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Situation Report on Brazilian and International Current Events

The Empire's Hemispheric Agenda... and the Other Agenda

Comments on an Interview of the US Ambassador to Brazil

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for Pacs and Jubilee South Campaign-RJ

My text is based on Patricia Zimmermann's article "*Presidente da Oposição não alterará relação com EUA, diz Embaixadora*" ["Opposition President will not alter relations with the US", says Ambassador] for Folha Online, Brasília, September 4, 2002. My remarks, in bold, are preceded by the initials MA..

The possible election of an opposition government in October will not change relations between Brazil and the United States as regards the 'hemispheric agenda' (involving all the countries of the Americas). The assessment comes from Donna Hrinak, US ambassador to Brazil.

MA - The HEMISPHERIC AGENDA is one the US is imposing on the rest of the continent. The Empire dons democratic garb and uses local henchman to conceal its tentacles. The Agenda includes "combating narcotics and terrorism", perfect alibis for bringing the entire continent under its military and police control, to bolster its trade and financial domination. As we watch neoliberalism's endeavours crumble all round the world, its ideologues are making headway in negotiating arenas like the WTO (World Trade Organization) and the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas). The agenda, in a word, is liberalization - and we must stand up to it. Equal rights for countries so profoundly disparate mean that inequalities will be perpetuated and the strong will dominate the weak. Trade cannot be "free" in a world increasingly in the grasp of monopolies and cartels, where more than half of international trade takes place within large corporations. Nor can there be cooperation, sharing and reciprocity where the rule of the game is to compete and to strive for maximum gains for an individual or country. What the ambassador means to say is that "the dice have been cast" in Brazil. She says it even before the presidential election, as if she had already reached some agreement with each of the candidates to the Presidency of Brazil to ensure continuity! She may also be saying that whoever wins will be tied from the outset by commitments to be fulfilled regardless of any opposition stance. This is arrogance and hypocrisy without limit. What interests is the new government to serve, those of the Brazilian nation or of the United States? Whatever the scenario, it will be up to civil society to bring the utmost pressure to bear against the United States agenda and in favour of the Other Agenda!

PACS
Instituto Políticas Alternativas para o Cone Sul

Who we are

Set up in 1986, in Rio de Janeiro, the Institute Policy Alternatives for the Southern Cone (PACS) is a non-profit institution which offers advisory services in the eco-social field and for educational action in collaboration with social movements.

Aims

Our aims are to contribute to human self-development and to building critical, creative public opinion capable of pressing for the implementation of public policies that are change-directed, participatory and technically competent, at the municipal, national and global levels.

Methodology

Using Praxis Methodology we work with people and organizations, with a view to strengthening them individually and collectively so that they become subjects of their own history and self-development. Our actions occur simultaneously in two dimensions: one local, immediate, and the other national, global and mediate.

Activities

Research, studies and critical thinking in the form of publications, radio and audio-visual programmes; alternative proposals, policies and development plans; advisory services and educational activities with social and ecumenical movements, city governments, and others; participation in regional and international networks.

Partners

CCFD (France)
Christian Aid (United Kingdom)
Catholic Lenten Fund (Switzerland)
Ford Foundation (USA)
FPH (France)
SCIAF (Scotland)
TRÓCAIRE (Ireland)

THE OTHER AGENDA - The societies of this continent have proposals for another agenda with a dual continental and global dimension. As yet another World Summit (Rio+10) founders due to the rigidity of the USA's narrowly egocentric outlook, it is important to turn to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, which has provided a framework in which to voice and interlink proposals for the Other Agenda. These include:

- reduction of North American countries' tariffs on LAC (Latin American and Caribbean) products, particularly those with greatest added value;
- building another integration centred primarily on the rights of people and peoples, particularly the right to self-development;
- adhesion by countries that contribute most to polluting the planet, particularly the USA, to the international treaties and targets for cutting rates of air, soil and water pollution and deforestation;
- dismantling of structural adjustment programmes in LAC, and withdrawal of the IMF as a supervisory presence in economies in the hemisphere;
- control of the corporate power of large companies and banks, regulation of corporate practices and elimination of collusion between large corporations/banks and the State, a breeding ground for systematic corrupt practices;
- adoption of an international system for taxing global financial flows, particularly short-term ones, and use of the proceeds to set up a global fund to fight starvation and misery, to be managed by UN organizations in collaboration with civil society organizations devoted to development in solidarity and environmental justice;
- adoption of mechanisms for the public audit of over-indebtedness; adoption of global trade, financial and investment practices that will invert flows of wealth and income to benefit the neediest countries and peoples;
- creation of an independent, transparent and democratic international court of recourse for highly-indebted countries, empowered to judge not just the legality or illegality of financial debts, but also their legitimacy or illegitimacy;
- redefinition of patterns of consumption in the continent's better-off countries and classes, to lead to a reduction in the quantity of energy and goods they consume and to investment in research and development of sustainable alternative energy sources;
- adoption of progressive fiscal and tax policies with a view to redistributing income on the continent, to boosting effective demand from impoverished population groups not just in LAC, but also in Canada and in the US itself and, as a result, encouraging investment in associative production in the respective countries, with a view to development that is at once democratic and sustainable;
- rejection of treaties grounded in the illusion of "free" trade between unequals, and the promotion of subregional cooperation agreements (Southern Cone, Andean Region, South America, Central America and the Caribbean, Latin America) as bases for building another hemispheric integration;
- orientation of material and financial resources to overcoming hunger and to democratizing the means and the collective conditions necessary for starving populations, particularly the women and children, to work and to live;
- adoption of the various international agreements on rights as a frame of reference for formulating national and continental economic policies, including those to promote the democratization of productive resources, credit and market access;
- combating violence, not just circumstantial factors, but also structurally, by adopting policies to combat factors that perpetuate hunger, exclusion and violence, and by introducing regulation of the media and so-called cultural products, so that they become vehicles for promoting constructive values in favour of social and interpersonal coexistence; that is, cooperation, altruism, reciprocity, solidarity and fraternity among people and peoples;
- redefinition of the continental and planetary plan for peace based on the continentalization and globalization of social and environmental justice, and respect for and promotion of human, social and peoples' rights.

She avoided commenting on the directions the presidential elections were taking, alleging that the matter was "a decision for the Brazilian people", but stressing that the "hemispheric agenda" calls for firm policies from States, not from governments.

According to the ambassadress, the process of negotiating the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) will be discussed with the incoming government, because between them Brazil and the US lead implementation of the bloc.

MA - For anyone who still doubted the deep involvement of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) government with negotiations to introduce the FTAA across the whole continent, here is the proof: the FHC government plays a leading role, and is thus the agent of US interests on the continent. The US hemispheric agenda is good for the FHC government, but bad for the continent's nations and peoples, including the people of the US itself. Even at the present stage of negotiations, prior to the signing of any agreement, the FTAA provides for countries to make commitments that are an affront to the rights of the peoples of the continent! The FTAA should be the subject for a complaint by Latin America and the Caribbean to the UN Human Rights Commission, on the basis of the various declarations and criteria of the UN itself. It would then be up to the UN Secretary-General himself to take the initiative and denounce and oppose the FTAA agreement as a proposal detrimental to the rights of peoples, particularly the right to sovereignty, self-development and life itself! Failing that, it will be up to civil society in our countries to take that initiative.

The OTHER AGENDA is expressed not just by social movements of the South of the continent but also by coalitions and networks involving South and North. Examples of this are the document *Alternatives for the Americas*, by the Continental Social Alliance (www.asc-hsa.org) and the report *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*, by the International Forum on Globalization (www.ifg.org).

In addition to the FTAA, the Agenda also comprises issues relating to security, science and technology and international crime. Donna Hrinak underlined that it is important that the "hemisphere" arrive at a collective response to the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking.

When asked about lowering the protectionist barriers that prevent Brazil's accessing the US market, the ambassadress declared that the matter deserved negotiating with all the countries.

She reaffirmed the US intention of withdrawing restrictions in the WTO over the next five years, but recalled that the European Union and Japan, for instance, would also have to bring down their tariff barriers. "Obviously we differ on a number of issues", she said, pointing to negotiation as the way to minimize conflicts.

MA - The US create adverse situations for their trading partners - such as the measures to protect their agriculture and the tariffs on steel - and then they call on everyone to negotiate... The country that controls most wealth in the world, that has the largest external debt (more than US\$ 6 trillion) and that most pollutes has an boundless appetite. It ignores the ethics of reciprocity. It wants to devour everyone and everything - that is the mark of its imperial aspirations. The logic of equity that presided over construction of the European Union contrasts scandalously with the logic of domination that prevails in present US trade relations with the rest of the continent and in the negotiations of the FTAA. The US attitude shows no trace of any concern for the economically and commercially weaker, nor any spirit of equity, sustainability or peace.

THE OTHER AGENDA is inspired in what the International Forum on Globalization calls the ten principles for democratic, sustainable societies:

- (1) People's democracy: the empowerment of peoples to become active subjects of democracy and the construction of governments at the services of the people and their communities;
- (2) Subsidiarity: whatever decisions and activities can be undertaken locally should be;
- (3) Ecological Sustainability: economic activity should enable us to meet all genuine human needs in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, and without diminishing the natural diversity of life on Earth or the viability of the planet's natural life-support systems;
- (4) Common Heritage: all the planet's common resources - (i) water, land, air, forests and botanical or zoological habitats essential to human life; (ii) the heritage of culture and knowledge that is the collective creation of our species; and (iii) basic public services (health, education, sanitation, public safety and social security) should be shared equitably among all peoples and all sectors of society;
- (5) Human Rights: including individual rights and peoples' economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, should serve as the model for drafting laws, State policies and regional and continental agreements;
- (6) Jobs, Livelihood, Employment: the most basic of all human rights to be guaranteed by the economies of the continent and the world, reorganized on the logic of "household management" (eco+nomia) for the wellbeing of their populations;
- (7) Food Security and Food Safety: this means not just sustainable access to food in quantity and quality sufficient to stay healthy, but also control by local and national communities of food know-how, technology and production processes;

- (8) **Equity:** for communities and societies to be sustainable and democratic, countries' and continental income and wealth must be distributed equitably; this also includes a strategy for settling the social, historical and environmental debt, and the creation of institutions for continental and global governance capable of enforcing these principles and rights;
- (9) **Diversity:** the recognition in concept and practice that cultural, biological, social and economic diversity is central to a viable, dignified, healthy and sustainable life;
- (10) **Precautionary Principle:** this should guide all social and economic activity, all product research, development and sale, and all mechanisms to induce consumption; it should also guide each individual's and family's day-to-day choices of what to buy and what to consume.

If the main continental and global power, the USA, had the desire and will to adopt these principles to guide its hemispheric and global actions, the world would be emerging from the dark ages we have been living in since the dawn of the new millennium! It is up to the US people and the peoples of every country in the Americas to take the lead and pressure their governments and the institutions of global governance in favour of this other agenda.

She recognized that the imminent US military attack on Iraq has led to stagnation in the world economy since the terrorist attacks of September 11.

MA - Two reasons stand out for US aggression towards Iraq. One its geo-economic and geo-political interest in gaining control of Iraq's (and Venezuela's!) oil resources in view of the risks inherent in political and military support for Ariel Sharon's aggressive, warmongering policies in the Middle East. The other is the urgent need to dispel the spectre of prolonged recession in the US economy by activating disproportionately the whole production chain of the arms industry. Countries "allied" to the US are called on to support this aggression politically and financially in the name of a genuinely imperial global "order". And all Empires make use of local henchmen capable of justifying the need for the periphery to submit to the Empire "for its own good"!

For those of us who love Brazil, Latin America and the Caribbean, this is the time to demonstrate our determination to fight without quarter for a new, genuine independence!

Let us elect the President and the Congress most capable of putting The Other Agenda into practice!

For a Brazil firm in both sovereignty and solidarity!

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Rio de Janeiro, September 7, 2002

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CRITICAL MASS* is an occasional report by the Institute Policy Alternatives for the Southern Cone, distributed in electronic and printed form, which deals with salient features of the current Brazilian and international situation. *(Also available in Spanish and Portuguese)*

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