
Interview: Juan Gabriel Labaké

A private initiative for the integration of Ibero-America

Juan Gabriel Labaké, a leader of Argentina's Peronist movement, granted the following interview to *EIR*'s Carlos Méndez on Sept. 16, 1985 in Quito, Ecuador. On a five-nation tour to promote his new book, *Proposal for 30 Million*, Mr. Labaké met with many political, trade union, and government leaders, including Colombian President Belisario Betancur. In meetings in Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, the Peronist leader discussed his proposals for Ibero-American integration and joint renegotiation of the continent's foreign debt, as outlined in his book. He has also proposed the immediate creation of a private Ibero-American institute for integration, the founding conference of which would be held in Lima, Peru.

EIR: Can you elaborate on your proposal for Ibero-American integration?

Labaké: The idea is to create a private entity, bringing together political leaders, trade unionists, scientists and intellectuals, and retired military who have a Latin American perspective on the problem and the will to work for continental integration concretely. On this topic, there have been too many formal conferences where there has been a lot of discussion, but nothing done.

Governments, as such, are going to take a while to achieve concrete successes in the area of integration, due to the number of formal problems, commitments, and—why not say it?—the contacts and pressures that exist to prevent it from coming into being. So, after 20 or 30 years of failed attempts at the government level, it seemed to a group of us [Peronists] that it would be important to promote this privately, as Latin American patriots who felt the need for this. So we are going to create this alliance for Latin American integration, into which each of us can belong as a private citizen. . . .

The [institute's] founding assembly will be held in Lima, between the end of November and beginning of December. We chose Lima for two reasons: first, because it has the youngest President and the newest government in Latin America; second, because of the Latin Americanist position and the great courage with which President Alan García has confronted international powers.

I think that this institute could start next year to concretize some specific projects, such as the Latin American University, which would begin with graduate-level courses, that could be given in more than one Latin American capital. Its budget would be very small, because for graduate-level studies, any government could provide a temporary location for course presentation. Our idea would be to bring together one to two hundred Latin American professionals to give courses on such basic topics as integration and infrastructure projects needed to integrate the sub-continent, such that once this first group of professionals finished the graduate course, they would begin to study these projects academically and technically.

We also think that the Lima conference could approve a scholarship system for exchange-students in the Latin American nations. During the first phase, this might occur at the high-school level, youth of ages 15 to 16 would live for a year in another Latin American country, carrying on their course work and living with a host family as another one of the children.

We also want the alliance to promote permanent contact among business leaders, on the one hand, and labor leaders on the other, and intellectuals who would take the concrete steps toward integration, each working from his own sector.

A number of other projects have emerged in the course of my tour, particularly the idea of producing a very high-level Latin American magazine, in which personalities from each country would collaborate. I think this could become a reality next year, perhaps quarterly or bi-annually to begin with. The important thing is to get started, and expand as we go along.

EIR: How would you evaluate your meeting with President Belisario Betancur of Colombia?

Labaké: I think that it has been the most important of my tour. I have found a man who is totally willing to collaborate for Latin American integration, and especially on this immediate task. He favors concretizing the alliance for integration, and is in total agreement that it be founded in Lima, for the reasons I've mentioned. He has asked that we keep him

permanently informed on how the project is proceeding, because he wants to collaborate in any way he can.

I took the opportunity to thank the Colombian President, in the first place, as an Argentine, for his decisive attitude on behalf of our rights to the Malvinas, rectifying the unfortunate position of Colombia's previous government [of Julio César Turbay—ed.]. Secondly, I thanked him in the name of the Latin Americans with whom I have spoken, for his anti-drug campaign, and for his association in this area with President Alan García, and with all those Latin Americans who want to fight this, including the corresponding North American agency.

This was a most cordial interview, and I think that President Betancur will be one of the cornerstones of the alliance for Latin American integration. Just as I think he will be the point man in the fight against drugs, and in favor of a united Latin American position, faced with all the problems from outside the region, call them foreign debt, International Monetary Fund, the international division of labor which always hurts us, or decline in the terms of trade, which is of course one of the cancers suffered by our region.

EIR: Although your tour is not yet over, how would you evaluate it thus far?

Labaké: The results have been far greater than I expected. In Argentina, there is a very superficial idea of the degree to which other Latin American nations desire the integration of the subcontinent. This new Latin Americanist consciousness began to emerge at the time of the Malvinas war, when we saw that the Latin Americans united with us, while Europe, the EEC, and the dominant sectors of the U.S. government allied with England. . . . This Latin Americanist current has been strengthened more recently due to the EEC's reluctance to support us in our dealings with the IMF, to support us in the face of demands that we paralyze our nuclear program. . . .

There is an important current of Argentine political thought that favors integration. But in the five other countries I visited, I found an even greater consciousness. In Colombia I met with the President of the Republic; but in Venezuela, I also met with two former Presidents, Luis Herrera Campins and Carlos Andrés Pérez. At the highest level of business, trade union, and political leaders, they are all willing to collaborate. . . .

I would say that I began my tour thinking that we could pull together 30 or 40 Latin Americans in general, but now, I think I have met over 200 people, all of whom agree with my project.

EIR: How would you evaluate the necessity of an urgent meeting of Latin American heads of state in Lima, no later than November?

Labaké: I completely agree that it is necessary, both be-

cause of what is happening in my country, and also because of what I have seen in the five countries I visited. The policy which forces us to refinance our debt, that is, which forces us to sign with the IMF in order to refinance, and the interest rates that the creditor banks charge us, are producing irreversible damage in our countries.

In Argentina, as in the other five countries, the deindustrialization, the recession, and the poverty caused by recession are creating irreparable damage at the human level. Plague and disease are spreading. In my country, endemic diseases eradicated years ago, are now returning. I'm told that, in other countries, malaria has returned, something that in the subcontinent, we had almost forgotten about.

This is at the human level. On the economic level, we are destroying our productive apparatus, especially in Peru, and I see this now in Argentina; and this irreparable damage is producing a situation from which there may be no return. That is, the deterioration is so great on the socio-economic and human level, as well as politically speaking, that our countries cannot recover. I can't say that, during a given month, we are going to reach the point of no return, but I maintain that we are very close—at least in the countries I visited.

It would be a happy event if the founding of the alliance for Latin American integration coincided with a meeting, or occurred close to the time of, a [heads-of-state] meeting that would jointly consider the debt crisis.

EIR: What impact do you think your tour will have in Argentina, in terms of its internal situation as well as foreign policy?

Labaké: I am hopeful that it will have an enormous influence, just as it has had on my own idea of a project, first as a project for integration, and second, of an entire Argentine international doctrine which views Latin American integration as the number-one priority of its foreign policy. There is not yet a clear consciousness in Argentina that the country's international doctrine must have Latin American integration as its point of departure. Not so much within Peronism, but within the ruling [Radical Civic Union, UCR] party and in some others, there is the idea that the first priority is to have good relations with democracies, with the so-called European democracies, and with the North.

My tour will produce a fundamental shift in other aspects of politics, such as in the fight against the IMF, and in the refinancing of the foreign debt, and in Argentina's posture vis-à-vis the world's economic, political, and social problems. One tends to view these problems very differently, when taken from the standpoint of Latin American integration, rather than on a country-by-country basis. So that, I think that my tour will produce—I won't say a revolution—but a fundamental change of view in Argentina. It proves that integration is much closer than we thought.