

'In Panama, founding fathers are winning'

Following are excerpts from the speech delivered by Mexico's President José López Portillo at the Oct. 1 celebration of the restoration of Panamanian sovereignty over the Panama Canal.

Mr. President of the Panamanian Republic; Mr. Vice-President, representing the President of the United States; Presidents and representatives of brother nations and observers; friends and Panamanians:

I speak in the name of all the heads of state of Latin America. ... Today this canal, the privilege and the pain of this isthmus, begins to belong only to Panama as it rightfully must. We commit ourselves fully to securing the triumph of this cause....

This celebration takes place among Americans, among inhabitants of what was once known as the New World and which came to call itself the Continent of Hope.

Since its origin, (the canal) has reflected the division of the old dominions ... now between North and South. One part has prospered on earth. ... For the south, for us, members of "Magna Patria," survival and progress under the colossus has not been simple. Those of us who were able to eradicate feudalism still suffer the consequences of a delayed, rickety and dependent industrialization. Those of us who have reached certain stages of modernization are still far from overcoming marginalization and are still beset by inflation, the energy crisis, unemployment and our chronic foreign trade deficits....

We joyously celebrate the end of the humiliating injustice that split Mesoamerica and that the legitimate flag, the Panamanian flag, now flies over the canal.

We are realists. We know that politics, when faced with the desirable, is frequently the art of the possible; and we know that there are still many years and requirements ahead. ... Full autonomy over the canal has not yet been granted; but it is a step in the right direction. A military enclave still exists, the result of a unilateral interpretation of a biased and therefore partial neutrality. But it was what was possible, what was reasonable; that is why we recognize it.

The spirit of our Founding Fathers

What is important now is that the Americans of the north and of the south must use this first step to forge a new continental spirit.

This spirit will be good, if the North Americans turn the genius of their Founding Fathers into a categorical

imperative. For example, George Washington, who said: "Make a pact of respect and justice with all the nations of the world. Cultivate peace and harmony with them all... Nothing is more important than avoiding permanent deeply rooted antipathies with other nations." And Lincoln, who said: "No man is good enough to rule over another without his consent"; and Juarez, that "men are ennobled by the recognition of their own errors, and among individuals, as among nations, respect for the rights of others is peace." This includes peace of one's conscience which cannot rest if "peace" is imposed by force....

We will not be the objects of neocolonialism, nor the arena of foreign hegemonies; no one will do for us what we do not do for ourselves; no one can claim for themselves the right to "guard" our sovereignty. No one but ourselves, and ourselves alone.

Let's understand once and for all that, disunited, we shrink the economic and political expression, the culture and creative capacity, of our continent. Either we unite and order ourselves, or order will arrive by the tortuous routes of economic and/or political hegemony, by groups with armed and financial power under slogans which do not belong to our heritage. The end of injustice and underdevelopment cannot be put off any longer, at the risk of seeing our continent in flames.

It would do little good to fight foreign intervention and pressures if, in our own nations, disunity, repression, poverty and inequality increase. To go forward necessarily implies overcoming our own contradictions, in order to become what each one of us is and what together we can be.

Nicaragua: the archetype overthrown

We have recently lived through an important experience, also characteristic of our time: the revolution of popular power in Nicaragua. More than the fall of a political regime, it was the overthrow of an archetype of exploitation, authoritarianism and dependence.

A sad caricature of Latin America which has circulated for decades throughout the world was buried in Nicaragua. In Panama, the wretchedness of colonialism and the abuse of force are being buried....

In Nicaragua, in Panama, in America, our Founding Fathers and our sons are winning.

The new legions of youth of all America, from north to south, today demand coherence and plans and action from us. We can respond to them; we must comply; we will not deny their needs, we will not shrink from their demands, we will not wipe out their hopes, we will not defraud them, but will earn their respect, respecting them and ourselves; we will guide into mature channels their noble and infinitely vital energy for change; we will all be the craftsmen of our common destiny.

Viva Panama!

Viva the youth of America!

Viva America!