

emergence of Latin America onto the world scene.

Most countries in Latin America won their independence from Europe early in the nineteenth century. While they maintained cultural ties with their former colonial powers, and some had important trading links with Europe, the Latin American countries remained largely outside "world politics" which were focussed on the great colonial and continental powers of Europe. The vigorous young republic of the United States, itself isolated from world politics, soon became the dominant outside force in Latin American politics. With the Monroe Doctrine, it proclaimed the whole area as a sort of protected domain, a *chasse gardée*. The US's influence probably reached its peak in the period from the end of the First World War until the early fifties. In any case, for roughly one and a half centuries Latin America remained largely outside the world's central political struggles. This relative isolation was exemplified by the non-participation of all Latin American countries, except Brazil, in the hostilities of the two world wars.

In the last twenty years, Latin America has come to assume a much more prominent place on the world stage. Partly, this has been for economic reasons. The new economic importance of Latin America can be seen in many ways. In the first eight months of 1979, for example, Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil were the world's three largest borrowers on the Eurocurrency market. The 1970s were the decade in which oil turned the world economy on its head. Venezuela, Ecuador -- which are both members of OPEC -- and Peru were early beneficiaries while Mexico, which is not a member, stands to make extraordinary gains in the 1980s. The 1970s saw increasing differences in the performances of the world's economies but most Latin American countries, even those that are poor in oil, enjoyed good economic growth. Brazil, which alone counts for almost one-half of Latin America's population, developed very rapidly, to emerge as the world's 10th largest economy and a significant exporter of manufactures.

The new importance of Latin America is also a result of major political developments. With global decolonization through the last two decades and the appearance of oil power in the 1970s, the structure and distribution of international power has shifted and the agenda of international politics has changed. The Third World countries now form a solid majority at the United Nations. Of course, the Latin American countries are quite different in their history and level of development from most of the Third World. But the Latin Americans had done a good deal of thinking on reforms in the international economic order as early as the 1950s so that particularly outstanding individuals such as Raul Prebisch of Argentina, the founder of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, were able to act as