
Speech to UN in 1982

We Must Stop 'A New Medieval Dark Age'

On Oct. 1, 1982, José López Portillo addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York, where he issued a clarion call for a New World Economic Order. The following are brief excerpts from that historic speech.

...The most constant concern and activity of Mexico in the international arena, is the transition to a New Economic Order. . . .

We developing countries do not want to be subjugated. We cannot paralyze our economies or plunge our peoples into greater misery in order to pay a debt on which servicing tripled without our participation or responsibility, and with terms that are imposed upon us. We countries of the South are about to run out of playing chips, and were we not able to stay in the game, it would end in defeat for everyone.

I want to be emphatic: We countries of the South have not sinned against the world economy. Our efforts to grow, in order to conquer hunger, disease, ignorance, and dependency, have not caused the international crisis. . . .

After major corrective efforts in economic affairs, my

government decided to attack the evil at its root, and to extirpate it once and for all. There was obviously an inconsistency between internal development policies, and an erratic and restrictive international financial structure.

A reasonable growth policy was irreconcilable with freedom to speculate in foreign exchange. That is why we established exchange controls.

Given our 3,000 kilometer border with the United States, exchange controls can only function through a banking system that follows the policies of its country and government, and not its own speculative interests or the fluctuations of international financial chaos. That is why we nationalized the banks.

We have been a living example of what occurs when an enormous, volatile, and speculative mass of capital goes all over the world in search of high interest rates, tax havens, and supposed political and exchange stability. It decapitalizes entire countries and leaves destruction in its wake. The world should be able to control this; it is inconceivable that we cannot find a formula that, without limiting necessary movements and flows, would permit regulation of a phenomenon that damages everyone. It is imperative that the New International Economic Order establish a link between refinancing the development of countries that suffer capital flight, and the capital that has fled. At least they should get the crumbs from their own bread. . . .

The reduction of available credit for developing countries has serious implications, not only for the countries themselves, but also for production and employment in the industrial countries. Let us not continue in this vicious circle:

it could be the beginning of a new medieval Dark Age, without the possibility of a Renaissance. . . .

We cannot fail. There is cause to be alarmist. Not only the heritage of civilization is at stake, but also the very survival of our children, of future generations and of the human species.

Let us make what is reasonable possible. Let us recall the tragic conditions in which we created this Organization, and the hopes that were placed in it. The place is here, and the time is now.