

12-2-2005

# Countersummit to Summit of the Americas Showcases Opposition

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur>

---

## Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Countersummit to Summit of the Americas Showcases Opposition." (2005). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13436>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## Countersummit to Summit of the Americas Showcases Opposition

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Latin America

Published: 2005-12-02

The IV Summit of the Americas Nov. 4-5 brought 33 heads of state to the Argentine resort town of Mar del Plata, about 400 km south of Buenos Aires, but it also attracted thousands of opponents to US President George W. Bush and "elite" economic policy. The event reinforced the perception that Bush is having no success pursuing his policy objectives in the region and seemed to highlight the regional popularity of populist leader Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

### *Thousands march against "Bush the murderer"*

Thousands of anti-Bush protesters from 25 nations in the hemisphere descended on the city of 700,000 to bitterly oppose the event, and many wanted Bush to simply stay away. "We're mad that Argentina even opened the door for his visit," said Wayma Maman, a 50-year-old Indian who traveled three days on a bus to participate in protests against Bush. "For us, he's the devil, and he should stay away with his proposals." The protesters set up a People's Summit to counter the meeting of national presidents.

Participants included Argentine Adolfo Perez Esquivel, who won the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize for opposing his country's military regime. "We've had enough of Mr. Bush, who has committed crimes against humanity," Perez told reporters. He called Bush a "murderer" for his actions in Iraq and elsewhere. Activists said they were not only protesting Bush's actions in the Middle East but also free-trade policies they said enslave Latin America workers. They hoped to draw 50,000 people for their highlight event a protest Nov. 4.

Barbara Wood, who came from Vancouver, British Columbia, with about a dozen fellow members of a labor union, said the People's Summit was about putting "people at the center, not politics." At the People's Summit, Bolivian leading presidential candidate Sen. Evo Morales was in attendance, as were singers Silvio Rodriguez and Manu Chao and US anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan. Soccer megastar Diego Maradona also rallied thousands in opposition to Bush. Chavez was the only president to attend the People's Summit, where his two-hour speech was cheered by thousands.

### *Kirchner speech blasts US*

Argentine President Nestor Kirchner opened the Summit of the Americas meeting with a speech in which he said that the US has the "inescapable and inexcusable" responsibility for policies that have led to poverty and a social tragedy in Latin America. He specifically cited the Washington Consensus and the structural-adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Kirchner, coming fresh off a mid-term election that solidified his government, provided electoral proof of his popularity (see NotiSur, 2005-11-04).

A recent poll by survey group Latinobarometro also showed that Argentina is the country where the US is least popular. Kirchner's governing style has focused on rolling back privatization schemes that have put national utilities in the hands of foreign companies, reducing the Argentine debt to primarily international creditors, and other nationalist policies that attack the neoliberal model that predominated in the 1990s (see NotiSur, 2005-03-11, 2005-04-15, and 2005-09-23). Bolstered by the October vote in his favor and the increasing leftward trend in many regional governments, Kirchner was able to present traditional Latin American leftist complaints to a sitting US president.

In the summit's opening ceremony, Kirchner complained about the negative consequences of the structural-adjustment policies that reigned in the 1990s, said the market alone cannot alleviate poverty, and warned that Latin America does not need "just any old kind of integration." The summit also underscored Bush's inability to advance the cause of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the general disrepute of his economic ideas (see NotiCen, 2005-11-10). Whether the meeting was the "final burial" of the FTAA as Chavez claimed it was, Bush was clearly unable to raise it from the mortuary slab.

Brazilian officials do not take the rejectionist line espoused by Chavez, but they are not willing to make a deal without significant concessions on agricultural subsidies from the US. Being the largest South American economy, Brazil's concerns set a commanding tone for its neighbors. Even ideologues in the Bush administration acknowledge his feeble position in the region.

Roger F. Noriega, who was assistant US secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs until earlier this year, said, "It is fair to say that confidence in President Bush's 'freedom agenda' in the Americas has eroded, as masses and leaders alike doubt his intentions."

A recent poll of Latin Americans in business, government, and education in six nations showed that just 17% of Argentine leaders and 12% of leaders in Brazil viewed Bush positively. The Miami Herald/University of Miami Business School/Zogby Elite Poll of 523 Latin America opinion leaders was conducted Aug. 17 through Sept. 15. It included respondents in the public and private sectors, mass media, and academia in Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina. A conflict between the governments of Venezuela and Mexico erupted at the summit as a war of words blew up between Chavez and Mexican President Vicente Fox over Fox's advocacy for the FTAA (see SourceMex, 2005-11-16).

Chavez also caused a significant commotion when he showed unedited video from closed-door meetings at the summit on his weekly television program *Alo Presidente*. Conversely, the summit provided an opportunity for Chavez and Kirchner to bring their governments into a closer relationship. On Nov. 21, the two presidents signed agreements on oil pipelines and economic and technological cooperation.

### *Riots outside of countersummit damage businesses*

The luxury hotel hosting the summit was guarded by more than 8,000 police and security forces, and surrounding streets were emptied. "There are no weaknesses" in the summit's security, Argentine Interior Minister Anibel Fernandez said. US interests like Blockbuster video stores and Citibank

branches were covered with corrugated metal shields ahead of protest marches early Nov. 4. The thousands of police officers erected a security ring around the summit hotels and patrolled the streets and beaches of this normally bustling city, which looked more like a ghost town. Coast guard boats and helicopters trolled the shore, while air space was restricted.

There were allegations that police outside the secured zone allowed rioters to create a "liberated zone" where vandals could set fires, smash windows, and do other property damage without threat of police interference.

The mayor of Mar de Plata was among those criticizing the police, saying they allowed a zone of "five or six blocks" of the Avenida Colon to go unguarded. "There were 48 businesses damaged on Avenida Colon," said mayor Daniel Katz. The vandalism occurred separate from the large-scale marches, which were peaceful. A large area of downtown Mar del Plata was cordoned off for the summit, and Avenida Colon was one of the main boulevards leading into the barricaded zone. "There were police outside the barricades and they didn't act," said Katz. "They were watching, waiting to see how it would end" as rioters destroyed properties.

Kirchner had criticism after all those who were arrested during the summit were released. He called on the Department of Justice to apply the law against those who sacked and set fire to businesses. Nearby in the region, protests in Buenos Aires resulted in vandalism against a branch of Bank Boston while six people were wounded and 15 arrested in Montevideo, Uruguay.

-- End --