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Bevan Sewell. "A Perfect (Free-Market) World? Economics, the Eisenhower Administration, and the Soviet Economic Offensive in Latin America". *Diplomatic History* 32:5 (November 2008): 841-868. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2008.00732.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2008.00732.x>.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/Siekmeier-Sewell.pdf>

Reviewed by **James F. Siekmeier**, West Virginia University

Bevan Sewell's article does an excellent job of examining how U.S. policy towards Latin America in the 1950s responded to its own historic, hemispheric agenda (economic free trade/investment and national security) while being pushed by an extra-hemispheric force – the Soviet Economic Offensive (SEO). In my opinion Sewell's article offers the best work on his topic of the contradictions between the U.S. free-market prescription towards Latin America – that free markets for foreign, private trade and investment will be the economic salvation of the region—and the U.S. national security goal of keeping the Soviet Union at bay in Latin America. Basically, by the mid-1950s, Washington leaders realized their tried-and-true method of promoting free-trade and investment in Latin America would not bring the benefits of economic growth to the broad majority of Latin Americans quickly enough, and the Soviet Union would take advantage of the slowness of the free-market model when it came to producing tangible benefits for the non-elite majority. In short, security imperatives would be sacrificed if the United States strictly hewed to its free-market credos. Sewall also skillfully discusses how intra-governmental conflict, principally between the Department of State and Treasury, made it difficult for the U.S. government to respond to the SEO in an expeditious and coherent fashion.

My main criticism is that the article could have engaged in more depth some of the more recent frameworks for understanding U.S. relations with Latin America and the Third (developing) world. First, Michael Latham, in his *Modernization as Ideology* (2000) discusses how in the late 1950s U.S. government officials and academics were employing new theoretical frameworks for analyzing and solving the economic, social, and political problems of the Third World. These political and academic leaders were responding to a new urgency in the call on the part of the majority of the world's people, who lived in the

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Third World, who were in the throes of a “revolution of rising expectations.” From the perspective of Walt Whitman Rostow, a some-time advisor to the second Eisenhower Administration (and later top Kennedy and Johnson officials), and others, it was “one minute to midnight” in the developing world--and only the United States had the tools to swing the neutralist, wavering developing world over to the noncommunist, capitalist world. A discussion of this important turning point the history of U.S. relations with the developing world would have nicely setup Sewell’s concluding point regarding the Alliance for Progress.

Finally, if Sewall had discussed a bit more of the growing anti-Americanism in Latin America in the 1950s, the reader would have been able to better gauge the significance of the points Sewall made with regard to Nixon’s disastrous 1958 visit to Latin America. Mark Hove’s recent article, “The Arbenz Factor,” *Diplomatic History* 2004, would have provided some interesting material in this regard.

Overall, however, the article is well-researched (multi-archival) and well-written. It is an important contribution to the field of the history of United States-Latin American relations.

James Siekmeier completed his Ph.D. at Cornell University in 1993 under Walter LaFeber. He is an Assistant Professor at West Virginia University and has published *Aid, Nationalism, and Inter-American Relations: Guatemala, Bolivia, and the United States, 1945-1961*(1999) and forthcoming *From Ike to Che: The Bolivian Revolutiion and the United States*.

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