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"the Most Important Thing Is To Find An Alternative To Neo-liberalism": Interview With Victor Tirado

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[The first part of the interview with Victor Tirado, titled "Defending Popular Interests in Nicaragua Means Struggling for Economic Reconstruction," was published in the 05/01/92 issue of the Central America Update. For background on Tirado, see the May 1 issue.] . Robinson & Gioconda Espinoza Robinson * Q: Let us turn to neo-liberalism in Nicaragua and Latin America. We don't think anyone would disagree that Nicaragua needs to achieve economic stability, or that the old statist models, whether they were revolutionary, populist or bourgeois nationalist in nature, are a thing of the past. Does this mean that neo-liberalism is the only model, or does the left have an alternative? Tirado: We must take into account that, to date, we [the Latin American left] have yet to evaluate our historic experience as revolutionary movements. We followed in the trail of the Soviet revolution for nearly 75 years. We have yet to analyze what we need to conclude from that fact, what conclusions we can draw from this experience. Let us remember that the Soviet socialist experience was a failure. It was not a model that we wanted or that served us. I am saying this because I want to stress the point that in order to confront neo-liberalism we first need to evaluate our own historic experience. The left is trying to come up with an alternative to neo-liberalism on grounds of its virtual failure in many countries. But even if neo-liberalism is a failure, we can't do anything until we analyze what our alternative would be. Otherwise we are merely talking about two failures side-by-side [socialism and neo-liberalism], and where does that leave us? Q: In Venezuela and most other Latin American countries neo-liberalism has failed. And in those countries where it is held up as a "success story," such as Chile, neo-liberalism has produced economic growth simultaneous to widespread impoverishment and the concentration of wealth. What position should a revolutionary party like the FSLN [Sandinista National Liberation Front] adopt in the face of the social crisis generated by neo-liberalism? Tirado: I am not trying to defend neo-liberalism. I am not disputing that it failed in Venezuela, or that its success in Chile has only resulted in the enrichment of a minority. My argument is that neo-liberalism has failed because of the way it has been applied in these countries, and if we examine the experience of other countries we can find cases where it has led to economic development. In Chile there has been no redistribution of wealth. Now then, when I say redistribution, I am not talking about charity, but rather about policies involving all economic sectors, such as credit, food, health and education policies. We should not try to adopt a "pure" neo-liberalism; it must be accompanied by other measures. Where it has been applied ineffectively, it has run up against the problem that has faced all economic systems, including socialism: the distribution of wealth. Distribution has been the great challenge for all economic systems. So if neo-liberalism gives you results at the level of growth but not at the level of wealth distribution, then it will fail. The problem, therefore, goes back to one of distribution. Whatever kind of economic system you want neo-liberalism, socialism, scientific communism, or whatever if you don't know how to handle the issue of distribution then you are going to fail. Q: Are you asserting that you can apply new schemes for distribution to a neo-liberal model? Tirado: Of course. That is exactly what I am saying. Mexico is doing this. Mexico is finding new forms of distribution, and this is why there has not been any social explosion there. I am not a partisan of neo-liberalism,

but I believe we have to study our own experience and reality. If you tell me that neo-liberalism is a conservative ideology then I would have to disagree, because it is what has lifted the capitalist countries out of their stagnation. On the other hand, if you tell me that marxism-leninism is a revolutionary ideology I would disagree, because it led the socialist countries to failure. Q: But the very logic of the neo-liberal model dictates that wealth is distributed according to market forces and not according to social considerations. Tirado: Regardless of the laws of the market, one must always take into account the poorest sectors. We have not yet understood that neo-liberalism can be planned, programmed. Nor am I saying that neo-liberalism is going to resolve all problems in fact, right now there is no system and no model that can claim to resolve all problems. I am saying that neo-liberalism corresponds to one stage, the current one, and who knows what will follow it. We are all so concerned with attacking neo-liberalism that no one has bothered to predict what could replace it. If neo-liberalism, whether it be a conservative ideology or not, has brought highways, has produced bridges, sent people into space, has produced aircraft, cybernetics, computers then it is neo-liberalism that must modernize our countries. And those countries which do not modernize are going to be left behind. Modernizing our economies is not a task that occurs from one day to the next; it is a process. utdated atin

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