

# THE NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL ON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES (NECLAS)

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Although the history of Latin American studies in New England is long and luminous, from Prescott to Haring, Morison, and numerous more recent lights, the nucleus for the organization of the New England Council was not formed until 1969. The organization of NECLAS was related both to the mushrooming growth of Latin American studies at New England colleges and universities and nationwide during the 1960s, and to the emergence of the larger private and state universities in the region as relatively new and major centers of research and teaching on Latin American affairs.

The initiative for the formation of NECLAS came from Arpad von Lazar of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy of Tufts University, David Haberly of the Portuguese Department at Harvard University, and H. Jon Rosenbaum of the Political Science Department of Wellesley College. On 6 December 1969, these and some forty-five other professors and students of Latin American affairs met at Wellesley College to form a New England Regional Council of the Latin American Studies Association. The conferees represented about twenty-five colleges and universities. In May 1970, Latin Americanists from many New England colleges and universities met at the University of Massachusetts to elect officers, discuss the purposes of the organization, and talk over the possibility of panels, workshops, and meetings on problems of teaching and research.

The first president of the organization that would soon become NECLAS was Hugh M. Hamill, Jr. of the University of Connecticut. Kenneth J. Rothwell of the University of New Hampshire was elected vice-president, and Milton I. Vanger of Brandeis University became the first secretary-treasurer. Members of the first executive committee (and some of NECLAS' other early organizers) were Lewis Hanke of the University of Massachusetts, John Griffin Leshner of The Fletcher School, Anthony P. Maingot of Yale University, H. Jon Rosenbaum of Wellesley College, and Arpad von Lazar of the Fletcher School. Hugh Hamill was not only the organization's first president but also its first (and so far only!) practitioner of *continuismo*, since when Kenneth Rothwell went on leave and was unable to succeed to the presidency, Hamill agreed to stay on as president for a second year.

The historical record<sup>1</sup> shows that the New England Council, like the national Latin American Studies Association, was founded as a nonprofit, learned society of scholars, teachers, and students. Its purposes, as stated in the Consti-

tution adopted on 14 November 1970, are “to foster and develop interests in Latin American studies by scholars, researchers, teachers, students, and general public primarily located in the New England region, to encourage more effective training, teaching and research in Latin American affairs, and to facilitate greater exchange within the region of information and ideas through lectures, forums, seminars, conferences and publications.”

New England is an area of short distances and city-state size political units, with their “primate cities” and surrounding countrysides.<sup>2</sup> In territory, it is roughly the size of Central America, and whether it is more politically unified than that other regional association is sometimes open to question. The short distances and open frontiers, however, have made the NECLAS meetings easily accessible to most of its members; seldom is one much more than a two-hour drive away.

There are other parallels that might be explored. In July 1973, NECLAS was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and its “juridical personality” was duly affirmed by the federal government, specifically the IRS, in the form of tax exempt status. That meant that dues and donations to NECLAS were henceforth deductible on federal and state income tax returns, and that NECLAS could now enjoy the advantages of bulk mailing rates and exemption from state sales taxes. It also implied certain familiar prohibitions against political activity by the organization. In Andersonian terms, NECLAS’ right to exist as a “power contender” within the broader *sistema* had been recognized, but one of the prices for that recognition was an agreement to abide by the “rules of the game,” not challenge other “power contenders,” and certainly not aim to overthrow the system *per se*. Fortunately, the “mausoleum effect” has not yet taken its toll on NECLAS.<sup>3</sup> Indeed NECLAS has thrived. From an initial forty-five attending the Wellesley organizational meeting, it has grown to a membership presently of 370 and is no longer confined to the New England area. NECLAS’ activities and functions have increased commensurately.

The first annual meeting was held at Brandeis University and hosted by Milton Vanger. The all-day program, on 14 November 1970, was attended by about 165 persons, double the number expected. Not least among the results of the meeting, in addition to fine speakers and stimulating panels, was that NECLAS became solvent. In subsequent years NECLAS endeavored to hold its annual meetings at the height of the spectacular New England fall foliage season, the second weekend in October. In 1971 Wellesley College was host to the annual meeting, and in 1972 the University of Connecticut at Storrs. In 1973 the meeting was held at the new and spectacular New England Conference Center at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, and in 1974 at Wheaton College in the lovely old New England town of Norton, Mass. In 1975 the University of Massachusetts at Amherst hosted the biggest gathering NECLAS had ever held; in 1976 the annual meeting moved to the “little Ivy League” campus of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. In 1977 we met in the fine facilities of the Center for Latin American Development Studies at Boston University, and in 1978 at Yale. Small schools and big, private and public, “elite” and “mass,” Jewish, Protestant, secular, and . . . (where are New England’s Catholics?),

whether intentional or not, a nice balance has thus far been maintained among the contending (and sometimes contentious) factions and institutions that are part of the New England educational landscape.

Annual meetings have been brief and friendly affairs, long enough for professional stimulation, renewing scholarly acquaintances, and catching up on the activities of colleagues, but short enough to avoid boredom and the pretentiousness of some of the larger professional meetings. NECLAS meetings have been held on Saturdays, generally with a business meeting the night before which usually adjourns as quickly as possible in favor of a social hour. The Saturday meetings also begin with coffee-and-doughnuts and conclude with a sherry hour that many colleagues argue are the best parts of NECLAS meetings.

Early NECLAS meetings consisted of a panel or two in the morning, lunch, and an afternoon speaker or discussion. By this point, however, the organization has grown sufficiently so that a busy full-day meeting is run: three panels in the morning, a luncheon speaker, and three panels in the afternoon—sometimes with Latin American films being shown concurrently. The themes have been exciting ones: the role of the state, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, family history, social revolution, the early stages of modernization in Latin America, Cuba, women, literature and politics, teaching Latin American history, and many others.

Participation in the annual meeting has often involved younger scholars with new things to say or innovative and exciting research results to report. Though trying to maintain a balance between newer and more established scholars, NECLAS has consciously stayed away from inviting the participation of Latin Americanists who may be “big names” but have had nothing new to say in the last twenty years. NECLAS has also been particularly active in seeking the participation of Latin Americanists at the high school, junior college, and small college level. The continued participation of these members over the years has given NECLAS a certain “extended family” friendliness, in which everyone knows everyone else or is “interrelated.” It also helps explain a certain wariness on the part of NECLAS members toward LASA, which, they feel, frequently ignores them and their interests or shunts them aside.

While the annual meeting is the major function that NECLAS sponsors, the organization has been connected with a host of other activities. Foremost among these are the workshops that NECLAS has sponsored, alone or with host institutions. These include a workshop on “Chile” held at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, in 1971, and hosted by Arpad von Lazar, and a workshop on “The Political Economy of the Cuban Revolution” held at Yale University that same year and led by Carlos Díaz-Alejandro, Anthony Maingot, and Alfred Stepan. The following year Jane Loy of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, organized a workshop entitled “What Can We Learn about Latin America through Film? A Case Study of Chile,” and Emir Rodríguez Monegal of Yale University organized a workshop on “Contemporary Trends in Latin American Literature.” In 1977 Robert White of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, arranged a workshop on “Brazil Today: The Arts and Society.”

Relations between NECLAS and the Yale Council on Latin American Studies, always close, were strengthened with the establishment of the Latin American Studies Language and Area Center at Yale University. Beginning with the program on "Latin American Literature: New Perspectives and New Materials" (1976), NECLAS and the Council have cooperated on a number of workshops; among those in 1978 were "Mexico: New Perspectives, New Materials," "The Politics of Health in Latin America," and "The Modern Latin American Novel." At present plans are for two or three workshops organized around timely themes every year.

In addition NECLAS has cooperated with local institutions and professional organizations in a variety of other ways. It cosponsored a Brazilian film series (1972) and a conference on "The Significance of Chile" (1974) arranged by the Council on Latin American Studies at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. In 1977 it cosponsored the Rodolfo Stavenhagen lecture on "Peasants and Social Change in Latin America" at Brandeis University. When the New England Historical Association held its annual meeting in 1971, NECLAS was represented on the program by a workshop on "Teaching the 'Columbus-to-Castro' History Survey Course" organized by Lewis Hanke.

That same year NECLAS held a joint meeting with the Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Hartford. This was so successful that another one was held the following year at Fairfield University. On both occasions NECLAS benefited from the support it received from Marco Arenas, Central State College, president of the AATSP chapter. NECLAS and the AATSP chapter plan to meet together again in the near future. NECLAS has also established especially cordial relations with the New York State Latin Americanists. NYSLA has contributed outstanding panels to the annual meetings of NECLAS, and has involved NECLAS in its own activities.

A special highlight was a charter trip to Brazil organized through NECLAS by Robert White of the University of Massachusetts in January 1974. At the special group rates, costs were reasonable and NECLAS filled the plane, even making a \$50.00 profit on the venture! Through White's contacts a series of lectures and discussions was arranged led by prominent Brazilian scholars, enabling interested students to earn credit for their Brazil experience. The response from all who participated was enthusiastic and NECLAS made plans to do it again the following year; but the number of reservations fell a few short of filling the plane and, lamentably, the trip had to be cancelled. NECLAS then moved to arrange a similar trip to Cuba, but the arrangements, difficult at best, became problematic with the renewed deterioration of United States-Cuban relations stemming, at least ostensibly, from the stepped-up Cuban military presence in Africa. The opening up of commercial tour service between New York and Havana likely means the demand for NECLAS to arrange such a trip will be diminished.

Through its *Newsletter*, published quarterly, NECLAS reports on these and other activities, keeping its members informed of upcoming events as well

as the activities of other regional associations. Occasionally, it has sponsored special publications. In 1971 it supported Kenneth J. Rothwell, University of New Hampshire, in the preparation, publication, and distribution of a "Directory of Latin American Scholars and Latin American Studies Programs in New England." Another effort to facilitate communication among those interested in Latin American studies was made in 1976 with the issuance of a list of scholars willing to speak on Latin American topics anywhere within the region.

The presidents of NECLAS during its nine years of existence have been Hugh M. Hamill, Jr. (1970–72) of the University of Connecticut, David T. Haberly (1972–73) of Harvard University, Robert A. Potash (1973–74) of the University of Massachusetts, John W. Plank (1974–75) of the University of Connecticut, Frank D. McCann, Jr. (1975–76) of the University of New Hampshire, Jane M. Loy (1976–77) of the University of Massachusetts, and Howard J. Wiarda (1977–78) of the University of Massachusetts. In 1977 Richard M. Morse of Yale University was elected vice-president, to succeed to the presidency in 1978–79; but his departure from New England for the West Coast necessitated his giving up the position. In an election to fill this vacancy, Frederick C. Turner of the University of Connecticut was chosen, and Jorge Domínguez of Harvard University was elected vice-president for 1978–79.

The elected Executive Committee of NECLAS consists of six members; nominations are based generally on both geographic and functional representation. That is, an effort is made to get as many New England states represented as possible, and also to achieve representation of various disciplines, small schools and large, public institutions and private, high schools, junior colleges and community colleges, etc. Whether this system of corporatist-functional representation is based on the "distinct" cultural and historic traditions of New England or has more to do with the requirements of contemporary capitalism cannot, at this time, be ascertained.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the presidency of NECLAS and membership on the Executive Committee are, in part, honorary; without its secretary-treasurer, Joseph T. Criscenti of Boston College (finally, the Catholic connection!), the organization could not have survived, let alone have flourished. Criscenti, since 1972, has been the heart and soul of NECLAS, arranging its activities, supervising the elections, getting out the *Newsletter*, and breathing life into what might otherwise be, like so many professional associations these days, a dead or dying institution. It may be that *personalismo* and *caudillaje* have been supplanted elsewhere in the Western World as "development," "modernization," and their accompanying sociopolitical ramifications have proceeded, but in New England, without Joseph Criscenti, we too would likely be a "conflict society," or perhaps no society at all.<sup>5</sup> (Criscenti hastens to add that he was not the author of the above paragraph.)

Latin American studies are alive and well in New England, and NECLAS has been both the reflection and an agent of the growth. Because the area has neither large Chicano nor Hispanic communities (the Portuguese are not an officially-designated minority), and does not lie easily within the range of missiles presumably sheltered in Cuba, interest in Latin America in this part of the

country has not been great and the political pressures to “do something” about either Latin America or “Latinos” have not been strongly felt. The situation may now be slowly changing; in the meantime the fact that NECLAS has survived and flourished is a supreme tribute to many remarkable persons throughout New England, who have given time, talents, and themselves to the organization. Pay your dues!

## NOTES

1. *Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (Oct. 1970).
2. See Roland Ebel, “Governing the City State: Notes on the Politics of the Small Latin American Countries,” *Jn. of Inter-American Studies* 14 (Aug. 1972):325–46.
3. Charles W. Anderson, “Toward a Theory of Latin American Politics,” Vanderbilt University, Occasional Paper No. 2, Graduate Center for Latin American Studies, February 1964; chapter 4 of his *Politics and Economic Change in Latin America*.
4. Philippe C. Schmitter, “Still the Century of Corporatism?” *The Review of Politics* 31 (Jan. 1974):85–131; and Howard J. Wiarda, “Toward a Framework for the Study of Political Change in the Iberic-Latin Tradition: The Corporative Model,” *World Politics* 25 (Jan. 1973):206–35.
5. The reference is to Kalman H. Silvert, *The Conflict Society: Reaction and Revolution in Latin America* (New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1966).