

# Preface

*Maxine Molyneux*

*Radical Americas* began its life as a project led by a small group of doctoral students most of whom met at the School of Advanced Study Institute of the Americas from 2009. After organizing a workshop and a reading group in the early days, they expanded in numbers and decided to work towards holding a conference, in the hope of fostering the development of an international network of scholars dedicated to retrieving and interrogating the radical histories of the Americas.

The originality of this vision lay in its insistence on the Americas (*plural*), that is, treating the hemisphere as a territory traversed by interconnecting currents of radicalism – of thoughts, of people, of movements, of revolutions – bringing a transnational historical perspective to the national, the regional and the local. If for Christopher Hill much earlier history was about leaving people out, the task of radical enquiry was one of inclusion in order to see how that altered the account. A history of radicalism in the Americas that is transnational adds a further missing dimension but if it is to go beyond the mere retrieval of forgotten or neglected elements it should likewise aim to recast that history, and on a larger canvas. As Hobsbawm said of ‘history from below’, it should also aspire to illuminate the present, and we have much to learn from critical analyses of radicalism’s promises, successes and failures.

The first *Radical Americas* conference took place in London in 2013, attracting submissions from ten countries, with a final selection of around sixty papers. More followed on an annual basis, with themes encompassing radical history, decolonization and decoloniality, radical identities and much more. These events, organized on a shoestring with a little institutional support, proved so successful, attracting

largely self-funded participants from many parts of the world, that they acquired a real momentum and a loyal following. Four conferences later, the quality of the papers presented and the excitement evident in a newly dynamic field indicated that something more enduring than a conference was possible and necessary to consolidate the field of study. Hence the idea of establishing a new journal, ideally one, it was hoped, that would be open access. That project was developed over the last year or so, and has now come to fruition as the e-journal *Radical Americas*, a satisfying culmination of five years of hard work by the same dedicated few who started it off.

It may be said, with perhaps some justification, that there are enough journals in the world and too little time to read them. But the proliferation of journals over the past few decades has in part been of a cottage-industry kind, with ever more specialized titles serving one or other sub-field, as academics focus ever more narrowly on their chosen theories or subjects with an eye to the REF, citations and all the other paraphernalia that goes along with scoring the necessary points for particular panel submissions. *Radical Americas* is not of this ilk, being more in the tradition of an expansive approach to the production of knowledge. It is a journal that welcomes work from a variety of disciplines as well as that which is multi- and cross-disciplinary. It has no preferred theoretical affiliation (without being averse to theory) and, most originally, it does three specific things: it treats the western hemisphere as the principal referent for the journal, encouraging scholarship and debate on the US, Latin America, Canada and the Caribbean; it aims to contribute to the history of radicalism in the Americas by highlighting the many cross-continental linkages that enrich and deepen the understanding of history's global dimensions; and – in the spirit of the times and in keeping with the founders' ambitions – it is published as an e-journal by UCL Press, as part of a new initiative by the university offering free online access to all the publications appearing under these auspices. This is in itself a novel and exciting development since for a wide range of countries, especially but not exclusively in the global south, drastic budget cuts to many universities make access to scholarship harder. It will be an invaluable scholarly resource for scholars everywhere. *Radical Americas* will therefore be able to acquire a wider readership and greater participation in its growing network of scholars. I wish it well and congratulate the editors on an excellent first edition.

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