
Interview: UCR presidential candidate

'Latin America is seeking unity'

An interview with Raul Alfonsin, presidential pre-candidate of the Union Civica Radical (Radical Civic Union), given to EIR's Latin America editor, Dennis Small, on April 25 in Buenos Aires.

Small: What do you think of the possibility of forming some type of debtors' association in Ibero-America?

Alfonsin: We think, and we have been working on this for many years, that some kind of integration of Latin America must be brought about.

Within this process of integration, I give fundamental importance to the "internalization" of foreign trade. For example, Venezuela buys \$1.3 billion worth of food, mainly from Europe and from the United States; but we Argentines could have adequately supplied them.

Small: Would this be a kind of Latin American common market?

Alfonsin: Maybe that would be too pretentious; but this is in reality the direction we have to be working toward. That is to say, we must work together to defend our interests. In 1950 Latin America's share in total world trade was no less than 12 percent. Today it has a share on the order of 4 percent. Our terms of trade keep getting worse, and it keeps getting harder to place our products.

Within this bad situation, which we have to resolve, there is also the need to harmonize our financial policies. Just four countries alone [Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and Venezuela] owe \$220 billion dollars—even though here we have to analyze the fact that the only country in the world which has contracted a fabulous debt to destroy itself, is Argentina. If you take this into account, you will realize that we have to work together, at least to protect ourselves from being forced to pay usury. Because they are trying to collect usury, several points above normal interest rates. They are trying to collect from our countries, and this absolutely cannot be. I would not pay this usury. I am willing to fulfill our country's promises, but not on the basis of destroying our people by paying international usury.

The solution we need is to convert the debt into long-term debt and pay at a lower interest rate. It would be paid in 20 years; in reality no one can demand anything else. We are going to pay and we want to pay—but only the debts that are not fictitious, because there are many debts that are fictitious,

so-called "self-loans."

As distinct countries, we could gain greater weight with a general integration, deepening the Latin American Economic System [SELA], leaning on the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America [ECLA], in short by a continuing effort for the New International Economic Order.

I observe that voices are getting louder and louder in proposing that NATO should get ready to intervene in the theatre of operations outside Europe, because apparently the supply of raw materials and energy necessary for European growth is perceived to be threatened. Principles, foundations, and elements of international law are being called into question. For this reason, too, we must provoke an activity which we, the different countries of Latin America, can develop jointly.

Small: There are reports here in Argentina that the IMF and the international financial community have pressured those who might govern Argentina in 1984, to make them comply with their debt payments and keep them from forming any type of debtors' association. Can you, as one of the leading candidates in the upcoming election, tell us if this report is true?

Alfonsin: I have received no insinuation whatsoever of this type; and I will act in accordance with whatever is in the interest of the nation, without accepting pressures of any kind.

Small: A Wall Street banker in the United States recently said the following on the subject of Latin American debt: "They can study the option of declaring moratoria on their debts, if they want, but the era of growth and expansion for these countries is over. They are going through a period of sobering adjustment. It hurts; they have to cut back. The expansion of their economies, and debt expansion at these rates, can no longer continue. They are screaming because it hurts; but that's too bad. Screaming is not the same as saying they refuse to pay." What comment do you have on this quotation?

Alfonsin: Of course, right now the world is going through a crisis which originated in attitudes of this type, in the mentality of the Chicago School which put finances ahead of production. It is a crisis which is affecting us in a particularly profound way in Argentina, because the government has been applying these very ideas.

It is evident that what this gentleman is saying about Latin America could be said about the world. It is a world which, pressured by the financial interests, has not grown. Probably it will not grow this year, and who knows if there will be growth next year. But Latin America is—as it behooves us to do—seeking forms of integration to respond to this type of aggression. And I hope, when I hear this, that we Argentines are going to attain the moral authority to demand solidarity from other countries, and above all from the democrats of different parts of the world.