the private sector [and] underlines the UK's long-term commitment to strengthening ties and developing trade links with Latin America and to re-establishing a strong role for British business in the region'; in 'Speech for the Minister of Trade to give as a welcoming address at the CBI-hosted

Foreign investment was attracted to Latin America in the past decade by the more favourable attitude towards foreign capital now prevailing throughout the continent – a far cry from the nationalistic stance of earlier years. To further encourage investors' confidence, the British government has signed Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements with several Latin American countries, including Brazil and Colombia in 1994, and Cuba in 1995.⁶⁸ In 1990 Douglas Hurd highlighted the importance of Latin America's share in Britain's overseas investments, then estimated at more than £10 billion: 'Bilaterally, we are one of the biggest overseas investors... we are the second largest investor in Mexico, Chile, and maybe others... We were the biggest overseas investor in Colombia in 1989.'⁶⁹ In 1995, according to the President of the Inter-American Development Bank, within the European Union the United Kingdom was the foremost investor in MERCOSUR countries: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.⁷⁰ 'Better off and back in fashion' and 'Investment pours back into Latin America', read the titles of two press articles in the early 1990s, setting the tone for what appears to have been a steady increase in British investments to the region.⁷¹ Particularly prominent is the presence of British direct investment in Latin America: in 1993 UK direct investment in the region, including the Caribbean, was estimated to be £12.2 billion.⁷²

MERCOSUR conference on 21 September 1995'. The calendar of events for 1996 includes mission visits to practically all Latin American countries; DTI, 'Link into Latin America: Calendar of Events, January 1996-1997'.

⁶⁸ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (264), London, 25 October 1995: 656 and 1015; and Prime Minister's Speech at Canning House, 'The United Kingdom and Latin America', 11 March 1994.

⁶⁹ Douglas Hurd, 'Latin America: an essential part of the new world order', 30 October 1990, Verbatim service, VS056/90.

⁷⁰ 'Statement by Enrique V. Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank', MERCOSUR Conference, Confederation of British Industry, London, 21 September 1995. 'During the 1990-93 period, UK foreign direct investment flows to the four MERCOSUR member countries amounted to a total of US\$ 983 million, according to OECD data', in *ibid.*

⁷¹ The commentary accompanying the UK annual investment figures for 1992 notes that the 'largest increase in investment was in the rest of the world sector, mainly developing countries... due in the main to increased investment in the Far East, particularly Hong Kong and Singapore, and also in South America and the Caribbean.' *Business Monitor M4, Overseas Transactions* (London: HMSO, 1993), p. 5.

⁷² 'UK direct investment: book value of net assets' (in current prices), in *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (255), London, 24 February 1995: 367-8. See also Bonsor, 'Britain and Latin America'.

British capital has been invested in various areas of Latin American economies, but perhaps most intensely in the production of minerals, in infrastructure and in utilities. It has also made inroads in countries where hitherto its presence had been limited. Such is the case of Colombia, where British Petroleum (BP) is developing an ambitious programme. In addition, BP continues to develop its operations in other Latin American countries, such as Venezuela and Mexico. Indeed, John Browne, Managing Director of BP, singled out the importance of the region 'to the world's energy balance'.⁷³ The interest in new partners has not meant the neglect of traditional ones, such as Mexico, Argentina or Brazil. In October 1995, the UK investment programme in Brazil was said to be worth £1.93 billion.⁷⁴ The ambitious privatisation programme underway in Argentina has also attracted British capital, although Britain still lags behind Spain and France in this respect, its historical connections notwithstanding. British Gas however is a major shareholder in the distribution of gas in Buenos Aires, and since 1990 Thames Water has been involved in the Argentine water industry. Other British firms – BAT, ICI, Glaxo and Unilever for example – have also been active participants in the development of Argentine industry.⁷⁵ In Chile, where British capital has perhaps been slower in responding to the new economic opportunities, companies like British Gas, Rolls-Royce and British Steel have nonetheless shown an interest in the trans-Andean pipeline project.⁷⁶

While it is clearly possible to identify an increased flow of British capital towards Latin America, the overall trade picture has been far slower to improve. In 1989 Britain's share of Latin American imports still hovered around a mere 1.4 %. In 1990 however the downward spiral in commercial relations which had characterised earlier decades seemed finally to have reversed with the release of figures that suggested a 23.2 % increase in British

⁷³ See John Browne, 'Latin American Oil in an International Context', lecture delivered at Canning House on 4 November 1993.

⁷⁴ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (264), London, 25 October 1995: 1015.

⁷⁵ 'Argentina whets foreign appetites', *The Financial Times*, 12 January 1993; *LATAG Bulletin*, March-April 1993, p. 20. On British Gas in Argentina, see D. Cotrell, 'Business prospects for the near future in MERCOSUR', paper delivered at the CBI-hosted MERCOSUR conference, 21 September 1995. Indeed the interests of British Gas extend to other MERCOSUR countries, including Chile and Bolivia; *ibid.*

⁷⁶ 'UK interest in trans-Andean pipeline', *The Financial Times*, 14 July 1993.

exports to the region that year.⁷⁷ But the benefits of trade liberalisation were soon to be somewhat obscured by the effects of Britain's entry into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) and the fall in the value of the dollar which served to reduce the competitiveness of UK exporters. The Brazilian economic crisis did not help matters, while the Department of Trade and Industry's ambitious 'Proyecto Venezuela' – an initiative to expand trade and investment links between Britain and Venezuela⁷⁸ – floundered amid the serious political instability in that country. Yet the overall pattern remains one of slow improvement. Significant in this respect have been the reestablishment of commercial and diplomatic links with Argentina, where the increase in investment noted above has been matched by a significant growth in British imports into that country. Colombia and Chile, too, stand out as countries where British imports have grown.⁷⁹ The 1993 export figures revealed a 27 per cent increase in British exports to the region amounting to some £1.7 billion, and this continued upward by 21 per cent in 1994 to more than £2 billion. They were up again by a further 20 per cent during the first half of 1995, although, as the Minister of State for the FCO, Sir Nicholas Bonsor, conceded in the 1995 parliamentary debate, Britain's overall market share remained 'disappointingly low': '1.7 per cent, compared to our share of the world trade which is about 5 per cent'.⁸⁰ The 'Link into Latin America' programme, whose results it is still too early to judge, was launched precisely to encourage the further development of trade.

Of course, the 'signs of a rediscovery' in British-Latin American relations should not be sought only in trade and investment figures, as a number of commentators have noted.⁸¹ There are many other criteria, some of which

⁷⁷ *LATAG Bulletin*, London (Autumn 1990), p. 8.

⁷⁸ 'Caracas visit launches Proyecto Venezuela', *LATAG Bulletin*, November 1991, p. 6.

⁷⁹ See the 'Export League Table', 23 April 1993, FCO Circular 165/93; see also *LATAG Bulletin* (March/April 1993), pp. 31-3.

⁸⁰ His predecessor had made a similar remark the previous year. See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (162), London, 20 July 1994: 466, and (264), 18 October 1995: 281. See also Minister of Trade's speech at the MERCOSUR conference, London 21 September 1995. In 1992 Britain's share of Latin America's imports and exports was 1.4% and 1.1% respectively. The most recent 'trade push' into Latin America was marked, in April 1996, by the visit to the region of Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind. See 'UK in push for Latin American trade', *The Financial Times*, 12 April 1996.

⁸¹ Bulmer-Thomas, 'British relations with Latin America into the 1990s', pp. 205-27; see also *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (138), London, 28 July 1988: 725 and (177), 22 July 1991: 859.

we have already referred to, on which to judge the overall pattern of relations. The initiation of the annual parliamentary debates on Latin America in 1988 have served to illustrate the diversity of themes now the subject of concern, as well as – in some cases – their relative novelty: alongside the more traditional concerns about trade, development and bilateral relations, issues like the environment, drugs, human rights, and 'good government' all now feature. And the state of bilateral relations is no longer a sufficient measure of the overall condition of British-Latin American relations. Britain's relations with Latin America are increasingly conditioned by its membership of the European Union, such that one must refer to a European rather than a British policy in a number of areas. Indeed it may be often be difficult to separate specifically British as opposed to common European interests.⁸² Further, non-governmental organisations alongside a variety of pressure groups and other 'non-state actors' have been clearly influential in raising the profile of certain issues, notably those relating to the environment and human rights. They have had a significant and increasing impact on policy both at the bilateral and European Union (EU) level.⁸³

The environment has at least featured in talks between British and Brazilian officials which have resulted in a series of bilateral agreements on environmental protection. The opposition, together with various NGOs, is often critical of the government's stance towards the environment and, above all, human rights. Yet human rights issues have also been raised, for example, in the meetings between John Major, other British officials and Latin American heads of state including Peru's Fujimori and Brazil's Collor de Melo in 1992, and more recently during the visit of Colombian president-elect Ernesto Samper to London in early 1994.⁸⁴ According to the government, its policy towards human rights – 'now tempered with the knowledge

⁸² Wallace, 'British Foreign Policy after the Cold War', pp. 438-9.

⁸³ Robert Graham, 'British policy towards Latin America', pp. 62-4. For a recent survey of EU-Latin American relations, see Christian L. Freres, Alberto Van Kláveren and Guadalupe Ruiz-Giménez, 'Europa y América Latina: La búsqueda de nuevas formas de cooperación', *Síntesis*, no. 18 (Sept./Dec. 1992), pp. 91-178.

⁸⁴ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (229), London, 20 July 1994: 466, 468-9. Government answers to questions in Parliament, usually by the opposition, provide evidence of current policies towards human rights. For recent statements regarding Brazil see, for example: *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (259), London, 2 May 1995: 151; (260), 16 May 1995: 112; (261), 8 June 1995: 284; (264), 25 October 1995: 1016. On Guatemala, see *ibid.* (264), 19 October 1995: 305-6 and (268), 7 December 1995: 341-2. And on Peru: *ibid.* (203), 7 February 1992: 327, and (208), 3 June 1992: 809-10.

that we are dealing with democratic societies'⁸⁵ – is tied to the support given to those relevant institutions in tackling the problems of law and order in Latin America. Such is the government's case for training some police forces, including Guatemala's, as expressed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sir Nicholas Bonsor in 1995.⁸⁶ Drugs trafficking has also become an increasing area of concern and Britain has lent support, mainly of a technical nature, to the Bolivian, Venezuelan and Colombian governments in their efforts to curb illegal production and trading.⁸⁷ In addition, the United Kingdom has given support for alternative development and crop substitution projects channelled through the United Nations.⁸⁸ There is evidence, too, of more general efforts at government level to structure a 'Latin America policy', in line with an overall policy towards Third World countries, based on the concept of 'good government' involving binding British aid and support to efforts to consolidate democracy within the region. A number of ministers have repeatedly stressed the need for a 'deliberate' policy on good government, designed to 'reinforce systems of justice and the very backbone of a liberal and democratic society'.⁸⁹ Aid is not as important an element of British policy to Latin America as in other areas of the developing world. On the one hand, Latin American needs are not considered as crucial as those, for example, of Africa. On the other hand, development aid is increasingly channelled through multilateral organisations. Nevertheless, aid has become significant particularly in connection with the areas of good government, human capital and the sustainable development of renewable natural resources.⁹⁰ Of aid administered bilaterally through the Overseas Develop-

⁸⁵ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (177), London, 22 July 1991: 859-60.

⁸⁶ The Minister was replying to the opposition's concerns about the training of police forces in Guatemala, in view of this country's record of human right abuses. See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (264), London, 18 October 1995: 279. For a radical critique of British policy towards human rights, although mostly in relation to the military regimes of the 1970s (namely that of Pinochet in Chile), see M. Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power. British Foreign Policy since 1945* (London and New Jersey, 1995). Although only recently published, this work takes very little account of political developments in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁸⁷ 'Drugs, rainforests and UK aid policy', *LATAG Bulletin*, Summer 1990, p. 6.

⁸⁸ In 1995, according to official sources, the United Kingdom was the second biggest donor to such programmes in the United Nations. See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (263), London, 4 July 1995: 124-5.

⁸⁹ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (117), London, 22 July 1991: 859-61; see also Garel-Jones, 'Latin America: the Quiet Revolution', p. 8.

⁹⁰ See Bonsor, 'Britain and Latin America'.

ment Administration (ODA), Latin America in 1970 accounted for a mere £2.1m of a total £275m, the Commonwealth still being the primary recipient of overseas aid.⁹¹ In contrast, in 1994 Britain had a 'sizeable and successful bilateral aid programme to Latin America'. The ODA's programme for 1992-3 allocated to the region £1.06bn of a total budget of some £7.6bn, with countries like Bolivia, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile and Argentina as well as Grenada and Panama all receiving in excess of £1m.⁹² In defining the structure of Britain's aid programme, Lady Chalker listed the promotion of good government and 'helping countries build effective institutions' as central goals.⁹³ And in the 1994 parliamentary debate on Latin America the FCO Minister David Heathcoat-Amory referred to the increasing number of aid programmes falling under the general heading of good government.

Aside from some of these more recent and general concerns that have come to inform British relations with Latin America, there remain, as in the past, a series of bilateral relationships of particular importance. Foremost among these is Britain's relationship with Argentina, which after almost a decade of hostility has substantially improved. There is no need here to go into the history of the longstanding dispute between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands.⁹⁴ Suffice it to say that since his election in 1989, Carlos Menem has made clear his desire for reconciliation, marking the beginning of a new trend in Argentine diplomacy. At the end of the same year, working groups from Britain and Argentina met in Paris to discuss the vexed question of fishing rights in the Falklands/Malvinas zone. In the summer of 1990 the two countries exchanged ambassadors, and in 1991 even cooperated militarily during the Gulf War. Foreign Affairs Secretary Douglas Hurd made a five-day visit to Argentina in January 1993.⁹⁵ On 26 September 1993, Brigadier Richard Lambe, the British UN chief of staff, greeted an Argentine military mission which joined Britons for UN duty in Cyprus. Two weeks earlier that year, Finance Minister Domingo Cavallo made the first

⁹¹ Marett, *Latin America: British Trade and Investment*, p. 199.

⁹² See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (238), London, 24 and 28 February 1994, 390-94, 558.

⁹³ 'Britain's aid strategy in the changing world', Speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 18 October 1993.

⁹⁴ See Andrew Orgill, *The Falklands War. Background, Conflict, Aftermath. An Annotated Bibliography* (London, 1993).

⁹⁵ See *The Financial Times*, 6 and 8 January 1993, and *The Times*, 7 January 1993.

official trip to Britain by an Argentine Minister since the war.⁹⁶ And on 23 October 1995 Prime Minister John Major met President Carlos Menem in New York, where the latter accepted an invitation to visit the United Kingdom.⁹⁷

The restoration of diplomatic relations under the so-called 'umbrella' formula deliberately laid the sovereignty question aside at least for the time being. 'We do not agree about sovereignty' – Douglas Hurd told Parliament in July 1995. 'We are not prepared to discuss sovereignty, but (if the Argentines) are willing to put that aside, we will be perfectly willing to develop trade, investment and other contacts.'⁹⁸ In this context commercial relations, as noted, have improved steadily. This has also been due to Argentina's privatisation policies, which have allowed the participation of British banks, consulting firms and industrial companies in that country. Between 1991 and mid-1995 British exports to Argentina rose by 165 per cent. Cooperation between the two nations has extended to a number of areas: 'agreements on visa abolition, air services, judicial co-operation against drug trafficking, investment promotion and fisheries'.⁹⁹ Fisheries, with illex squid at the centre of the dispute, has been a contentious area. Nevertheless, since 1992 the two governments have been able to strike annual accords on these issues, although Britain has been seeking a long-term agreement on fisheries.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, in November 1995, the two countries signed an oil co-operation agreement, a landmark in recent Anglo-Argentine relations.¹⁰¹

No other bilateral relationship has come near to matching the importance of restoring the Anglo-Argentine connection, in terms of its scope and implications for British-Latin American relations. Indeed, it might be argued that a breakthrough in Anglo-Argentine relations was a prerequisite for a sustained and durable strengthening of British-Latin American relations

⁹⁶ *The Financial Times*, 1 November 1993, and *The Times*, 27 September 1993.

⁹⁷ *The Financial Times*, 24 October 1995.

⁹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (263), London, 5 July 1995, p. 368.

⁹⁹ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (263), London, 5 July 1995, p. 366. See also *The Times*, Supplement on Argentina, 27 February 1996.

¹⁰⁰ *The Financial Times*, 8 January 1993, 20 October 1993, and 24 October 1995.

¹⁰¹ The accord was referred to as 'constructively ambiguous' by *The Financial Times*. Oil was also considered 'the most difficult issue for the two governments', as it raised the question of the Falkland Islands' sovereignty. *The Financial Times*, 25 October 1995.

overall.¹⁰² Whether the result of political decisions in London or growing political familiarity with the Argentine leadership, the evolving Anglo-Argentine relationship may be said to form part of a general background of changing perceptions and a better climate that has come to characterise Britain's relations with the region during the past decade. Nevertheless, as already suggested, the renewal of Anglo-Latin American ties in the 1990s has also involved stronger relationships with countries that in the past did not figure prominently on the British agenda in the region. Colombia, in particular, whose position towards the war in the South Atlantic did not pass unnoticed in Westminster,¹⁰³ has developed close links with the United Kingdom in this new scenario.

Colombia's history of friendly relations with Great Britain dates back to the official recognition of Latin American independence. But overall the British economic presence in Colombia, compared to its presence in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico – and even Uruguay and Bolivia – has been relatively unimportant. This is not to deny the significance of British capital and expertise in the development of certain areas of the economy in particular periods, nor to deny the considerable British influence in Colombian cultural and intellectual life, as well as in political institutions.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, when, in 1938, Colombia and Great Britain attempted to renegotiate the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation signed by the two countries in 1866, the possibilities of expanding trade were limited: 'since Colombia's exports to this country consist only of bananas, hides and skins and coffee'. There was some British investment in oil, particularly from Shell, and in gold. British banks were also active in Colombia. However, all Britain could offer at the time to strengthen the relationship were modest increases in the imports of coffee and bananas and some scholarships, all within 'narrow

¹⁰² Guillermo Makin, 'The Nature of Anglo-Argentine Diplomacy 1980-90', in Alex Danchev (ed.), *International Perspectives on the Falklands Conflict* (London, 1992), p. 233.

¹⁰³ See, for example, *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (209), London, 9 June 1992: 143. Colombia's position was to uphold international law and therefore it opposed Argentina's use of force in its attempt to solve the conflict. This did not mean that Colombia rejected Argentina's claim of sovereignty over the islands. Interview with Carlos Lemos Simmonds, Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of the conflict and Ambassador in London at the time of writing (1996).

¹⁰⁴ See M. Deas, 'La influencia inglesa y otras influencias en Colombia', in A. Tirado Mejía (ed.), *Nueva Historia de Colombia* (Bogotá, 1984); and C. Dávila, 'Empresarios y aventureros británicos y la élite local en Colombia durante el siglo XIX', paper delivered at the 47th Congress of Americanists, New Orleans, July 1991.

limits', besides 'an offer relating to credits'.¹⁰⁵ This limited interest has only been reversed in the last decade, best symbolised by Major's visit to Bogotá in 1992.

British economic interests in Colombia were boosted by the discovery of oil in the Casanare region, where British Petroleum, alongside the Colombian company Ecopetrol and other international consortia, is playing an important role. By the end of 1995, in the first stage of a development programme, BP was expecting production of 150,000 barrels per day (b/d) of oil from the Cusiana fields. The next stage, which involved the building of 'one of the world's great pipeline projects of the 1990s', will allow BP to raise production to over 600,000 b/d. For BP, as the company's managing director, John Browne, confirmed in a speech at Canning House at the end of 1993, 'our work in Colombia is a major investment on a world scale. We've spent over \$0.5 billion there in the last three years, and we will be spending another \$300 million next year (1994) on both development and further exploration'.¹⁰⁶

Other companies have followed suit; since December 1995, for example, the leading mining consortium RTZ has announced plans to expand its coal operations with a £22.7 million investment in Colombia.¹⁰⁷ In spite of security problems, as Sir Keith Morris has pointed out, British investors have continued to show confidence in the Colombian economy.¹⁰⁸ A bilateral Trade Facilitation Group, set up after the meeting between John Major and César Gaviria in June 1992, identified business opportunities worth between \$10-14 billion, mainly in oil and gas exploration and development, power generation, telecommunications, water services, agroindustry and railways rehabilitation.¹⁰⁹ Acknowledging the importance of these developments, President Gaviria supported the Investment Promotion and Protection

¹⁰⁵ See Board of Trade, 'Commercial Negotiations with Colombia', 18 August 1939, Public Record Office, FO 371/22742. See also British Legation to Foreign Office, Bogotá, 2 May 1938, PRO, FO 371/21439.

¹⁰⁶ 'Latin American Oil in an International Context'.

¹⁰⁷ '\$36m Colombia project for RTZ', *The Financial Times*, 17 December 1995.

¹⁰⁸ 'Keith Morris, adiós a Colombia', *El Tiempo*, 16 October 1994.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Mowlem, 'The Commercial Opportunities', paper presented to the Latin American Parliamentary Group at Canning House, London, 28 June 1994.

Agreement which was finally signed with Great Britain in March 1994.¹¹⁰ Trade has also improved: Colombia was the third largest market in Latin America in the 1994 league table of British exports. In addition to closer economic links, Britain is also, as noted, helping the Colombian authorities to counter the illicit production and trafficking of drugs. In 1989, following the visit of a team of British officials to Colombia, an aid package was devised to provide technical support to combat the activities of the notorious drug cartels.¹¹¹

The Colombian experience deserves special attention for it shows how economic opportunities provided new inroads for British business in this country. A similar pattern, however, emerges throughout the continent – even, more recently, in Cuba. It has been suggested here that some at least of the above changes can be linked to processes related to, or affected by, the end of the Cold War. Political and economic liberalisation, both well underway before the collapse of Soviet power in Eastern Europe and the USSR itself, have made Latin American countries more attractive to Britain along with other European countries. They have also brought Latin America closer into line with US policies on a number of issues. Yet critically the end of the Cold War, by reducing the strategic importance of a region like Latin America, and thereby contributing to its perceived ‘marginalisation’, has also contributed to a decoupling of the US-Latin American relationship that may directly benefit Europeans. Further, the relative decline in the economic position of the United States and the growing economic and political strength of Europe, as it emerged from the 1980s, suggests that the latter will ‘inevitably seek a more salient role in a region with which it has historical and political affinities’.¹¹² In another way Latin America has become, and is recognised as, a more important international player, one whose weight

¹¹⁰ *El Tiempo*, 9 March 1994. The signing of the agreement, originally due to take place during Gaviria’s visit to London in 1993, was delayed for constitutional reasons which were the cause of controversy. See, for example, ‘Viaje fallido’, *Semana*, 3 August 1993; and A. López Michelsen, ‘El convenio con la Gran Bretaña’, *El Tiempo*, 8 May 1994.

¹¹¹ Stuart Croft (ed.), *British Security Policy. The Thatcher Years and the End of the Cold War* (London, 1991), p. 191. Since 1989, Britain has spent £13m in an assistance programme to fight drugs in Colombia – basically equipment and training for drug enforcement agencies. See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (253), London, 3 February 1995: 882; and (254), 7 February 1995: 220.

¹¹² On this theme see further Alberto van Kláveren, ‘Latin America and the International Political System of the 1990s’, in Jonathan Hartlyn, Lars Schoultz and Augusto Varas (eds.), *The United States and Latin America in the 1990s* (Chapel Hill, 1992), pp. 31-3.

may be increasingly felt in international fora and must be courted for its favours. Collectively Latin American countries have often played a leading role in Third World international politics, notably through organisations like the Non-Aligned Movement or through United Nations' fora such as UNCTAD.¹¹³

Developments within the European Union and in its relations with Latin America (as well as Britain's own position with regard to the Union itself) also add a new dimension to British-Latin American relations. On the one hand, political links between the continent and the European Union have greatly intensified, as manifested, for example, in the active role that Europe has played in the Central American crisis and in the new interest in and commitment to issues such as human rights and democratisation. Economic links have been slower to improve: from 1985 to 1995 trade between the two regions fell significantly in comparison with previous decades. Yet during the three year period 1993-1995 Latin America was described as the 'most dynamic market for European exports',¹¹⁴ while the EU remains Latin America's second largest trading partner. It is still too early to assess how the Single European Market will affect Latin America: fears of a 'Fortress Europe' appear exaggerated and the process seems likely to offer benefits as well as disadvantages to different countries, at least in the medium term. Further, as van Kláveren writes, the 'strength and dynamism of an economically unified Europe could be felt in Latin America, despite the rather marginal weight of the region in Europe's external economic relations'.¹¹⁵ One positive development was the adoption by the European Union, on 23 October 1995, of a strategy for strengthening relations with Latin America for the period 1996-2000, a move reflecting the new importance of the region.¹¹⁶

Latin America's interest in regional integration on the European model – as manifested in the various schemes that exist for promoting sub-regional integration – and Europe's commitment to promoting such schemes are some obvious ways in which the two regions may be brought closer together. The impact of the European project can be clearly seen in groupings like the Andean Pact or MERCOSUR in their commitment to the creation of common

¹¹³ See for example, Esperanza Durán, *European Interests in Latin America*, Chatham House Papers, No. 28 (London, 1985), p. 8.

¹¹⁴ European Commission, *Bulletin of the European Union*, No. 10 (1995), pp. 95-6.

¹¹⁵ Van Kláveren, 'Latin America and the International Political System', pp. 33-6.

¹¹⁶ *Bulletin of the European Union*, p. 95.

markets within a certain time frame.¹¹⁷ As Wolf Grabendorff argues, 'in coming years Europe and Latin America may drift together because they have chosen similar paths to economic and political integration'.¹¹⁸ And while EC/EU assistance to Latin American countries is nothing new,¹¹⁹ the assistance offered to MERCOSUR countries through the Asia/Latin America (ALA) Regulation in 1995, within the context of a EU-MERCOSUR 'Interregional framework cooperation agreement', signed in December 1995, demonstrates the potential at least for an enlarged aid and economic cooperation programme at the level of regional institutions.¹²⁰

If Europe then can be looked to as an example and model, Britain's particular position in the Community together with its historic Atlantic connections may offer some advantages. Britain's international profile, and its traditional interests in both European and Atlantic circles have encouraged claims that Britain is uniquely placed to direct European initiatives in Latin America, as well as bringing benefits to relations at the bilateral level. 'The United Kingdom', Viscount Montgomery has pointed out, 'can be seen as an ally in Europe and as a gateway and bridge into the Community for Latin America'.¹²¹ The end of the Cold War era has been rightly seen as one which has presented Britain with a 'window of opportunity' in many developing countries.¹²² This is particularly so not only given the transformed context of US foreign policy, but also because of the problems facing a number of Britain's major partners and rivals (Germany and Italy are obvious examples). In suggesting ways in which Britain might redefine its

¹¹⁷ See Louise Fawcett, 'Regionalism in historical perspective', in Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (eds.), *Regionalism in World Politics* (Oxford, 1995), p. 24. On the broader theme of 'Regionalism in the Americas', see Hurrell's chapter in the same volume.

¹¹⁸ Wolf Grabendorff, 'European Integration: Implications for Latin America', in Colin I. Bradford (ed.), *Strategic Options for Latin America in the 1990s* (Paris, 1992), p. 239.

¹¹⁹ For a summary of such assistance since 1975 see Guadalupe Ruiz-Giménez, 'La agenda de los noventa para América Latina: la contribución de la CE', *Revista de Occidente*, no. 131 (April 1992), pp. 151-62.

¹²⁰ See Minister of Trade's speech to the MERCOSUR conference, *Bulletin of the EU*, p. 96.

¹²¹ *Parliamentary Debates. Lords*, London, 19 December 1990: 834. See also similar comments by Jacques Arnold in *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (177), London, 23 July 1990.

¹²² See, for example, James Morgan, 'Wide Horizons, Slender Means: the Scope for British Influence', *International Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 4 (1992), pp. 603-17.

foreign policies for a new era, William Wallace writes: 'We could build onto our position as Europe's most attractive base for extra-European investment a more explicit and developed image of Britain as a link between Europe and the developed world – securely rooted in European cooperation, but pursuing close and mutual relations with North America and Japan...'¹²³ The argument, as noted, may equally be extended to the developing world. Britain's position in Europe could also help mitigate the fears of Latin American and other developing countries of the adverse impact of a 'fortress Europe'. In this context, Conservative governments have always been anxious to reassure Britain's non-European trading partners and to stress their opposition to such a development: in the 1991 Latin American debate Ray Whitney referred to the 'suspicion and fear that, in creating a single market in 1992, we shall create the old cliché of a fortress Europe'. And he continued: 'One of the prime contributions that the United Kingdom has made and will continue to make is to ensure that we create not a fortress Europe but a dynamic market of 320m people, which is politically stable, makes a contribution to world peace and creates the opportunities for greater trade among all the countries of the world, not least Latin America.'¹²⁴

The limits to revival

For all the optimism expressed above, there remain some all too apparent constraints on any major further developments in British-Latin American relations. There has been much legitimate criticism of any premature celebration of a great revival. In 1989, from the opposition benches, Jeremy Corbyn voiced the opinion that 'one of the problems with British policy towards Latin America is that there is no policy – just a series of decisions which may or may not be made on national or economic issues. There is very little overall strategy'.¹²⁵ Such views have since been echoed elsewhere. According to Laurence Whitehead, for example, the British government's policy on debt, drug trafficking or environmental conservation all directly affect Latin America but do not 'constitute a Latin American policy, certainly not in the way that London consciously shapes and coordinates relations with

¹²³ William Wallace, 'Foreign Policy and National Identity in the United Kingdom', *International Affairs*, vol. 67, no. 1 (1991), p. 79.

¹²⁴ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (177), London, 22 July 1991. See also Ray Whitney's intervention, in similar vein, in the 1994 debate in *ibid.* (229), 20 July 1994.

¹²⁵ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (157), London, 27 July 1989: 1316.

Europe or the USA or even with South Africa or India'.¹²⁶

Although such criticisms do not lack some validity, they undervalue the changes of the last decade, as outlined in the previous section, particularly when set against the steady decline of British interest in the region since the 1930s, or against the realities of Latin America's international position. After all, neither economically, politically nor strategically can Latin America possibly hope to compete for Britain's attention with Europe or the United States. Nor, with a few exceptions, do any comparable historical links exist such as those which bind Britain to the Commonwealth or to countries of the Middle East. Indeed, precisely given its relatively peripheral status one should be looking more closely at the 'signs of rediscovery' described here. Within the constraints of a limited relationship, and in a period of shifting international priorities on both sides, considerable progress has been made.

Yet there is also a need to separate myth from reality, facts from rhetoric. Despite the evidence accumulated in this paper, there are some contradictions to the argument that British-Latin American relations are undergoing a revival. In this last section, we explore some of these contradictions: in particular we look at cuts in diplomatic staff and, above all, at British policies towards trade when traditional loyalties with other regions are at stake. Finally, we also look at the possible responses of Latin America to these contradictions. All these point to some of the limitations which impede a deeper relationship developing between Britain and Latin America.

The somewhat rosy and optimistic picture that emerges from a study of recent relations in the past decade is contradicted, for example, by the cost-cutting exercises that have continued at certain levels of diplomatic and cultural relations. Douglas Hurd's declared intention to give the continent greater priority notwithstanding, there came a subsequent decision to cut levels of diplomatic staff in British embassies throughout Latin America. As John Wilkinson pointed out in the 1991 parliamentary debate on Latin America, it was difficult for the government to 'effectively support our business men and our strategic aims to maintain a fruitful relationship with Latin America as a whole... if, at the same time, the government are reducing our diplomatic presence and cutting posts in our embassies. Too many posts in South America have been cut to the bone and some South American countries do not have a fully manned British post'.¹²⁷ Such cuts

¹²⁶ Laurence Whitehead, 'Britain and Latin America', paper presented to the IRELA Workshop, Barcelona, 5 October 1990, p. 1; see also his 'Britain, Latin America and the European Community', in Bulmer-Thomas, *Britain and Latin America*, pp. 83-4.

¹²⁷ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (177), London, 22 July 1991: 852.

were justified by the Foreign Secretary himself as compensation for the need to expand the diplomatic corps in the Far East. And in defending this decision a *Times* editorial argued that 'Britain's essential interests are limited to Europe, North America and its chief trading partners in the Far East... Even at the sacrifice of commercial opportunities, embassies in Africa and Latin America may have to give way to regional centres in key countries.'¹²⁸ The number of British consular offices in Latin America actually increased from 33 to 41 over the five year period 1987-1992, but this was mostly due to the new appointments of honorary consuls, providing assistance and advice to British nationals 'at *minimal cost*'.¹²⁹ The advantages of the European relationship too can be objected to in much the same way. Have developments in Europe, or indeed Britain's particular position in Europe, really strengthened the prospects of either British-Latin American or European-Latin American relations? Problems obviously remain with regard to strengthening European as well as British links with the continent, although some European countries – Spain is one example – would appear to have a stronger interest in forging closer relations.¹³⁰ The fact remains that for Europe as for Britain, Latin America – 'the great forgotten area of the EC'¹³¹ – simply has not been a traditional priority: 'hard facts and achievements have not yet kept pace with the political pronouncements and expressions of goodwill made by political leaders in both regions.'¹³² The real impact of the 'Europe 1992' project has still to be felt, and there are those who argue that its effects will be deeply damaging to Latin America.¹³³ The trade picture, for example, remains one of great asymmetry – an asymmetry particularly worrying to Latin Americans. Finally, there is always the danger

¹²⁸ 'Transcript of a speech given by the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, to the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House on 27 May 1993', *The Times*, 31 May 1993.

¹²⁹ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (216), London, 11 January 1993: 559-60.

¹³⁰ Partly at Spanish instigation, the EC extended in 1990 its superior tranche of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) to four countries of the Andean Pact. See Christopher Stevens et al., 'EC Trade Preferences and a Post-apartheid South Africa', *International Affairs*, vol. 69, no. 1 (1993), pp. 92-3.

¹³¹ Ruiz-Giménez, 'La agenda de las 90', p. 154.

¹³² Freres et al., 'Europa y América Latina', p. 104; Durán, *European Interests in Latin America*, pp. 9-10.

¹³³ For a breakdown of the positive and negative effects of the Single European Market for Latin America, see Grabendorff, 'European Integration: Implications for Latin America', and the updated Spanish version: *La integración Europea: consecuencias para América Latina*, in *Síntesis* (Madrid), no. 18 (Sept./Dec. 1992), pp. 15-51.

is always the danger that the twin forces of economic and political liberalisation that have made Latin America more attractive to Europeans could prove reversible.

There are clearly, then, some very real and concrete obstacles to any substantial change in the nature of British-Latin American relations. Perhaps no other issue illustrates both the current difficulties and the potential contradictions of British policies towards the region as clearly as the 'Euro-Banana' conflict, to which we now turn our attention.

The Single European Market, which came into effect on 1 January 1993, gave rise to great expectations among Latin American banana producers. Hitherto many European markets had effectively been restricted to them due to preferential arrangements previously existing between ACP¹³⁴ and Mediterranean producers. With 40 per cent of world consumption of the fruit already concentrated in Europe, the 1990s saw an increased demand for the banana. This was both as a result of its increased popularity in countries like Britain¹³⁵ (a phenomenon also noted in Japan), where it appeared to be overtaking the orange as the second most popular fruit after the apple, but also because of the new demand from former Eastern bloc countries. Here, with the collapse of Soviet power, the banana had become identified as a 'symbol of liberty'.¹³⁶ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this potentially lucrative market became the object of one of the most intense 'lobbying' operations in the recent history of the European Union.¹³⁷

The search for a single regime for the European banana market has divided consumers and producers alike. Under previous arrangements, Latin American producers were subject to a quota system and tariff barriers of up to 20 per cent, imposed by a majority of EU members, with the important exception of Germany, the largest European consumer of the fruit. For their part, banana producers from the former European possessions and colonies of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific enjoyed a preferential set of trading arrangements. Spain and Portugal have also retained special links with traditional suppliers in the Canary Islands and Madeira, France with

¹³⁴ ACP: Former European possessions and colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

¹³⁵ Consumption of bananas in the United Kingdom almost doubled between 1985 and 1995; see *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (263), London, 19 July 1995: 1470.

¹³⁶ *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1991.

¹³⁷ See *Financial Times*, 6 April 1992 and 30 June 1993.

Guadeloupe and Martinique.¹³⁸ In 1990, two-thirds of the 425,000 tons of bananas consumed in Britain originated from plantations in Jamaica and the Windward Islands: St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Vincent and Grenada, again with producer access to British markets guaranteed under the Banana Protocol of the Lomé Convention.

The prospects of any unified regime controlling the import of bananas to EU countries raised as many fears as hopes among banana producers worldwide, given their different and often opposing interests. On the one hand, the ACP countries feared competition from the cheaper and better quality Latin American product. On the other hand, the Latin American producers faced the possibility that the previously existing discriminatory regime, or indeed any new regime, would be extended to all EU members. For the Europeans themselves, the banana dispute has also brought to the fore serious conflicts of interest and loyalties. Whatever the decision, it would affect at once their commitments to their former colonies and possessions, to the Uruguay round of GATT talks on trade liberalisation, and not least to their own consumers.

Throughout the course of the debate, in particular since its intensification in mid-1991, Britain's position moved clearly in favour of protection of the Caribbean producers, and by extension the interests of the large companies like Geest and Fyffes, who have traditionally dominated the British market.¹³⁹ At the level of public opinion the conflict was presented somewhat simplistically as a struggle between 'Euro' and 'dollar' bananas, or in other words between the big US multinationals controlling continental production and the smaller Caribbean island producers, historically attached to the European metropolis, whose protection is seen as essential to survival.¹⁴⁰ There is little doubt that the concerns of the Caribbean producers are genuine. 'If we lose the industry we lose the country' said the

¹³⁸ For a short description of the arrangements existing prior to 1993, see Brent Borell and Sandy Cuthbertson, 'EC banana policies', *Hemisphere*, Fall 1992, pp. 32-4.

¹³⁹ See Peter N. Davies, *Fyffes and the Banana. A Centenary History, 1888-1988* (London & Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1990).

¹⁴⁰ See, for example: 'Assured EC access urged for banana producers', *The Financial Times*, 17 March 1992; 'New order of the banana falls foul of the old bunch', *The Independent*, 31 May 1992; 'Big Bananas, Little Bananas and a Whole Jungle of Banana Skins', *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1992; 'The great European banana split', *The Times*, 3 March 1993. As some of these headlines suggest, despite the significance of the issue for many producing countries, bananas are far from being taken seriously as a subject of discussion by opinion makers.

Dominican prime minister in April 1992, a not invalid claim considering that 60% of the country's external income and 15% of its workforce is dependent on banana exports.¹⁴¹ Studies conducted by the World Bank considered nonetheless that the protectionist measures of the European Union in favour of the ACP countries would ultimately bring more benefits to the big trading companies and the importing countries themselves, whilst also being the source of great inefficiencies.¹⁴² Yet in the wider debate the political arguments predominate over the economic, as suggested by the conclusions of a report prepared by the International Coalition for Development Action, favouring the interests of the former colonies. As Lord Glenconner reminded his colleagues in the House of Lords in November 1992: 'We are not talking about banana republics... but banana kingdoms since in these countries Her Majesty the Queen is the Head of State'.¹⁴³ On various occasions during parliamentary discussions, the British government confirmed its determination to ensure that any single regime for the banana would not run counter to commitments made under the Lomé Conventions. Yet at the same time it recognised that any new arrangement reached should be compatible with the ongoing GATT negotiations.¹⁴⁴

In April 1992, the European Commission (EC) appeared to be moving towards the adoption of a tariff/quota system aimed at protecting the old colonies, while Latin American producers continued to press for a tariff regime which would at least not exclude them from competing in the new European market of some 336 million potential consumers. In August the same year a more explicit proposal to limit Latin American imports to a quota of 2 million tonnes was attacked both by the Union of Banana Exporting Countries (UBEC) and by the Association of Jamaican Banana Exporters.¹⁴⁵ In December, just one month before the Single European Market was due to

¹⁴¹ See *The Financial Times*, 10 September 1991 and 6 April 1992. See also A. Maingot, 'La guerra del banano en el Caribe: anticipando cambios globales', *Foro Internacional*, vol. XXXII, no. 1, July-September 1991, pp. 65-83.

¹⁴² *The Financial Times*, 29 September 1992, and 'EU banana policy "perverse and inefficient" says World Bank', *The Financial Times*, 20 January 1995.

¹⁴³ *Parliamentary Debates. House of Lords Weekly Hansard* (1547), London 23 November 1992: 876.

¹⁴⁴ See *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (204), London, 18 February 1992: 104; (208), 4 June 1992: 940; (210), 9 July 1992: 314; and (212), 28 October 1992: 683.

¹⁴⁵ *The Financial Times*, 15 April and 28 August 1992. UBEC comprises Costa Rica, Honduras, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and Panama.

come into operation, negotiations deadlocked. At this point, the British government, holding the presidency of the European Commission, put forward a proposal, which, in combining a tariff and quota system, guaranteed the protection of the Caribbean producers. This was the formula finally adopted by the EC, effective as of 1 July 1993: the first two tonnes of imported bananas would be subject to a tariff of 100 Ecu (£79.50); any imports above this quota would be subject to a higher tariff: of 700 Ecu (£560).¹⁴⁶

This decision was unanimously rejected by the UBEC countries as well as other banana exporters who see themselves as discriminated against by the imposition of a system overtly favouring traditional suppliers. In Ecuador, for example, where some 100,000 jobs appeared threatened as a direct result of the EC ruling, there were violent protests. In January 1993 furious demonstrators dumped bunches of bananas in front of the French Embassy in Quito and burned the French flag, before continuing their protest in front of the British and German embassies.¹⁴⁷ In May 1993 the Colombian journal *Semana* produced a report claiming that the new ruling was prejudicial to the Colombian companies marketing the fruit: Uniban, Proban and Banacol.¹⁴⁸ The Germans, too, were naturally dissatisfied with an arrangement which obliged them to buy their fruit at considerably higher prices. But their subsequent attempts through the European Court of Justice to suspend the measures proved in vain. Meanwhile the Latin American producers took their case to the GATT, where they first succeeded in securing the establishment of a special panel to consider the implications of the new regime imposed by the Community.¹⁴⁹ Six months later, in January 1994, a GATT report upheld the complaint by five Latin American countries that the EU policy towards bananas contravened GATT rules. In spite of GATT's condemnation the EU has continued to implement its preferential banana trade, with strong British support.¹⁵⁰ However, Brussels was able to appease some of the Latin American producers by reaching an agreement over higher quotas with

¹⁴⁶ See *The Financial Times*, 9, 11 and 18 December 1993.

¹⁴⁷ *The Financial Times*, 20 January 1993.

¹⁴⁸ *Semana*, Bogotá, 25 May 1993.

¹⁴⁹ *The Financial Times*, 30 June and 27 July 1993; *Latin American Weekly Report*, 24 June 1993, p. 281 and 1 July 1993, p. 298.

¹⁵⁰ 'We fought hard to safeguard (the Windward Islands banana industry's) interests in the EC banana regime', acknowledged in Parliament the Foreign Office; *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (259), London, 10 May 1995: 464. See also *The Financial Times*, 14, 18, 20 and 23 January 1994.

Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Venezuela.¹⁵¹ Although after this agreement, in March 1994, the EU declared an 'end to the row over bananas', there are still some disaffected countries, including Guatemala and the United States, which also threatened to retaliate against Colombia and Costa Rica.¹⁵²

The so-called 'banana war' has, then, served to highlight some of the contradictions *vis-à-vis* Britain's relationship with Latin America and indeed Europe, as well as demonstrating the clear conflict of loyalties. From a general angle, as *The Financial Times* observed, British 'support for the banana regime blatantly contradicts its professed commitment to free trade'.¹⁵³ The dispute has strengthened – at least among Latin Americans – the idea of a Fortress Europe that Britain had gone to such great pains to dispel. On a number of occasions in the House of Commons, as noted previously, MPs made reference to the particular role that Britain could play in the EC in ensuring that 'we create not a fortress Europe' but 'a dynamic market of 320 million people'. This role, in terms of banana policies at least, has so far not been played. Thus, a *Financial Times* editorial concluded: 'It was supposed that the EC common market would serve to lower prices and increase competition. But in the case of bananas, the programme has run off course.'¹⁵⁴ In short, the banana issue has served perhaps as a salutary reminder of the limitations inherent in any new British-Latin American relationship and indeed in any blossoming EU-Latin American initiative. As Freres et al. have noted: 'The conflict generated over the extension to other EC markets of the discriminatory regime applied by France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain to restrict access of the more competitive Latin American banana exports, constitutes another demonstration of the potential gravity of the commercial problems existing between the two regions.'¹⁵⁵

In the face of a 'Fortress Europe' or, in particular, of a Britain tied by its traditional loyalties, Latin Americans may feel that they would be better off exploring other frontiers. Strengthening even further links with the United States and Canada, which are, after all, closer to home, might be perceived as the natural and perhaps the only alternative route. The North American

¹⁵¹ *The Financial Times*, 30 March 1994, and *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (253), London, 26 January 1995: 361.

¹⁵² In the course of revising this paper, it was announced that the USA had dropped its investigation into Colombia and Costa Rica. See 'Kantor drops US banana inquiry', *The Financial Times*, 11 January 1996.

¹⁵³ 'Yes, the EU's gone bananas', *The Financial Times*, 25 January 1995.

¹⁵⁴ 'Gone bananas', *The Financial Times*, 3 June 1993.

¹⁵⁵ Freres et al., 'Europa y América Latina', p. 98.

Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) points in this direction, although Mexico is in a different position from the rest of its Latin American neighbours. And the Mexican crisis has retarded any possibility of expansion of such integration. Latin American countries are also looking for ways of strengthening links among themselves. Sub-regional organisations are on the ascendant – MERCOSUR, the Andean Pact or the G-3 (Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela), but looking to their own resources has its obvious limitations. Some Latin American countries have also started to look further afield. Chile, for example, has for long been strengthening ties with the Pacific,¹⁵⁶ as demonstrated by its recent association with the APEC. Britain has a lot to offer to Latin America, but in the more open and competitive international scenario of the post-cold war era, Latin Americans are well aware of the existence of other possibilities.¹⁵⁷ How Latin Americans themselves perceive the prospects of this ‘new relationship’ with Britain is therefore a significant question. An ‘aggressive’ or a ‘passive’ Latin American diplomacy in this country would make a considerable difference to British inroads in the region.

Conclusions

When Sir Kenneth James, in his 1991 New Year message, alerted the members of Canning House to the need not to waste the new opportunities for renewing British-Latin American relations, it was like yet another replay of an old refrain.¹⁵⁸ Certainly, his optimism was not entirely unfounded. After several decades in which Latin America had become increasingly distanced from the mainstream of British concerns, there were indeed several signs that relations were entering a new dynamic phase. Now, some five years later, many of the ‘signs of rediscovery’ are still present – as this paper has amply

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, P. Armanet, ‘Política de Chile en la cuenca del Pacífico; perspectivas para la década del noventa’, *Estudios Internacionales*, no. 92, January-March 1992, pp. 41-72. Armanet suggests that the Pacific could be an alternative to a ‘fortress Europe’, see *ibid.*, p. 59. See also C. Moreno Laval, ‘América Latina y la cuenca del Pacífico’, *Estudios Internacionales*, July-September 1991, pp. 336-83.

¹⁵⁷ At a London meeting, asked by a Latin American diplomat what Great Britain had to offer to Latin America, a Conservative MP dismissed the significance of the question with a hint of arrogance. Instead of listing the various reasons – and there are many – for Latin Americans to pay greater attention to Britain, his reply implied that this was simply a matter of ‘take it or leave it’.

¹⁵⁸ ‘A Letter from the Director General to Corporate Members of Canning House’, London, January 1991.

demonstrated – even if some have become a little tarnished.

The resurgence of British 'enthusiasm' for Latin America in the 1990s has some precedents – all of them soon followed by disenchantment. 'Throughout my commercial life', Lord Nelson of Stafford observed in 1972, 'I can remember the saying that South America was about to "take-off".' And he added a caustic note: 'The great difficulty is to ascertain its timing.'¹⁵⁹ Nowadays the idea, as expressed by Minister Chalker, is repeated once again: the region is full of great potential.¹⁶⁰ This time, however, British renewed interest has occurred under different circumstances from past experiences. The processes of political and, above all, economic reforms undergone in Latin America have been crucial in this new rapprochement.

The consolidation of these reforms conditions the strengthening of British ties in Latin America. Closer economic links are at the heart of British policy towards the region. 'Increasingly, the flag follows the trade', Douglas Hurd stated from a general angle. One of his Ministers put it more directly: 'the prospects for Latin America and our relationship with it depend so much on trade'.¹⁶¹ Among many other factors, the expansion of trade from this side of the Atlantic will depend on the willingness of British businessmen to continue investing in Latin American markets. Past records are not always encouraging. And the recent Mexican crisis only serves to fuel those images crudely recalled by Jacques Arnold, 'too many British businessmen still regard Latin America as an uncomfortable, hot place run by caudillos, saddled with debt, not paying their bills, destroying their forests and growing and peddling drugs'.¹⁶² As Latin American countries enter into the 1990s with a firm commitment to open up their economies, how they are perceived by the outside world has become all the more relevant.¹⁶³ The question of 'image' has ceased to be a trivial matter confined to the agenda of cultural

¹⁵⁹ *Parliamentary Debates. Lords* (327), 26 January 1972: 371. About the same time, the Director of the Bank of London and South America, Sir George Bolton, predicted that by the end of the century economic and political developments will make the region the source of envy to many a European country; cited in Marett, *Latin America: British Trade and Investment*, p. 78.

¹⁶⁰ *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (138), London, 1988: 728.

¹⁶¹ See 'Transcript of a speech given by the Foreign Secretary'; and *Parliamentary Debates, Hansard* (177), 22 July 1991: 860.

¹⁶² *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (177), London, 23 July 1990: 250. For similar remarks, see *idem* (138), 28 July 1988: 709, and (157) 22 July 1989: 1322.

¹⁶³ See, for example, The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Latin America. Regional Overview*, London, second quarter, 1992, p. 7.

attachés.¹⁶⁴

The changing context of British foreign policy, alluded to in this paper, has also conditioned relations with Latin America. It has been argued that both at the bilateral and the European level there are opportunities for Britain to consolidate and expand relations with Latin America. Britain's increased commitment to Europe, overturning the Churchillian order of international priorities, need not be detrimental to Latin America. The attractions Britain once held for the Latin American continent may not be restored in full. Yet within the context of a limited relationship, there is considerable scope for British policy.

The prospect of a Labour government after the next general election poses some questions about sustaining Britain's renewed interest in Latin America. Economic considerations – in particular the opportunities offered to British business by the liberalisation of Latin American countries, have been at the centre of Conservative policies towards the region. Indeed, the process of economic reform was much inspired by British Conservative policy. The Labour party has been accommodating to the new global impetus in favour of market forces, but Labour obviously does not share the Conservatives' enthusiasm for free trade. If the interventions of Jeremy Corbyn in parliament – he is the most active Labour MP in the Latin American debates – are indicative of Labour views, some change in emphasis at least should be expected. Corbyn, however, is perhaps an example of Labour radicalism.¹⁶⁵ Other, more moderate views, such as those expressed by Tony Lloyd, may be more representative. And past Labour governments have shown pragma-

¹⁶⁴ This question was addressed in a conference organised by Canning House and the Institute of Latin American Studies in London: 'Reflections of Latin America in the European Media', on 13-14 February 1995.

¹⁶⁵ Confrontation between Corbyn's views and those of his Conservative colleagues has become a familiar scene in the debates on Latin America. After the opening statement of the last debate (1995), when Jacques Arnold praised economic and political developments in the region and British renewed interests in Latin America, Jeremy Corbyn replied: 'It is difficult for me to follow the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr Arnold), as I found little with which I could agree in what he said, and his interpretation of history should be filed under "Sycophantic"'. Conservatives, in turn, use Corbyn's views on Latin America to contradict the picture of 'new Labour': 'old Labour is alive and well on the Opposition benches and marching firmly in the wrong ideological direction'; *Parliamentary Debates. Hansard* (264), London, 18 October 1995: 267, and 270.

tism in dealing with Latin American economic relations.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, economic considerations may take second place under Labour with other concerns – human rights, the environment and drugs – taking higher priority.

Whatever the party label of the next government, there is little doubt that Latin American diplomacy will continue to face serious challenges. The generally old-fashioned ministries of foreign affairs throughout the region can scarcely compete with the intense activity of lobby groups outside their countries – be they concerned with economic or human rights issues. When in 1988 Sir Geoffrey Howe referred optimistically to the revival of interest in Latin America – ‘Hope in a time of change’ – he was setting a new British agenda for the region. This paper has attempted to review how this agenda has progressed in the past decade. The extent to which Latin American countries perceive this ‘window of opportunity’, and whether or not they accept its challenges, remains to be seen.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, M. D. Wilkinson, ‘The Chile Solidarity Campaign and British Government Policy towards Chile, 1973-1990’, *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 52, June 1992, pp. 59-65.

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