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Mike Leffert

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Region's Leftist Parties Unite to Fight New Trade Pacts

by Mike Leffert

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The leftist parties of Central America and Mexico met in Tegucigalpa June 2-5 and declared they would continue to fight against free-trade agreements (FTAs) with developed countries because the pacts worsen the problems of poverty, unemployment, marginalization, violence, and emigration. Present at the meeting were representatives of the Partido del Trabajo (PT, Mexico), Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN, El Salvador), Unificacion Democracia (UD, Honduras), Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional de Guatemala (URNG), and Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FMLN, Nicaragua).

The meetings went almost completely unnoticed in the media of any of the countries because the host UD, according to Deputy Doris Gutierrez, "apparently forgot" to announce it. Nevertheless, out of the glare, or even the flicker, of publicity, the parties came together on a Joint Declaration of the Meeting of Tegucigalpa denouncing the FTAs for these reasons and because of other negative social, cultural, environmental, and economic consequences. They said their next target would be the Association Agreement currently underway with the European Union (EU).

A campesino leader and ex-UD deputy whose name was curiously left out of one of the very few media reports said of the parties, major in some countries but insignificant in others, "For the left parties of Central America, what is happening in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Uruguay, where the left has risen to power, is important." The unnamed interlocutor overlooked the FSLN, which has come to power just across the border. The informant told the apparently lone local reporter that in Honduras the left has begun work to consolidate a political alliance with social movements, the academic community, campesinos, workers, indigenous, and churches to form a political front for the next elections. Together, the parties aim toward a strategy of unity to forge a new society in the Mesoamerican region.

FSLN secretary Jacinto Suarez said the parties would need to take advantage of the leftist momentum in the region to take political power, just as has happened in his country. He said power must be won "in order to repair the social and economic damage the neoliberal model has done to us." In his view, if it could happen in Nicaragua, the Honduran left could rise to power, too, because right-wing campaign lies have been exposed. Among those lies, he said, were that foreign investment would leave, an economic depression would come about, and family remittances would be cut off.

None of these things have happened in Nicaragua. El Salvadoran FMLN deputy in the Central American Parliament (Parlacen) Blanca Flor Bonilla said the parties would undertake an analysis of the political process unfolding in each of the countries. She said neoliberal policies in Central America have translated into "more violence, poverty, and social exclusion," and now the task is "to construct an alternative model that puts people at the center, not the multinationals, as is happening now."

Trade, not aid; European priorities change

The parties' best hope of getting some after-the-fact publicity for their aims at the moment is clearly the European Acuerdo de Asociacion (AdA), negotiations for which are set to begin in June in Brussels. Although called an association agreement, it also clearly seeks, said Guatemalan Vice Minister of Foreign Relations Anamaria Dieguez, trade liberalization across the board. It sounds like an aid deal, but, fear critics, it is a CAFTA redux. To make that point, Mario Rodriguez of the Red Mexicana de Accion Frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC) noted that there are four European initiatives already in existence: aid to the peace process in Central America, the Pact of San Jose, the cooperation pact in the 2003 Cumbre de Roma, and the XIII ministerial meeting of the Grupo de Rio.

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