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The Imperative of Making Common Cause with the Oppressed: The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples for our America

By Ken Cole

“To awaken consciousness ... can literature claim a better function in these times?” -Eduardo Galeano, The Open Veins of Latin America.

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America

In December 1994, in Havana, Fidel Castro met Hugo Chávez (to become President of Venezuela in 1998) for the first time. “Chávez ... spoke with passion and depth about the program of the Bolivarian Revolution [in Venezuela], and the possibility of realizing the dream of [Simón] Bolívar ... the union of [Latin] America...” (Elizalde and Báez 2005, 47, author’s translation). The dream was of regional self-determination for the peoples of Latin America in a spirit of cooperation, human dignity and solidarity, and the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and the Caribbean – ALBA – was conceived. The first official declaration and subsequent agreement made under the framework of ALBA was signed between Cuba and Venezuela in Havana on December 14th, 2004. Subsequently (and at the time of writing, April 2010) Bolivia joined April 29th 2006, Nicaragua January 11th 2007, Dominica January 26th 2008, Honduras August 26th 2008 (although after the coup of June 28th 2009 which deposed elected President Manuel Zelaya, the United States backed regime of Roberto Micheletti withdrew from ALBA – see below), and St Vincent and the Grenadines, Ecuador and, Antigua and Barbuda June 24th 2009. However, the ALBA initiative institutionally addresses regional needs in general, drawing Argentina, Brazil, Belize, Grenada, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, The Bahamas, British Virgin Islands, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay into the ALBA orbit. PETROSUR, PETROCARIBE and PETROANDINA supply petroleum at advantageous terms; TELESUR addresses information and media from a Latin, rather than a North, American perspective; and health initiatives [Operación Milagro dealing with ophthalmic problems, which by February 2008 was operational in fourteen countries in the Americas, and medical schools in Havana and Caracas training doctors, free of charge] bring medical services to the poor of Latin America. There are also plans for regional natural gas distribution [GasDucto del Sur], and there are various regional sport, educational, economic and banking institutions. The eight member countries of ALBA continue as active participants in a range of other Latin American integration schemes: Central American Common Market – CACM; Caribbean Community and Common Market – CARICOM; Comunidad Andina de Naciones – CAN [Community of Andean Nations]; Mercado Común del Sur – MERCOSUR [Southern Common Market]; Grupo de Rio [Rio Group]; Plan Puebla Panamá – PPP [Puebla-Panama Plan]; and the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas – UNASUR [Union of South American Nations]. In the Spanish lexicon the word alba has a particular significance, translating as “dawn of day” (Velásquez Spanish and English Dictionary). ALBA constitutes a social process beyond intergovernmental, institutional, integration initiatives. It is the dawning of a non-capitalist, regional, social, consciousness (see Cole 2008): “...a geo-economic, geo-political, social, cultural and ideological space that is in construction...” (Hugo Chávez, at the 6th Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America, January 30th 2008, quoted, Janicke 2008, emphasis added). ALBA is the “...promotion and development of a peaceful [regional] democratic culture ... through exchanges of ideas and implementation of social, economic and cultural development projects; eradication of extreme poverty; education; combating corruption; employment generation; and elimination of discrimination for reasons of gender or race.” (Carmen Jacqueline Giménez Tellería, President of the ALBA Governing Council, emphasis added: see Tellería 2006). At the IVth Extraordinary Summit in June 2009, convened to receive St Vincent and the Grenadines, Ecuador, and Antigua and Barbuda, into the ALBA fold, the name was modified to the Alianza Bolivariana para los

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Pueblos de Nuestra América [Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America], reflecting that this integration process was no longer a theoretical proposal, but "...a geopolitical, regional, platform of economic power ... embracing eighty million people, with an annual product of six hundred million dollars and reserves of gas, petroleum, water and fertile land..." (Chávez 2009). Like the word alba, the phrase Nuestra América has a particular ideological resonance in Latin America.

The Americas: an introduction

The first International Conference of American States was celebrated in Washington between October 1889 and May 1890. Originally intended as a Pan-American, political, initiative for the peaceful resolution of conflicts within the Americas, the need to find markets in the Hemisphere for United States industry took precedence and the aim of regional economic integration to the advantage of the United States assumed primordial significance. However, both political and economic agendas were resisted. The idea that regional disputes should be settled in Washington by binding arbitration was regarded by delegates as a surrender of sovereignty: and the proposal that regional trade should be conducted within a hemispheric customs union favouring US industry threatened the interests of governing elites in Latin America. For José Martí, regional opposition to U.S. arbitration and customs union proposals underlined the need for Latin American, inter-governmental, negotiation and cooperation, to reconcile "...hostile and discordant elements ... inherited from a despotic and perverse colonizer [Spain] and the imported methods and ideas [from the U.S.A.] which have been retarding logical government..." (Martí 1891: 115). Inimitably, to this end, he articulated the importance of a regional social consciousness in *Nuestra América* [Our America], an emblematic and iconic article published in newspapers in New York and Mexico City in January 1891 (Martí 1891a). José Julián Martí y Pérez (a.k.a. José Martí) was born in Havana in 1853 to Mariano Martí and Leonor Pérez, peninsular migrants who had met and married in Cuba. Martí was first introduced to nationalist sentiments by his school teacher, Rafael María de Mendive, a Creole intellectual committed to the cause of anti-slavery and Cuban independence from Spain. And José's subsequent academic success and literary talent made him an effective partisan in the resistance movement against Spanish colonial rule. His travels as a revolutionary exile throughout Latin America and his five years living in the United States honed his intuition on the cultural complexities of oppression and the frustrations "inherited from a despotic and perverse colonizer", and the socially corrosive, competitive dynamic, of United States imperialism, which "retarded logical government". He sagaciously perceived that freedom from the tyranny of Spanish colonialism would be supplanted by United States economic domination.

"Never has there been in America, from independence to now an issue that requires more sensitivity, nor obliges us to be more vigilant, nor demands a clearer and detailed analysis, than the invitation from powers in the United States, replete with products they cannot sell, to extend their control over the Americas..." Martí, quoted Ministerio de Comunicación e Información 2006: 20, author's translation.

In Nuestra América, Martí juxtaposed a cultural distinction between: "Our America" – Iberian, Latin-Catholic, 16th/17th century tradition of Spanish/Portuguese colonial expansion; with the "Other America" – Anglo-Protestant inspired, 18th/19th century United States imperialism. And to resist the imported, pernicious, "methods and ideas" of the Other America he called for regional, cultural solidarity: "...Our America [has] to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent..." (Martí 1891: 119, emphasis added). And he remonstrated with Latin American governing elites for adopting imported cultural values and lifestyle mores which would ultimately legitimate economic exploitation, social inequality, and United States hegemony. The distinction between "Our" and the "Other" America is a cultural and emotional divide, rather than a geographical and economic division. Inherent in the ideological precepts of "Nuestra América" is a regional, social consciousness: a communal affinity and accountability which opposes the celebration of individuals', competitive interests, and the elitist, economic expediency of social

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organization, implicit in the cultural maxims of the Other America. For Martí, to govern well...

“... one must see things as they are ... Good government is nothing more than the balance of the country’s natural elements where each man can attain self-realization and all may enjoy the abundance that Nature has bestowed in everyone ... Knowing is what counts. To know one’s country and govern it with that knowledge is the only way to be free from tyranny ... If a Republic refuses to open its arms to all, and move ahead with all, it dies ... Nations should live ... always with one heart and one mind.” Martí 1891: 113, 114, 117 and 118, emphasis added.

Common interest was more than an expedient intimacy born of competitive exchange. Individuals’ self-realization was conceived as an emotional, social process, the cultural parameters of which defined personal aptitudes, sensibilities, ambitions and opportunities.

The Other America: an invitation from powers in the United States to extend control over the Americas.

Already, 66 years before The First International Conference of American States, in an attempt to prevent newly independent Latin American nations from escaping Spanish colonial dominion only to fall under the jurisdiction of other European powers, especially Great Britain (see Galeano 2009: 173-175), U.S. President James Monroe had enunciated his “Doctrine”: that the government of the United States reserved the “right” to unilaterally intervene in any sovereign nation of South America if United States interests were deemed to be threatened or subverted. And 59 years later, after the 2nd World War, when United States foreign policy was defined by the Cold War with the Soviet Union (1946-1989), President Truman (1944-53) launched “...an offensive to destroy all the Latin American political forces that were considered obstacles to the expansion and deepening of Washington’s continental domain...” (Regalado 2007:121-2). In 1948, in an attempt to unite the Americas against the Soviet “threat”, the United States convened a conference of 21 Latin American nations in Bogota (Colombia), to adopt the charter of the Organization of American States [OAS]. To further consolidate U.S. influence in the Hemisphere, in 1961 President John F. Kennedy (1960-3) initiated the Alliance for Progress. Twenty thousand, million, dollars of U.S. aid was made available to be loaned to Latin America, and predictably, around 90% of all commodity purchases from these monies were made from U.S. corporations (see, Cox, 1994: 83-85). Under Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency (1963-69) James Monroe’s 1823 Doctrine was invoked to justify military intervention in the Dominican Republic between April 1965 and September 1966, in support of right-wing political interests opposed to Juan Bosch of the Dominican Revolutionary Party. There was also military intervention in Panama, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina and Chile (1964); Argentina (1966); Venezuela (1963-7); Peru (1963-8); Colombia (1962-6); El Salvador (1962-72); and Uruguay (1966-71) (see Regalado 2007:144). For details of 55 U.S. interventions in Latin America between 1890 and 2004 see, Becker 2004. But Our America became intolerant of the hegemonic ambitions of the Other America. In Peru, Bolivia, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Venezuela, Guatemala, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Colombia and México, armed movements organized to fight against national political elites supported by the United States were active (see Regalado 2007:145). Contemporaneous with financial globalization – an era inaugurated by U.S. President Richard Nixon’s August 15th 1971 decision to unilaterally renege on international commitments entered into at the Bretton Woods Monetary and Financial Conference held in July 1944 – the tenor and logic of the “invitation from powers in the United States to extend their control over the Americas” assumed a financial guise. Of course, the post-1971 globalized world has been characterized by other profound changes. Following developments in the electrical and materials industries, in 1971 in Santa Clara, California, Intel introduced the microprocessor, heralding cheap practical computing. And the creation of the Internet and investments in satellite and cable networks, and the concomitant evolution of production processes, transport systems and marketing strategies, and revolutions in occupations and lifestyles, and changes in social demographics, globally

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transformed everyday life (see, Reich 2009: Chapters 2 and 6, and Hobsbawn 2008: Chapters 1 and 4). But the change in international relations which reconfigured the parameters of United States intervention in the Americas, can be pinpointed to decisions taken on August 15th 1971. Henceforth the logic of U.S. hegemony in Latin America would be financial rather than political. The focus of development thinking and economic decision making shifted from finance ministries and politicians. Central banks and economists now operated the levers of regulation, and monetary policy (finance) rather than fiscal policy (economic management and government spending) became the touchstone of “development”. To take advantage of the “freedoms” of the globalized international economy, U.S. President George H. Bush proposed the “Enterprise for the Americas” initiative (June 1990). The first step was the inauguration on 1st January 1994 of the North American Free Trade Association [NAFTA]: an agreement between Mexico, Canada and the U.S.A. Subsequently, in December 1994, at the First Summit of the Americas of the Organization of American States, in Miami, the process of establishing La Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas [ALCA] (The Free Trade Area of the Americas [FTAA]) was proposed by the United States. “Our objective is to guarantee our national business control of a territory that stretches from the Arctic to the Antarctic, and the free access, without difficulties, for our products, services, technology and capital throughout the hemisphere.” (U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, cited in Cockcroft 2004:6, author’s translation). But negotiations for the establishment of ALCA became stalled in 2003, and the November 2005 “Summit of the Americas” in Mar del Plata (Argentina), intended to re-start negotiations, ended without any agreement or final communiqué.

The Other America: democracy in the time of globalization

The exigencies of globalization implied particular political imperatives to ensure that U.S. economic interests would be advanced. Henceforth, intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign nations would emphasize the promotion of representative democracy associated with market deregulation. “Pro-democracy” as an imperialist strategy was first applied in Nicaragua. In July 1979 the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) deposed the U.S. backed dictatorship of [Anastasio Somoza](#). The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] and Argentine Intelligence, unified anti-Sandinista forces into the Contras (officially known as the [Nicaraguan Democratic Force](#)). From 1982 to 1988, based in Honduras, the Contras attacked civilian targets, and through murder, rape, beatings, kidnapping and disruption of harvests sought to undermine social cohesion. However, a more insidious tactic was the creation of an alternative cultural and political process, by which the interests of the Other America would be protected by promoting free enterprise and competitive exchange within a representative, democratic agenda. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was mandated to channel funds and direct the development of a political opposition movement that could triumph at the polls (see, Robinson 1992). “The total amount that the United States invested in the Nicaraguan electoral campaign of 1989-90 has never officially been revealed, but has been estimated at more than \$20 million.” (Agee 2005). And on February 25th [Violeta Barrios de Chamorro](#) of the UNO won 54.73% of the vote in the presidential elections. Subsequently the NED was prominent in a program of political intervention in Venezuela (see Agee 2005). And in the tradition of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, “pro-democracy initiatives” of the Other America to subvert and destabilize governments which challenge United States supremacy were also visited upon Haiti. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a reformist priest, was originally elected as President in 1991, only to be ousted eight months later in a C.I.A. orchestrated coup. Finally, in 1994, Washington restored Aristide to the presidency on the condition that development policy rigidly followed neo-liberal, free-market policies. And U.S. troops were stationed in Haiti for the remainder of his term to ensure compliance (see Blum 2010). Aristide remained in office until 1996, and was re-elected for the period 2001-2004. And in February 2004 he was once again escorted by United States military personnel and flown out of Port-au-Prince on a United States plane, and an interim government led by Prime Minister [Gérard Latortue](#) (who had been brought back from the U.S.), and pro-U.S. President [Boniface Alexandre](#), was installed. On the history of U.S./Haiti relations, and Aristide’s refusal to privatize state-owned

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enterprises, see Klein 2005, and Chossudovsky 2010a. It was hoped that Barack Obama's accession to the 44th Presidency of the United States on January 20th 2009 would seriously attempt to set a "...new tone of respect..." working towards a "...peaceful, prosperous, and democratic hemisphere..." (see FPF 2009). The hope was that a line would be drawn under the foreign policy of George W. Bush, whose invasion of Iraq and the torture and detention of "enemy combatants" in Guantanamo Bay was evocative of the ubiquitous U.S. interventions in Latin America in the 19th and 20th centuries. Obama's inaugural address to the United States Congress spoke of the U.S. being a "...friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity..." (see NYT 2009). And on April 19th at the 5th Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain (Trinidad), the first hemispheric forum for President Barack Obama to engage with leaders from across Latin America and the Caribbean, the foreign policy principles of his administration were outlined. The importance of democratic practices as a universal value was emphasised and he declared that the United States would no longer support the violent overthrow of democratically elected leaders. Then, on June 28th, the democratically elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, in the early hours of the morning, was escorted in his pyjamas by troops and deported in a plane which flew from a U.S. airbase to Costa Rica. The coup leader Roberto Micheletti ordered a series of draconian measures against Zelaya's supporters (see, COFADEH 2009) and installed a government of allies and cronies. Significantly, Honduras had become a member of the Bolivarian Alliance of the People's for Our America, and Zelaya was deposed on the eve of a non-binding plebiscite (referendum) on the election of a constituent assembly, to convene in November, to rewrite the constitution and rule on the demand for agrarian reform. If successful this initiative would have irrevocably changed the political and economic environment in Honduras towards the social needs of the impoverished masses (Our America) and against major land owners and foreign agri-business transnationals and the comprador bourgeoisie engaged in trade with the United States (the Other America). International condemnation of the coup was near universal and, regionally, the new regime became a pariah. President Obama denounced the coup as illegal and called for Mr. Zelaya's restoration to power, but US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was less forthright, and proposed that Costa Rican president Oscar Arias act as a mediator in discussions between the illegitimate government of Roberto Micheletti and the elected president Manuel Zelaya. On the 21st of September Zelaya slipped back into the capital of Honduras, Tegucigalpa, taking refuge in the Brazilian embassy. By the 30th October a deal had been brokered for Zelaya, under the "Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord" (see, <http://hondurascoup2009.blogspot.com/>), to participate in a "Government of Unity and National Reconciliation": a power-sharing deal which collapsed within a week when the terms of the agreement were unilaterally abrogated by Michelotti with the active connivance of Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in Washington. Zelaya was ineligible to contest the 29th November Presidential elections, and Porfirio Lobo Sosa, a businessman was elected, and inaugurated as President January 27 2010. And the Other America was once more triumphant in Honduras. In Paraguay, for fear of "...an ouster similar to the one that befell ... Zelaya..." (Agence France-Presse, November 6th, quoted Rozoff 2009), President Fernando Lugo replaced the nations top military commanders, who had previously been trained at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC or WHINSEC), formerly the School of the Americas [Escuela de las Américas], at Fort Benning, Columbus, Georgia (U.S.A.). And for similar reasons Nicaragua expelled a Dutch European parliamentarian who was reported to be in Managua to gauge how the military "...felt about attempting a Coup d'état..." (Radio Netherlands, reported in Rozoff 2009). Also, following the refusal by Ecuador to renew an agreement which gave the United States access to its Manta airbase – the lease expired in November 2009 – President Álvaro Uribe Vélez of Colombia agreed to the Supplemental Agreement for Cooperation and Technical Assistance and Security Between the Governments of the United States and the Republic of Colombia (SACTA) on October 30th , 2009. The agreement allows United States military forces to use seven air force and naval bases and army installations in Colombia and to access all Colombian territory for military purposes. The SACTA agreement also included a proviso that all U.S. military personnel have diplomatic immunity from prosecution. SACTA was near unanimously rejected by South American governments. What particularly disturbed other Latin American authorities was that access to these military installations would give U.S.

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Southern Command (SouthCom) “...air mobility reach on the South American continent...” and “...nearly half of the continent can be covered by a C-17 [aircraft] without refuelling...” (Lindsay-Poland 2009). A US-air force document stated that an increased military presence was necessary to combat “...the constant threat from anti-U.S. governments in the region...” and that the bases would be used for ‘...full-spectrum military operations improving the capacity of US forces to execute *expedient warfare* in Latin America...’ (see Whitney 2009, emphasis added). Fidel Castro in one of his Reflections, published by the Cuban News Agency on the 6th November, described this agreement as an “...annexation of Colombia to the United States ... that turns Colombia into an overseas territory...”. Also, the Russian Information Agency (September 27th 2009) reported that Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli and U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton had reached preliminary agreement on U.S. access to four air and naval bases (see Rozoff 2009). The agreement was subsequently confirmed in October. And as part of this military buildup in the Americas, the United States recommissioned the U.S. Navy Fourth Fleet, disbanded in 1950, to patrol the Caribbean Sea, and the waters around Central and South America. On January 12th 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti causing an unfolding humanitarian crisis. It is estimated that up to 200,000 were killed, with the survivors desperately in need of clean water, shelter and medical help. Haiti has a long history of U.S. military intervention and occupation “...that has contributed to the destruction of Haiti’s national economy and the impoverishment of its population” (Chossudovsky 2010b). The international relief effort, without negotiation between the two governments, was the justification for Washington to mobilize one aircraft carrier, 33 rescue aircraft, numerous warships, 11,000 marines (expected to reach 16,000), and turn Port-au-Prince airport into a military base which prioritized U.S. Air Force flights and blocked various aid missions from entering the country, in order to serve Washington’s logistic agenda. The *China Daily* of January 21 2010 asked if Haiti was becoming the 51st state of the United States (see Zibechi 2010). The post-February 2004 U.N. “peacekeeping” contingent of 7000 under Brazilian control, was by then dwarfed by the U.S. military presence. *The island of Hispaniola, which is Haiti and the Dominican Republic, is a gateway to the Caribbean basin, strategically located between Cuba to the North West and Venezuela to the South. The militarization of the island, with the establishment of US military bases, is evidently intended to politically pressure Cuba and Venezuela: “The total number of U.S. bases, including the two bases in Aruba and Curacao (Dutch Antilles), to the north and east of Venezuela to date number 13.” (Zibechi 2010). And the Hugo Chávez government of Venezuela is considered a major threat to the “stability” of the Americas.* “The invitation from powers in the United States” continues unabated. U.S. complicity in right-wing political ambitions in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Haiti and Honduras, and the concern over United States capacity to “execute expedient warfare” has prompted South American nations to arm themselves in defense of national sovereignty. The October 8th edition of *Venezuelanalysis.com* reports that Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Brazil have purchased arms from Sweden, Russia and France to guard against U.S. support for numerous military groups. It is also reported (see Rozoff 2009) that Nicaragua and Ecuador have purchased Russian military equipment. “It is clear that the Obama administration is in no hurry to break with the methods used by its predecessors.” (Toussaint 2010). There has been no fundamental break with past U.S. foreign policy. The strategic imperatives remain unchanged.

The Other America: the Washington Consensus and the rebellion of Our America

After the price of oil quadrupled in the 1970s to nearly US\$12 per barrel, petro-dollar surpluses burgeoned and were deposited with international banks, a major portion of which was “recycled” as loans to Latin American governments. Subsequently, in an effort to stave off price inflation in the US economy, domestic interest rates were increased, an increment which through the institutions of global finance simultaneously augmented the cost of international lending, and the indebtedness of Latin American countries mushroomed. The ‘debt crisis’ ensued when, in August of 1982, Mexico’s Finance Minister Jesus Silva-Herzog declared that foreign debt obligations could no longer be honored. In response,

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commercial banks reduced or halted new lending in Latin America and refused to refinance billions of dollars of short-term loans. And in the last two decades of the 20th century, every Latin American economy with the exception of Cuba was “structurally adjusted” (see below) by the WB and the IMF to preserve the integrity of global financial markets (euphemistically justified as “debt relief”). In what came to be known as the “Washington Consensus”, the conditions attached to new loans to repay existing debts required that: governments reduce fiscal deficits by restricting social spending (on education, health, social services, etc...), moderate taxation (to act as an “incentive” to private investment), allow interest rates and exchange rates to be competitive (to encourage foreign investment, export production, trade liberalization and competition), etc... (see, Williamson 1990: Chapter 2). Lifting restrictions on foreign ownership, privatizing state utilities and industries, lowering taxes, weakening trade unions, cutting social benefits, education and health provision, “...plunged Latin America [in the 1980s] into its deepest crisis this [20th] century ... Deregulated economies ... synonymous with unprecedented social polarization ... plummeting living standards ... and multi-billion dollar fortunes ... [led to the] massive pillage of the economy (by foreign and local investors and bankers) and the state (by elected politicians and non-elected officials).” (Petras and Morley 1992: 7). The 1980s became a “lost decade”: average per capita income in Latin America declined by 0.9% per annum in the 1980s and by 1.5% in the 1990s (see, Robinson 2008); and between 1983 and 1992 the overall number of people living in poverty increased from 78 to 150 million (see Korzeniewicz and Smith 2000:8-9). In Venezuela tens of thousands of people protested IMF-mandated austerity measures enforced by President Carlos Andes Perez; in Argentina there were prolonged strikes against the Carlos Menem regime; similarly in Brazil people protested through extended industrial action and widespread social unrest against the policies of the supposedly “centre-left” Social Democratic Party regime of Fernando Collor de Mello which dramatically increased unemployment and lowered the real wage; and in Guatemala, Peru and Chile there were similar rebellions. And in the incipient 21st century “...[in spite] of more than two decades of democratic governments ... the region faces a growing social crisis. Deep inequalities remain entrenched, serious levels of poverty prevail, economic growth has been insufficient and dissatisfaction with those democracies – manifest in many places by widespread popular unrest...” (Caputo 2005). Such “widespread popular unrest” included community action against: water privatization [Cochabamba, Bolivia, 2000]; banking/peso crisis [Argentina 2001/2]; privatization of electricity supply [Arequipa, Peru 2002]; etc... As a development strategy structural adjustment was “an unmitigated economic disaster... around 97 million people, are presently struggling to live on an income of less than a dollar a day. Meanwhile the number of Latin American billionaires has more than quadrupled since the late 1980s.” (Bellamy Foster 2007). Representative democracies (based upon competitive elections and majority rule) as a political means of realizing citizens potentials and ensuring individuals’ well-being are largely meaningless in a globalized world. State regulation of social existence has assumed an international dimension. “The internationalization of the state ... has involved the emergence of truly *supranational* institutions [WB, IMF, WTO, etc.] ... It is not that the nation-state will disappear ... The function of the nation-state is shifting from the formulation of national policies to the administration of policies formulated by ... transnational institutions.” (Robinson W. 1996: 372 and 373, emphasis in original). Denied any semblance of democratic control over their lives by the machinations of “formal” political institutions, people organized themselves into social movements to defend themselves against the (local) effects of (global) economic competition. “From the early 1990s ... social movements of very different backgrounds [in Latin America] have been at the forefront of social protest, at the local as well as at the national and supranational level ... there have been impressive mobilizations and campaigns that cannot be considered as isolated activities.” (Biekart 2005, emphasis added). Social movements structure political dissent (rebellion) around opposition to the experience of free-trade agreements, privatization of public services, political corruption, and struggle to protect indigenous rights, land entitlements, employment, and the like. However, social change and the imagining of alternative modes of existence (revolution), requires organized political solidarity: and gradually, resistance has transmogrified into a political process orientated to the building of progressive social environments. There has been a political and ideological sea-change, as a social consciousness evolved to embrace fundamental social change. In December 1998

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Hugo Chávez, leader of the Fifth Republic Movement, was elected President of Venezuela, a result ratified in regional and national referenda and elections no less than 13 times, up until a referendum was narrowly lost in December 2007. However, in elections in November 2008, Chávez' United Socialist Party increased its vote by 1.1 million over the referendum which had been lost the previous year. Since December 1998, Bharrat Jagdeo, of the People's Progressive Party, was elected President of Guyana in August 1999; in Brazil, in October 2002, Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva, of the Workers' Party, was first elected President, and reelected in October 2006; Néstor Carlos Kirchner, of the Frente para la Victoria [FPV] (Front for Victory), was sworn in as President of Argentina in May 2003; and in October 2007, his wife Cristina Fernández, on essentially the same political platform, was elected to succeed him; in October 2004 in Uruguay, Tabaré Ramón Vázquez Rosas, of the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) coalition, was elected President ending 150 years rule by right wing parties and the military, and in elections of 29th November 2009 he was succeeded by José Mujica, ex-Tupamaro National Liberation Front activist of the 1970s and 80s. 2006 was a momentous year: in January, Evo Morales of the Movimiento al Socialismo, or MAS (Movement for Socialism), was elected President of Bolivia, and was re-elected on the 7th December 2009 for the period 2010-2015 with more than 63% of the valid votes; in March, Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, of the Socialist Party, was elected the first female President of Chile; in April, Ollanta Humala, of the Peruvian Nationalist Party, came within 5% of being elected President; in July, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, of the Party of Democratic Revolution, lost the election for President of Mexico by less than 1% in a disputed contest; in November José Daniel Ortega Savedra, of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, regained the Presidency of Nicaragua; and also in November, in Ecuador, Rafael Vicente Correa Delgado who founded the Alianza PAIS-Patria Altiva i Soberana (Proud and Sovereign Fatherland Alliance) was elected President and reelected in April 2009 in the first round of voting, which is without precedent, with 51.7% of the vote in an electoral contest between four candidates. In September 2007 Alvaró Colom, leader of the Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza [UNE] (National Union of Hope) became Guatemala's first left-leaning president in fifty three years, when he won the presidential race against Otto Pérez Molina of the Partido Patriótica (Patriotic Party) in the second round of the vote (there were 14 candidates in the first round). In April 2008 Fernando Lugo, a Roman Catholic bishop, of the Christian Democratic Party, a party integrated into a coalition of more than a dozen opposition parties and social movements, known as the Patriotic Alliance for Change, was elected President of Paraguay, ending more than 60 years rule by the right-wing Colorado Party. And on the 16th March 2009, Mauricio Funes of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, a movement which fought a 12 year guerrilla war up until the early 1990s, won the presidential elections in El Salvador. The issue of state intervention in development – hitherto marginalized in the dominant discourse of neo-liberalism – came to politically occupy centre stage. Presidents and candidates espoused, albeit with different emphases and within distinct contexts, development strategies oriented to advancing the well-being of the Other America. In the words of one observer: "The Latins are defying the American Empire" (Perkins, 2007: 79).

Our America: the power of the human mind.

In 1891 for José Martí there had never been an issue that required more assiduity than "the invitation from powers in the United States to extend their control over the Americas". And in the incipient twenty-first century the threat to the community of Our America from the hegemony of the Other America is still perilous. Martí was convinced that within the cultural precepts of Nuestra America, "...las armas del justicio..." – weapons of the human mind – would be unassailable in the struggle to realize the human potential of los humildes [the disadvantaged masses]. "A powerful idea, waved before the world at the proper time..." would be decisive in effecting progress (quotes from Martí 1891a and 1891).

"To understand we have to examine reality; the most credible source of truth comes from our own existence; that is our experience; we have to learn to observe in order to create; we have to think about

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our experience; that is we have to reflect.” Martí, 2001: 362, emphasis added, authors’ translation.

All organisms adapt to the environment of their existence. And humans, as self-conscious, social beings, whose survival depends on cooperating within a social division of labour, have to adapt to an appreciation of each other’s intentions and ambitions. The conditioning circumstances of individuals’ experience are the social relations of existence. “We are what we are because of enculturation, plain and simple. This is not true of any other species.” Donald 2001: 151, emphasis added. In the creation of their existence, individuals are constrained by their knowledge of nature, themselves and each other. And knowledge, a cultural creation, is woven through with ideological prejudices which legitimate social existence and justify inequality. Indeed, the most effective tool in the arsenal of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Fundamentally it is a task of progressive political leadership to challenge the social conventions which condone a culture of privilege and injustice, permitting individuals to morally discriminate between alternative courses of action. People reflect upon feelings of well-being, or danger, or sorrow, embarrassment or pride, or ambition, affection and solidarity. The intuitive appreciation of life constitutes human consciousness: ‘...the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is ... [an] ensemble of the social relations.’ (Marx K 1972:12, emphasis added). This is the process of praxis: “...the reflection and action which truly transform[s] reality, [and] is the source of knowledge and creation.” (Freire 1972: 77). And by dint of praxis human beings intuitively adapt to the frustrations of collective well-being and establish a social intelligence, a “...universal moral grammar ... [which] evaluates the causes and consequences of our own and others’ actions.” (Hauser 2006: xv and 4, emphasis in original). It is a philology which punctuates human behaviour and social progress. Within this psychic infusion, consciousness, morality, knowledge and language, socially evolve as properties of the human mind. Individuals, as social beings, are innately impelled to understand their experience (see, Damasio 1999, Chomsky 1986, Hauser 2006 and Pinker 1994). Martí’s argument in Nuestra America attempts to establish such a collective “sense of self” amongst los humildes. Knowledge and enculturation, fuse cognition and consciousness, so that individuals cooperate to improve and secure their well-being. This is the “awakening of consciousness”, the “revealing of identity”, which in the opening quote of this essay, Eduardo Galeano opined should be the “function of literature”.

“...the first human right is the right to think, the right to believe, the right to live, the right to know, the right to dignity, the right to be treated as other human beings, the right to be independent, the right of a people to sovereignty, the right to human dignity.” Castro 2007: 28, author’s translation.

Self-fulfilment and personal freedom are part and parcel of processes of self-determination and the appreciation of social existence. In the time of globalization such progress can only be countenanced on an international (regional) scale. This is the construction of the economic, social, cultural and ideological space that is the ALBA process.

“...like never before we need the ideas of Bolívar and Martí ... in this unipolar world our people are threatened by being devoured by the empire ... destroying our independence and popular sovereignty ... the imperialist strategy is very clear ... to impose a political and economic regime which is convenient to the United States ... [nothing] will remain in Latin American hands ... North American companies will fundamentally control all economic activity ... [But] if we put the ideas of Bolívar and Martí into practice it will lead to an end to injustice, the end of exploitation... [This] can be called many things ... socialism ... Bolivarianism ... the thought of Martí ... [or] Christianity...” Castro 1994: 94, 96, 101, 105.

ALBA is an economic, cultural and spiritual project to realize human creativity. Such progress can only be effected through the politics of endogenous development.

“When development is not endogenous the risk is the contradiction with, and disturbing of, traditional

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cultural and economic way of life of people. Without equality there is injustice which leads to conflict and violence. And without [social] sustainability the natural environment and social structure is threatened.” Towards a Culture of Global Peace [Hacia una Cultura Global de Paz], UNESCO, Manila, November 1995, quoted Ministerio de Comunicación e Información, 2004.

Just as José Martí remonstrated with Latin American governing elites for adopting the cultural values and lifestyle mores of the Other America and called on Our America “...to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent...” (Martí 1891: 119, emphasis added, quoted above), so the ALBA process enables regional, social and economic relations to be cast in an endogenous development mould. At the 3rd Extraordinary ALBA Summit (summoned to evaluate the current global financial crisis from the perspective of the South countries) in November 2008, representatives of the (then) ALBA nations (Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Honduras, Dominica), plus Ecuador, approved a regional unit of account for settling trade imbalances: the Sucre – Sistema Unificado de Compensación y Regulación Económica (Unique System for Regional Compensation). Analogous to the U.S.\$ within the Bretton Woods system of international relations, the Sucre is a “regional unit of account” [Unidad de Cuenta Común Regional] between trading nations (a virtual currency), eventually intended to be coined as the ALBA common currency. As a unit of account which addresses trade imbalances within the (socio-political) parameters of regional endogenous development, the value of the Sucre, for any particular country, reflects the relative economic development and particular social needs of member nation states. Trade imbalances between member countries necessarily produce debtor countries (imports exceed exports), who owe money to creditors (exports exceed imports). And trade, like exchange, is a relation of (social) interdependence between consumers/buyers (demand) and producers/ sellers (supply): each party to the relation of exchange needs the goods or income supplied by the other. Any imbalance of supply and demand implies adjustment on both sides. As we have seen, such a lack of reciprocity has been an ever more intractable problem for the post-2nd World War system of trade regulations, the Bretton Woods system, in which, only the debtor countries have had to make economic adjustments to rectify trade imbalances (leading to the imposition of the “Washington Consensus” in, and the impoverishment of, debtor countries in the latter quarter of the 20th century, as noted above). Regional endogenous development demands that money, as a unit of account in trade, has to be recycled from creditor to debtor countries – not as loans or investment, but, as in the conception of the Sucre, as a reconfiguration of the producer-consumer economic relation of international exchange, as specified by the national currency/Sucre exchange rate. That is, the Sucre conforms to a political, rather than a market driven economic agenda. The first transaction with the Sucre as intermediary was on February 5th 2010, when Cuba bought 360 tons of rice worth 108,000 Sucres from Venezuela,

Epilogue

“It is imperative to make common cause with the oppressed, in order to secure a new system opposed to the ambitions and governing habits of the oppressors.” Martí 1891: 116, emphasis added.

In December 1994, when, in Havana, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez met for the first time, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and Caribbean was conceived to counter the inexorable “invitation from powers in the United States to extend their control over the Americas”.

“Latin America has suffered constant aggressions executed by Washington during the past two hundred years. Strategies and tactics of covert and overt warfare have been applied against different nations in the region, ranging from coup d’etats, assassinations, disappearances, torture, brutal dictatorships, atrocities, political persecution, economic sabotage, psychological operations, media warfare, biological warfare, subversion, counterinsurgency, paramilitary infiltration, diplomatic terrorism, blockades, electoral intervention to military invasions. Regardless of who’s in the White House democrat or republican when

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it comes to Latin America, the Empire's policies remain the same." Golinger 2010.

To counter such an "invitation", ALBA, the governing principle of which "...is the widest possible solidarity between the peoples, untrammelled by nationalisms or individuals' egos, nor national politics which restricts and negates the objective of constructing the Latin American nation." (Alterinfos América Latina 2007, author's translation). constitutes a process of regional, endogenous, development, eschewing the "governing habits of the oppressors" which Martí railed against. Human potentials are socially defined, and to effect progress, governance must "...open its arms to all and move ahead with all ... It is the time of mobilization, of marching together..." (Martí J. 1891: 117 and 112, emphasis added). Relentless economic exploitation and cultural exclusion, politically perpetrated by the Other America, has materially impoverished, socially disadvantaged, individually frustrated and spiritually disillusioned the peoples of Our America. The political emphasis of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America inevitably constrains the freedom of capitalist enterprise to exploit and profit from international, market led, exogenous development. And the ALBA initiative, providing Our America, through the Sucre system of international payments with an alternative to the competitive globalization of the Other America, is such a threat to the regional, political, status quo.

"There is no way of overestimating the challenge that the emergence of ALBA and the overall reawakening of Latin American pose to the role that the U.S. arrogates to itself as Lord of the entire Western Hemisphere." Rozoff 2009.

And to this end, the 2011 United States State Department budget includes "...\$48 million ... to deploy special 'democracy promoter' teams to countries where democracy is under threat from the growing presence of alternative concepts such as 'participatory democracy' promoted by Venezuela and Bolivia"..." (Golinger 2010). The spectre is one of deepening regional conflict as citizens struggle to liberate "Our" America from economic destitution, moral poverty and cultural decay. Regional endogenous development is an aspect of the revolution of the human mind "...making the individual feel more complete, with more inner wealth and much more responsibility ... The revolution is made through human beings ... [who must] forge their revolutionary spirit day by day." (Guevara 1965: 225 and 227, emphasis added). This is that task of revolutionary politics.

"We all have our convictions ... [and we] can all influence each other. In the long run we shall all reach similar conclusions. My deepest convictions [are]: the incredible and unprecedented globalization ... is a product of historical evolution ... Is it a reversible process? ... No ... is it sustainable? No. Will it subsist for long? Absolutely not ... Will it last decades? Yes, only decades ... How will such a transition take place? We do not know ... Will it be through deep and catastrophic crises? Unfortunately, this is most likely, almost inevitable and it will happen through many different ways and forms of struggle ... Who will be the builders of the new world? The men and women that inhabit our planet. What will be their basic weapon? Ideas will be, and consciousness. Who will sow them, cultivate them and make them invincible? You will. Is it a utopia, just one more dream among so many others? ... As the most visionary of the sons and daughters of this island [José Martí] said: 'Today's dreams are tomorrow's realities.'"

Castro 1999: 63.

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