

## **SLAS President's AGM Report**

(Lucy Taylor, Aberystwyth University)

SLAS Annual Conference, University of Sheffield, April 2012

It is a great pleasure to be here in Sheffield at the Annual Conference 2012. Despite the rather wet weather forecast I hope very much that everybody has a very enjoyable time at the many and varied panels and events. My particular thanks go out to David Wood and his team for organising the conference – and of course the Football Tournament!

SLAS Society has continued to flourish, despite the difficult times more broadly in the academic sector. During the year in which I have been President we have undertaken a number of very successful events, starting with the excellent conference in St Andrews, thanks to the efforts and energies of Will Fowler and Eleni Kefala. The conference boasted over 30 panels and an important plenary workshop on the Honduran coup of 2009, plus a brilliant keynote lecture by Eric Van Young – and a slightly wild and very enjoyable Ceilidh. Next year's conference will take place in Manchester, thanks to Peter Wade.

The Annual Lecture took place at the University of Glasgow in November. The lecturer was John Holloway who spoke on the global contribution of Zapatista politics. My sincere thanks to Mo Hume and Karen Seagal for organising this very successful event, a version of which is available on the SLAS website as a podcast. This year's Annual lecture will take place at the University of Oxford sometime in the Autumn, and while names have yet to be confirmed we hope that this will be a high-profile and prestigious event.

The postgraduate branch of SLAS – PILAS – has itself run a series of well attended and intellectually important events, starting with the PILAS conference which took place in Cambridge in June 2011. The PILAS conference gathered over 150 postgraduates working on Latin American issues in the UK to a packed programme of panels and keynote speeches from Peter Wade and Geoffrey Kantaris. I would like to thank the Cambridge team for their sterling work (especially Catriona McAllister and Andrew Tillman) in running PILAS with such competence, energy and enthusiasm. They have been superceded by the Oxford team (especially María Mancilla García and Iván Gonzalez) who have already held an event at the British Library and are putting the finishing touches to the 2012 PILAS conference. They have also dragged Latin American studies into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by developing a Facebook page which now has over 200 adherents.

This has been a particularly big year for the Bulletin of Latin American Research which celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> Issue. Events to commemorate the anniversary have involved the creation of a special 'virtual' issue featuring six ground-breaking articles drawn from across its publication, and a special lecture. The lecture was given by James Dunkerley at the University of Oxford, entitled "Where is Carlos Monteverde?". My particular thanks go to the editors and to the Wiley Blackwell team, but especially to David Howard the Coordinating Editor who has done a great deal to raise the profile of BLAR and to generate an innovative and exciting future for the journal. The BLAR book series is also going from strength to strength with the publication this year of Par Kumaraswami's edited collection "Rethinking the Cuban Revolution Nationally and Regionally: Politics, Culture and Identity". You should all have received a copy of this book which goes out to all SLAS members, as well as being available to purchase. A panel discussing the book forms part of the conference programme and a wine reception and book launch will take place on Thursday at 5.30 sponsored by Wiley Blackwell – I'll see you there!

As President, I too have been busy working on behalf of the Society, particularly in developing our linkages to the wider academic community. I have participated at a series of REF-related meetings linked to UKCASA – the coordinating committee of area studies associations. Through these meetings I have raised our membership's concerns at a meeting with Panel C (Janet Finch) and Panel D (Bruce Brown) Chairs, as well as the Area Studies Sub-Panel Chair, Peter Gatrell. Issues raised included questions of comparability and equality of treatment between panels and the thorny issue of impact. I have also participated in the Standing Conference which draws together Heads of Latin American Studies Centres where we spoke about ways in which to raise the profile of Latin American Studies in the UK academic arena.

One of the participants in the Standing Conference meeting was Steve Rubenstein, who sadly died a few months ago. Steve was Director of RILAS in Liverpool and it was a great shock to me to learn that he had passed away. I wrote to Steve's family and friends on behalf of the SLAS membership, expressing our great respect for Steve's research and teaching work, and our sadness at his loss. His passion, intellect and idealism certainly inspired me, and I am sure many of you too.

This has been a successful year for SLAS, then, but it would not have been possible without the support and enthusiastic collaboration of my SLAS colleagues. I would like to thank all of the committee members, but with special mention to those who are leaving the Committee after excellent service; Jasmine Gideon and Silvia Posocco - and also, and very especially,

Adrian Pearce who is standing down as Secretary. Adrian's fantastic work and his extraordinary commitment to the Committee has been a mainstay of SLAS for the last eight (?) years and we all owe him a big debt of gratitude – thank you Adrian. I would also like to thank Paul Henderson, who has kindly agreed to act as auditor for the society for a further two years.

All that remains is for me to wish you all a very happy conference and I look forward to chatting to you all – friends old and new – over the course of the next three days.