

**Seminar “Left-wing and progressive governments in Latin America and the Caribbean: an assessment and perspectives”**

**Latin American and Caribbean Integration:  
Historical Antecedents, Current Situation and Perspectives**

Revolutionary, progressive, patriotic and popular forces in Latin America and the Caribbean have a great theoretical and political challenge ahead: to promote and to project the future based on a theoretical systematization of current experiences, the struggle for solidary integration, national (and continental) liberation and the emancipation of workers and Latin American and Caribbean people.

The base document of the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Sao Paulo Forum, held in August 2010 in Buenos Aires, reads, “facing this new situation demands greater capacity of analysis, formulation and strategic articulation that allow us (...) to establish a systematic exchange among progressive and left-wing governments in the region”.

**From the Amphictyonic Congress to CELAC**

In 1826 the first summit of Latin American and Caribbean countries was held in Panama, with one English observer. Headed by Simon Bolivar, the Amphictyonic Congress, as it was called, approved the “Treaty of the Union, League and Perpetual Confederation”. The treaty determined the creation of a confederation of countries, a league of republics with a Supranational Parliamentary Assembly, a common defense pact and integration and trade agreement, among others.

It is important to understand that the proposed Latin American union, since its beginning, was based on a confederation and not on a federation. A confederation is the association of sovereign States and a federation implies the transference of sovereignty to a federal state, such as in the case of the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Argentine Republic and the United Mexican States, the official name of Mexico.

The Latin American union, therefore, has original and historic roots, preceding other integration processes such as that of Europe, and is much more than mere economic necessity – it is a long-term phenomenon, the expression of a historic destiny.

According to Darcy Ribeiro, an important Brazilian intellectual, Latin America, in the conformation of its identity, has a common characteristic and a common antagonism. The common characteristic is that we, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, are the result of the process of Iberian expansion carried out by Portugal and Spain, what makes us recognize ourselves naturally as brother countries and people, sons and daughters of that process. The second common aspect is antagonism against USA's imperialism and, for that reason, according to Ribeiro, the anti-imperialist struggle is immanent in all of us.

The emancipatory idea of the Latin American union that started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was kept suspended, but remained in a latent state, and now reappears with greater force in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the current century. The proposal of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, CELAC, embodies the whole history and the innovative tradition inaugurated almost 200 years ago.

The proposal of building the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, CELAC, arose in the historic summits held in December 2008, in the Sauipe Coast, in the state of Bahia, Brazil and later in February 2010, in Cancun, Mexico.

As Brazilian former Minister of Foreign Affairs and current Minister of Defense Celso Amorim once said, for the first time Latin America and the Caribbean gathered on their own initiative, with the participation of Cuba and without the participation of the United States of America (USA), Canada or any other European country, taking a great step towards breaking with the "Pan-Americanism" policy under the hegemony of the USA.

The creation of CELAC, a fact of enormous historical dimension, is set to take place on December 3, 2011, in Caracas, Venezuela.

### **Integration under the hegemony of the USA and Pan-Americanism**

There have been many integration projects in the history of Latin America, from the first ones boosted on by leaders of bicentennial campaigns for independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, passing by the integration organizations and processes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until the most recent experiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Those initiatives differ basically between those aimed at their own interests, such as the sovereignty and independence of Latin America and the Caribbean, and those with imperialist and neocolonial inspiration, submitted to the interests of the USA.

During the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since the first Pan-American Conference in 1890 and throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the post-war period, the USA sponsored the hegemonic doctrine of Pan-Americanism. In 1947 the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) was signed based on the "doctrine of hemispheric defense". In 1948 the Organisation of American States (OAS) was created. From 1960 on, in line with the Alliance for Progress and USAID, the Latin American Free Trade Association (ALALC) and the Inter-American Development Bank, IDB, were created.

During that period, initiatives of sub-regional integration such as the Andean Pact and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), the Central American Common Market (CACM) and the Central American Integration System (SICA), the current Caribbean Community, CARICOM, and the Common Market of the South, MERCOSUR, were conditioned by and under pressure from hemispheric interests and the influence of the USA inspired by "Pan-Americanism".

In 1980 the Latin American Integration Association, ALADI, which had substituted ALALC, was too restricted to trade exchange. In mid-1980s the trade among Latin American countries was continuously diminishing. During the 1980s, known as the "lost decade", became exhausted the period which the model determined by substitution of imports had prevailed, strongly impacted by increasing of the international interest taxes which resulted in the outburst of foreign debts.

The limitations of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) and the redemocratisation of many countries in the continent contributed to the creation of an environment that enabled new integration initiatives. Under those new circumstances, Brazil and Argentina, based on common interests and a strategic vision, promoted the Common Market of the South, MERCOSUR. The Treaty of Asuncion, with the participation of Paraguay and Uruguay, was signed in 1991.

With the inauguration of neoliberal governments that clearly favored the USA in many Latin American countries in the beginning of the 1990s, including president Collor de Mello in Brazil and Menem in

Argentina, MERCOSUR's initial proposal was distorted and it served as a means of trade liberalization, which was in vogue during that period.

In 1994 George H. W. Bush started the "Initiative of the Americas", a proposed "free trade" hemispheric area that would be later named Free Trade Areas of the America, FTAA.

In a moment of sincerity, speaking on the meaning of the FTAA, the former US Secretary of State for the George W. Bush administration Colin Powell confessed "Our objective with the FTAA is to guarantee to USA's companies the control of a territory that encompasses the Arctic to Antarctica and free access, without any obstacle or difficulty, to our products, services, technology and capital in the whole hemisphere". General Powell's words reveal with crystal-clear transparence the real intent of the USA with the FTAA.

After the rising of a series of left-wing and progressive governments in Latin America and Caribbean since 1998, with the victory of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and after many popular struggle in the continent, the FTAA was defeated in 2005 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

### **Continental integration based on the new Latin American political cycle**

The role of the Sao Paulo Forum political parties in sparking the current impulse of integration organizations and processes started with the stage of resistance against the neoliberal hegemony in the 1990s. The founding document of the Sao Paulo Forum in 1990 already stressed the defense of unity and integration of Latin American and Caribbean countries and people.

The changes in the international situation and the successive political and electoral victories of left-wing and progressive forces in Latin America, have set up an unprecedented political situation that allows a readjustment and resuming the integration processes.

In contrast with other failed experiences in South America, the MERCOSUR was relaunched and the Union of South American Nations was created. In 2003 presidents Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Nestor Kirchner signed the "Buenos Aires Consensus" and vowed to readjust and deepen MERCOSUR.

In 2003 MERCOSUR enters a new stage that advances beyond trade integration in aspects such as an effective ports union to tackle asymmetries, the political union based on strengthening the PARLASUR, the physical integration of productive chains and the promotion of necessary social policies, among others.

In March 2011, the Treaty of Asuncion that created the Common Market of the South turned 20 years old. It is an opportunity to make an assessment of the bloc's achievements and strategic perspectives.

In sense to take a different stand and resist the USA's policies and having a great geopolitical and strategic importance, UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) was created as a community of nations in the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of South American presidents in December 2004, in the Cusco Declaration, Peru.

UNASUR also makes advances in economic issues, including a response to the aggravating systemic crisis of capitalism. Recently it created the South American Council of Economy and Finances and decided to accelerate the constitution of the South Bank, the creation of a South American reserve fund, the substitution of the Dollar in regional economic exchanges for local currencies and the start of a process of greater coordination regarding economic policies.

According the speech of president Lula in May 2008, on the occasion of the signature of the treaty that constituted UNASUR, "our South America will not be a mere geographic concept anymore. From today it is a political, economic and social reality with its own institutionality. UNASUR must be built as part of our national projects of development".

The Brazilian people have great interest in advancing this process, since solidary continental integration is one of the pillars of our national project. The Lula Administration (2003-2010) and now the Dilma Rousseff Administration, have retaken the best in our internationalist and Latin American tradition represented by Abreu e Lima, a Brazilian who fought alongside Bolivar.

The Lula and Dilma Rousseff administrations also retook a patriotic and progressive tradition of an independent foreign policy that was inaugurated by the very patriarch of the independence of Brazil, Jose Bonifacio, our first chancellor, and maintained later by diplomats such as San Thiago Dantas, Araujo Castro and, more recently, Celso Amorim.

According to the strategy of converging MERCOSUR and UNASUR, it is paramount to integrate Venezuela in MERCOSUR, which depends on the approval of the Paraguayan parliament. Today the expansion of MERCOSUR to other South American countries is being debated.

An extremely significant fact is the recent victory of Ollanta Humala and his coalition in Peru. Now it is necessary to work to deepen existing association agreements already uniting Peru and UNASUR, which could be added to MERCOSUR, even considering that the existing free trade agreement between Peru and the USA may be an obstacle. The same could happen in the relationship with Colombia, even in face of the pending Free Trade Agreement with the USA that wasn't yet approved by the USA's parliament.

Created by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004, the Bolivarian Alliance of the People of Our America, ALBA, formed also by Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and others, is a reference to a revolutionary and socialist oriented integration.

### **The advance in the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean and the reaction of imperialism**

Thus, the continental integration advances through different complementary mechanisms whose strategic direction in the union of sovereign countries with shared national projects within a context of a systemic crisis of capitalism and a system of world power in transition with the relative decline of the USA's hegemony and the strengthening of socialist China and the BRICS, group formed by China, Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa.

The solidary integration of Latin America and the Caribbean progresses with the growing convergence of the processes of ALBA, MERCOSUR, UNASUR and others. It is decisive in freeing us from imperialism and in achieving our national projects with sovereignty, an autonomous foreign policy, democracy, economic development and social development.

Unable to curb the processes of integration in Latin America that now constitute a fundamental tool in developing the region, USA's imperialism resort to division and cooptation of part of the bloc. The most recent action of imperialism is the Pacific Agreement (Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile) which may become a new partial FTAA, a

“mini FTAA” according to some. The victory of Ollanta Humala in Peru may create the conditions to dismantling the Pacific Agreement.

In fact, there has been a strong and powerful reaction of conservative forces in multiple dimensions with different signs of a counter-offensive of the right-wing and imperialism. Despite important advances in the last decade in Latin America, one cannot underestimate the current moment for the continent nor overestimate our own forces and underestimate the power of reaction of imperialism and the right in each country.

Imperialism’s trend towards repression and war is inexorable. Thus it is important to think Latin American integration in the long-term and it must include a common defense project, as forecasted in the Amphictyonic Congress in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A good beginning is UNASUR’s South American Defense Council, which aims at turning the region into a Peace Zone.

### **The historic step of creating CELAC**

We have reached great achievements in a short period of time in historical terms since the creation of the Sao Paulo Forum. In the end of 2008, in the state of Bahia, Brazil, independent Latin American countries gathered in the Sauipe Coast for the joint meeting of the 1<sup>st</sup> of the Summit of Latin American and the Caribbean on Integration and Development (CALC), and the Rio Group.

The creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean of States, CELAC, is a great historic event, another fundamental step towards Latin American and Caribbean unity. It was the decision taken in the Cancun Declaration, in 2010, Mexico, by chiefs of State and Government from the countries of the region in the 2<sup>nd</sup> CALC/Rio Group.

While we are celebrating the Bicentennial of Independence, a new organization is born, one based on the ideals of Simon Bolivar of our Great Homeland, Our America, with the objective of “deepening political, economic, social and cultural integration” for the promotion of sustainable development based on unity, democracy and “solidarity, cooperation, complementarity and political coordination”.

Cuba’s participation has huge significance, on one hand, and the non-participation of the USA, Canada and European countries, on the other hand, indicate that people and countries of the continent are willing to

take hold of their destinies with sovereignty, without interference from USA's imperialism.

This primordial step in our struggle for the second and true independence of Latin America and the Caribbean would not be possible without the determined action of progressive governments, without the manifested will of our people, without the tireless action of parties and political organizations that take part in the Sao Paulo Forum.

After the second meeting of presidents in Mexico, CELAC will be institutionally created in December 2011 in Caracas, in Bolivarian Venezuela. Regarding the significance of creating CELAC, president commander Raul Castro, in his communiqué to the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, signaled that that is the most transcendental fact of the last one hundred years in our continent.

### **Building a solidary integration**

How can we define a project of solidary integration to Latin America and the Caribbean in the present context? In our opinion, the first defining aspect of a solidary integration is national sovereignty allied to continental sovereignty and anti-imperialism. Our integration must be the union of countries and sovereign national projects in the form of a confederation. In dialectic terms, continental sovereignty must reinforce national sovereignty and not the contrary, as in the case of Europe.

The European experience and its current difficulties teach us some lessons. The European Union deprived "peripheral" countries of fundamental sovereign mechanisms necessary to national development and broadened inequalities within the bloc based on a capitalist-imperialist integration with a federal character and a neoliberal and militarist policy.

In that sense, we had better follow the steps of the heroes of our first independence, who defended the confederation, instead of copying foreign integration models that were guided by the interests of the monopolies of "central" countries, hastening monetary and economic union and now are undergoing a serious crisis, especially in the case of "peripheral" countries.

The second element that, in our opinion, characterizes solidary integration is fighting asymmetries, promoting solidarity, cooperation



and complementarity within the region. It is necessary to plan regional development and guide it according to the interests of the people; balance economic development with social development and the environment; fight social inequalities in order to improve the living standards of people and avoid intra-regional polarization between “central” and “peripheral” countries.

As stressed by former president Lula in a speech during the Sao Paulo Forum meeting in Managua, May 2011, “Integration is the only chance that our countries have to solve the centuries-old problems of our people.”

Thirdly, what defines strategically a project of solidary integration is the socialist way. Deepening solidary integration opens the path to achieving socialism in the countries in the region.

### **The socialist way to continental integration**

Capitalism undergoes a systemic structural crisis that will not reach a virtuous and favorable solution to nations and to workers and people within the limits of the capitalist system. The socialist strategy must be present as a guideline in national and popular projects unfolding in Latin America and Caribbean. Our project of solidary continental integration will only be fully reached if it is inserted as part of the struggle for socialism in each country and on a continental scale.

In this new stage in the struggle for socialism in Latin America there are general features that are common to all countries. However, each country has its own historical, political, cultural and social particulars and therefore there is not a single model of socialism or a single route to achieve it. Therefore, as Latin American countries and people with specific economic and social formations, we will develop original national routes in order to reach the transition towards socialism.

Now in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean we fight for the success of these national governments that represent a portion of power and inaugurate the challenge of building not only more democracy, but also a new popular power. For that reason, a differentiated and long process of accumulation of forces is necessary and one of the main tasks will be the mandatory update and renewal of the revolutionary theory, based on principles but free from dogmatisms, having a concrete and specific, national and continental, reality as a starting point.

The base document of the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Sao Paulo Forum also says that it is necessary to overcome from “the current situation, when we are improving the lives of the people in the marks of capitalism, to a new situation, which we can improve the life quality of the people in the marks of socialism. To do this, we must combine the different national strategies with a strategy of continental integration in order to achieve that. For all those reasons, the integration process in Latin America has gained strategic importance.”

We agree with Uruguayan communist Rodney Arismendi who, aiming at the future of our people, affirmed that even with different shades and paces, each Latin American country is historically converging to a single process with a view to finally turn Latin America into an integrated, solidary and socialist continent.