

Ibero-American labor seeks joint strategy

by David Ramonet

On Aug. 15, 1986, while the bureaucrats of the International Monetary Fund were putting out the word that Peru had been declared "ineligible," a number of trade union leaders from all over Ibero-America were meeting with President Alan García, to present to him the solidarity and allegiance of the continent's organized labor movement.

The meeting of the union leaders with President Alan García culminated a series of meetings held to discuss convening a Meeting of Latin American Workers, to map out a joint strategy for organized labor in Ibero-America against the International Monetary Fund, against the usurious international banks, and against the drug trade.

The preparatory meeting of the Meeting of Latin American Workers was organized by Peruvian Congressman Luis Negreiros Criado, leader of the Peruvian dockworkers union Sitenapu, and by the president of the Union of Bogota and Cundimarca Workers (Utraboc) Jorge Carrillo, who had just completed his term as Colombia's labor minister and has since been elected the president of the Unified Confederation of Workers (CUT).

Out of the trade unionists' talks, the "Lima Declaration" was produced, which circulated widely among labor leaders of Latin America. It states:

"The President of the Republic of Peru, Dr. Alan García, has had the moral integrity to decisively and responsibly confront the usurious international financial institutions which have caused this crisis. But this struggle cannot be conducted exclusively by the governments; at its head must be the trade union movement, which historically has been a factor in the great economic and social changes benefiting the population in general.

"Therefore, we, democratic labor leaders of Latin America, demand that our countries and all the workers of the region take a united position toward the grave problem of the foreign debt and the International Monetary Fund. . . .

"It is not true that each country has its crisis; in truth, the cause of Latin America's crisis is one and the same; and thus

we must act in concert to solve it. What is at stake is the very existence of nations and democracy. With the reduction of the populations' living standards, the family, the basic cell of society, is disappearing. IMF policies are a blatant rejection of Christianity's basic principles of defense of human dignity."

"The true challenge is to achieve integration," says the declaration. And it stresses, "We workers are the backbone of integration. The labor movement must take on the role of leadership which it has not fully taken up to now." The declaration began to circulate almost immediately among the labor leaders of the continent, encountering a general positive response to the need to convene a meeting of Ibero-America's workers.

It was also the occasion to present the first copies of the book *Ibero-American Integration: 100 Million New Jobs by the Year 2000!* which the Schiller Institute published at the request of the Schiller Institute Trade Union Commission. President García received one of those copies personally from the executive director of the Schiller Institute for Ibero-America, Fernando Quijano Gaitán.

ICFTU-ORIT supports debt freeze

The impact of the historic meeting of the trade unionists with Peru's President was felt almost immediately. In September, in Buenos Aires, the General Labor Confederation of the Argentine Republic (CGT) held an international labor meeting together with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and its American branch, the Regional Inter-Americana Labor Organization (ORIT in its Spanish acronym), which came out in favor of a moratorium on the foreign debt and sent a message of support to García. This was the first time that the social-democratic bureaucracy of the ICFTU ever signed a document with such demands.

The debt moratorium resolution was the product of an intense debate inside the conference. The ICFTU and ORIT bureaucracy, backed by the European unions and the American Institute for Free Labor Development (the notorious AIFLD), wanted to force the CGT to give its backing to Argentina's President Raúl Alfonsín, using the worn-out blackmail that "to attack the government is to attack democracy." But the Ibero-American delegations managed to impose their will.

The European labor 'crats were left exposed. All they could do was to support the Argentine CGT's position for Ibero-American integration, against the IMF and usury. This strengthened the position of the CGT's secretary-general, Saúl Ubaldini, who is coming forward more and more as the unifying figure for Argentine organized labor.

This was made clear at the *Congreso Normalizador*, held for the purpose of legalizing the CGT (until then it functioned *de facto*, but not *de jure*), where Ubaldini was confirmed as secretary-general. The CGT is, in fact, the only organized

social force in Argentina through which the population has vividly expressed its repudiation of the IMF austerity program, called the "Austral Plan."

Colombia's United Workers Confederation

In Colombia, there has been an explosion of discontent against the so-called "narco-unionists" promoted by AIFLD, a pro-drug outfit which gets its funding from the U.S. State Department and CIA. From July on, at every national meeting of the Union of Workers of Colombia (UTC) and the Confederation of Workers of Colombia (CTC), the leaders of those unions were denounced for their ties to drug traffickers, and for pushing the abolition of the extradition treaty for drug traffickers between Colombia and the United States. Also, these leaders were denounced for having gotten their position with AIFLD financing, to carry out their corrupt actions. Finally, the main federations, like those of the capital and the province of Cundimarca, as well as various of the strongest national unions, dumped those confederations to start a process of trade-union unification.

On Sept. 26, the same day that the international conference in Buenos Aires finished its deliberations, tens of thousands of workers and peasants from all parts of the country marched in the streets of Bogota for the first time in many years. The program for the march was very precise: "For the defense of national sovereignty, no to IMF impositions." "Against terrorism and for the right to life." This was the first mass action of the newborn United Workers Confederation (CUT).

On Nov. 15-16, some 2,000 delegates attended the constituent congress of the CUT, representing 80% of the unionized workers in Colombia. They unanimously elected former Labor Minister Jorge Carrillo as president, and the slate presented by the democratic sector, headed by Carrillo, obtained the majority of votes.

From before its official founding, the CUT had been the target of attacks both from the extreme left and the extreme right, as well as from promoters of the legalization of the drug trade and the abolition of extradition. Carrillo is accused of "divisionism"—when what he did was unify the unions—and of turning over the union movement to communists—when he rescued the leadership of Colombian organized labor for the democratic sector. As the Bogota magazine *Semana* wrote on Nov. 25, "Everything seems to indicate that the guarantee it won't end up in communist hands nor those of the radical left, is precisely the presence of Carrillo and the support offered to it from the democratic sectors."

Is AIFLD communist?

Meanwhile, with what was left of the UTC, AIFLD bankrolled a congress to name as vice-president Mario Valderrama, best known for having traveled some months ago to Miami to intercede for the jailed drug smuggler, Hernán

Botero. Renamed secretary-general was Alfonso Vargas, who had gone to Spain to intercede for another trafficker, Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela. Valderrama presides over the "Independent Medellín" soccer team, which the late Colombian justice minister, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, had named as a drug-money laundering conduit. Up to a few weeks ago, Valderrama was vice-president of the team, but the former president died after a gunfight with his rivals.

These are the "unionists" backed by AIFLD, at the same time it is fomenting attacks against the CUT's democratic sector. Many Colombian unionists are asking if the AIFLD wants the labor movement to fall into communist hands.

Nothing new in that. John Ranelagh writes in his book *The Agency. The Rise and Decline of the CIA. From Wild Bill Donovan to William Casey*, that under Allen Dulles the CIA entrusted the creation of AIFLD to individuals "like Tom Braden and Cord Meyer, politically liberal or, like Jay Lovestone, ex-communists."

Moreover, on Nov. 11, the most influential Mexican news commentator, José Luis Mejías, picked up and ran with the extensive documentation *EIR's* Ibero-American editor Dennis Small had presented at a Washington, D.C. press conference two months earlier, showing AIFLD's ties to drug runners. The full AIFLD scandal became the subject of Mejías's front-page column in the major Mexican national daily *Excelsior*.

IMF labor 'reforms'

With the sole exception of Peru, the international banks have imposed genocidal austerity on all Ibero-American governments, to collect the foreign debt. Moreover, during 1986 they started to generalize the practice of introducing more labor reforms in order to institutionalize the IMF's "adjustment" plans, which require finishing off the inalienable rights of labor, as defined by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*.

In Panama, the World Bank made loans conditional on a series of reforms in the Labor Code, imposed in April. Even so, the IMF and World Bank now insist on reforming the social security system. These reforms affect the least protected sector of the workforce: pensioners, unemployed, and disabled workers.

There are plans to introduce similar changes in Colombia and Costa Rica, and in Argentina, where the government refuses to give the unions to operate facilities like hospitals, recreation centers, etc. (the most important part of social security benefits), a labor conquest which is peculiar to the Argentine labor movement.

The military dictatorship's labor laws continue to rule in Argentina, and while Argentina's Congress is debating a new law, the government refused to form worker-management committees to discuss wage increases—in practice reducing the function of the unions.