

Colombian labor: 'We pay or eat'

Government representatives meeting in Cartagena, Colombia, were greeted by 200 demonstrators from local trade unions, carrying four-meter-long banners reading "Moratorium Now!" "No to the IMF!" and "We Support Operation Juárez!" The presidents of the UTC and the CTC trade union federations in the state of Bolivar circulated copies of the following "Open Letter to the Foreign and Finance Ministers of Ibero-America."

Colombian television, which covered the demonstration on the evening news, reported that "we are accustomed to seeing here meetings of ministers and businessmen, but we have never seen the population mobilize itself for a meeting of this type. The Cartagena population came out to demand that the rich pay the debts, and an end to the International Monetary Fund."

Some 30,000 Ibero-American unionists and other citizens had earlier signed a call for the immediate implementation of Lyndon LaRouche's "Operation Juárez" proposal as the solution to the economic crisis. The petitions were presented in Cartagena at a press conference.

Cartagena, June 20, 1984

Gentlemen:

As we interpret the thinking of thousands and thousands of workers who make up the Ibero-American labor movement, we wish to inform you that the present economic and financial crisis has reached the point where *either we pay or we eat*.

The nations of this continent must join Bolivia in its decision not to pay one more penny of foreign debt. The \$350 billion owed by Ibero-America has been paid many times over through brutal cuts of our standard of living and consumption, and shameless looting of our natural resources.

Therefore we celebrate the fact that the governments of Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia have called for a summit of debtor nations, to seek joint action before the insatiable usury of the international financial institutions.

We hope, gentlemen, that the resolutions adopted at this meeting will rise to the level required by history. The bankers wish to divide our countries in order to lop off our heads afterwards, one by one. The "incentives" they are offering to Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia in exchange for abandoning the debtors' union which in fact has already been established, has no other purpose than to divide us.

The bankers have begun to bludgeon Argentina, which they want to make a bloody example. Colombia and others will follow. We face a *second Malvinas war*, and on this occasion there must be no hesitation. Either we unite to declare a moratorium on foreign debt, through which we may force the collective renegotiation of that debt in order to obtain new credit for economic expansion, or we shall perish as we continue to apply the International Monetary Fund's conditionalities, which include: reduction of imports, budget cuts, wage increase ceilings, elimination of transportation subsidies, tax increases, public service hikes, etc.

Instead of the "pick and shovel" programs which we have had up to this point, we require great projects, such as a second interoceanic canal, a canal system around the Magdalena River, the agricultural development of the Rio de la Plata basin, a high-technology steel complex in the Colombia-Venezuela border area, exploitation of the iron deposits in Brazil's Grande Carajas, large-scale development of nuclear power plants in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, etc.

It is such projects which will give us skilled and stable jobs. But we know that the main obstacle to carrying them out are the conditionalities imposed by the international banking system. Ibero-America has been for centuries merely a great pantry of raw materials and agricultural produce. It is time now that we produce our own machine tools, that we mechanize agriculture and integrate the continent by means of railways and canals which unite the great waterways.

Without delay, then, gentlemen, you must proceed to drop the *debt bomb* against the creditors who plunder us. This is what a true patriot would do. This is what Benito Juárez did in Mexico in 1861, when he declared a moratorium on Mexico's foreign debt. If you proceed according to the requirements of the present situation, you may be sure that the entire population of Ibero-America will be with you; otherwise, besides going down in history as traitors, you shall be overtaken by events which nobody can now stop: In very short order the foreign debt shall cease to be paid, because people prefer to live than to honor their own death.

Sincerely,

Anatolio Renals, president, Worker's Union of Bolivar (Utrabol, UTC)

Apecides Alvis, president, Worker's Federation of Bolivar (Fetrabol, CTC)