

Stefan Rinke. *Latin America and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xi + 302 pp. \$29.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-107-56606-4.

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Latin America and the First World War, originally published in German as *Im Sog der Katastrophe* (In the wake of the disaster), takes issue with the tendency to emphasize the economic crisis of the 1930s as the key moment when the direction of Latin American history changed. The First World War, Stefan Rinke contends, was a critical turning point that shifted the region's outlook and global awareness.

Drawing from a wide array of source material, Rinke examines the ways Europe's cultural and economic power drew Latin America into the conflict. The war elicited immediate interest and passion from large immigrant communities across the Southern Cone where conscripts and volunteers of European descent mustered in South American ports to return home for military service. Elites generally sympathized with the Allies because they regarded France as a beacon of world civilization, but Germanophiles existed in every country and the far-reaching economic power of British and American capital had important political ramifications.

During the war years (1914-18), Britain's naval blockade slowed or halted vital imports to the region and everywhere prices fluctuated. Decreased demand for commodities such as coffee, tobacco, and sugar resulted in unemployment, and the cost of living skyrocketed in major cities. Thus, trade

disruptions affected millions of illiterate Latin Americans and forced governments to confront the consequences of their dependence on Europe. The actions of belligerent nations also raised sovereignty issues. Britain and France blacklisted German-owned companies in Latin America and pressured governments to seize enemy property. Not long after the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in early 1917, German U-boats torpedoed merchant ships from Brazil and Argentina, which touched off mass protest and anti-German riots in both countries.

The book highlights regional dynamics. Brazil eventually declared war on the German Reich, but neighboring Chile and Argentina did not. Still smarting from the loss of Panama in 1903 due to American military intervention, Colombia's leaders stayed neutral and looked with skepticism on calls for pan-American solidarity. US clients (Cuba, Panama, Guatemala) acted in concert with Washington's dictates and revolutionary Mexico cultivated ties with Berlin as a counterweight to US hegemony. In sum, national governments acted cautiously and pursued their own interests. Meanwhile, imperial Germany wanted to destabilize the Allies' colonial empires through support for dissidents and revolutionaries in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. That policy informed the Zimmerman Telegram (1917) and German efforts to incite re-

volt against British and American interests in the Caribbean Basin.

A central argument of *Latin America and the First World War* is that the conflict's impact "went far beyond the exclusive spheres of the diplomats or the elites involved in the propaganda war" (p. 195). Urban dwellers followed events thanks to the burgeoning newspaper industry and trade disruptions affected millions of workers in the export sector. Thus, "the conflict had an astonishingly wide social impact in many parts of Latin America." In the realm of ideas, the war's murderous brutality shattered Europe's claim to be a universal model of progress and civilization at the same time a new generation of students, writers, and intellectuals questioned Western dominance of the international order. The Versailles Treaty and League of Nations, for instance, elicited feelings of disillusionment because the victors espoused a high-minded rhetoric about the equality of nations, but France and Britain were not about to give up their colonial empires. Similarly, the United States continued to occupy nations such as Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Everywhere the Bolshevik Revolution radicalized the international atmosphere. Here, the book links the war and its aftermath to Latin America's anti-imperialism movements during the 1920s and convincingly argues that wartime shortages and price dislocations set the stage for the politics of economic nationalism.

Latin America and the First World War is a valuable contribution to the historiography. Rinke consulted thirteen national archives as well as an array of newspapers and magazines to achieve a remarkable coverage of print sources and diplomatic exchanges. That bird's-eye view of the region yields various comparative insights although it should be noted that the Italian and Ottoman Empires do not receive attention with respect to their wartime policies or more importantly, how sizable Italian and Arab communities in South America reacted to events overseas. The book's

twenty-three illustrations, mostly from South American magazines, illuminate the war's impact on educated opinion and support the author's assertion that "continental consciousness" developed among writers and intellectuals. That said, the degree to which the First World War transformed the mind-set of ordinary Latin Americans is much more of an open question, just as the war transformed some countries and regions much more than others. Nonetheless, Rinke has introduced a worthy set of questions in his ambitious, deeply researched international history.

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