

A New Dawn in Latin America by Ricardo Alarcón*

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the political and economic system it headed brought about an excessive euphoria that caused many—both on the right and within a “left” subordinated to that failed project—to believe in the final and definitive triumph of capitalism. So much was said about the fall of the Berlin Wall that few realized that at the same time the Caracazo was taking place.

When the impoverished masses took to the streets of the Venezuelan capital (February 27, 1989) to protest against IMF draconian measures and were brutally massacred, the western media kept a despicable silence. However, it was the beginning of a process that no one can deny anymore: the bankruptcy of the neoliberal economic model and its political expression—the fictitious “representative democracy”—which Washington had imposed on the entire continent.

While others were talking about the “end of history,” new protagonists emerged all over Latin America, who brought the social struggle to unheard-of levels. Governments in Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia tumbled like houses of cards or were defeated in successive elections such as those which brought coalitions led by the traditional left in Brazil and Uruguay to power.

Today true revolutionary processes are consolidating in Venezuela and Bolivia, where the state is recovering the main levers of the economy previously handed over to foreign monopolies, and where millions of indigenous and poor people are receiving, for the first time, free education and health care while participating actively in political life. Cuba is successfully weathering its direst economic crisis and advancing toward perfecting its socialist project. Sandinism is returning to power in Nicaragua and recovering a path, disrupted by the “dirty war” waged by Washington. The Ecuadorian people are sweeping away the oligarchic parties and establishing a government that seeks deep changes. The Caribbean Community is strengthening and broadening its cooperation with Cuba and Venezuela. And the South American countries are carrying out great joint projects on their way toward full integration.

The Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (ALBA) has deepened its roots and spread beyond its initial members. ALBA is a real alternative to neoliberalism with a strong social and human content. Millions of Latin American and Caribbean people have freed themselves from

illiteracy and have recovered their sight and health. As Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa said, we are living a change of era.

Yet we are also living in dangerous times. The main threat comes from Washington. This historic turning point has to face a U.S. administration clinging to an irrational policy which purports to impose its hegemony by any means.

The recent release of Luis Posada Carriles, the most notorious terrorist of this hemisphere, who currently walks free on the streets of Miami, proves that Washington continues to encourage the worst procedures against our peoples. Posada has an extensive criminal record, registered in detail in U.S. official documents declassified in the last few years—a history of terrorist activity in which many people in Cuba, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States itself have been victims.

The most infamous was the mid-air bombing of a Cuban airliner and the death of its seventy-three occupants on October 6, 1976. Posada was being tried for that heinous crime when he escaped from a Venezuelan jail to join as a key figure in the Iran-Contra operation, and to continue a non-stop career of terrorism, which he himself has detailed in his autobiography—published in 1994, in a front-page interview with the *New York Times* in July 1998, and in several interviews in Miami newspapers and on television. Venezuela demands his extradition to continue his trial for these crimes.

The international counterterrorism conventions are very clear. Washington must extradite Posada, or if it does not do so “without any exception whatsoever” (Montreal Convention, article 7) it is obliged to try him for such crime in its own courts.

Two years have passed since Posada reappeared in U.S. territory. Bush has not extradited him, nor has he tried him. Neither Bush nor Alberto González has identified him as a terrorist. They refuse to do so while they incarcerate and persecute thousands of undocumented immigrants and turn the torturing of detainees into a state doctrine.

Next September marks the tenth year of imprisonment of Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, Antonio Guerrero, and René González, five Cubans who went to Miami to penetrate the terrorist groups that operate there against Cuba with impunity. They sought to discover the terrorist plans and help to prevent them and save lives. The Five did not have arms, they did not cause damage to

anybody, and they sacrificed heroically in an uneven fight against terrorism.

Throughout the process directed against them in a Miami court, Washington recognized very explicitly that its actions against the Five were aimed at protecting those criminal groups in the United States. This is recorded in the minutes of the court and in documents of the U.S. government that insisted up until the end on expressly guaranteeing that the Five would be "incapacitated" forever—so they could never again attempt to expose the criminals. Therefore, besides the excessive sentences—four life terms and seventy-five years in prison altogether—at the prosecution's request, there was added this unusual sentence: "the defendant is prohibited from associating with or visiting specific places where individuals or groups such as terrorists...are known to be or frequent."

The Five's case has been utterly silenced by the U.S. media. It is truly outrageous how those media and many American politicians refuse to denounce and condemn the Bush regime's cynical conduct, which massacres entire populations and sends thousands of young Americans to kill and die in the name of a false "war on terror," while providing protection to Posada, and other murderers, and cruelly and unjustly punishing five young men who are true fighters against terror.

Today Latin America advances with hope and confidence that sooner rather than later a new dawn will also arise to light the American people.

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