

Argentina's Alfonsín sidles toward Moscow

by Benjamín Castro

Shortly before leaving for Moscow on Oct. 11, Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín, the loyal executor of the infamous "Austral" austerity plan imposed on his country by the international banks and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), took advantage of the 76th interparliamentary meeting to spell out the scandalous purpose of his visit to the U.S.S.R.

Alfonsín dolefully declared that, though the Ibero-American countries had made "an enormous effort to put their economies in order, improving efficiency and increasing exports," those efforts—the application of IMF austerity programs—"crashed into discrimination and growing protectionism by our creditors."

After that speech, Alfonsín arrived in Spain to propose that Spain be the "mediator" between Ibero-America and Europe. According to Alfonsín, Spain could explain to the European countries why they must reduce their protectionist screens against Ibero-American products, "especially in agriculture."

Spain 'mediates'

Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González, who is the favorite Western head of government of both David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission and Mikhail Gorbachov, seemed quite happy to act as mediator with the Soviet Union. According to the report in the Buenos Aires daily *El Clarín* of Oct. 13, a member of the Alfonsín delegation revealed that during a gala four-hour dinner, González gave Alfonsín "a briefing on the new Soviet process, its meaning and its direction." González explained to Alfonsín that "their new economic program is not just a five-year plan," but is premised on "a reduction in what the U.S.S.R. spends on the arms race."

Alfonsín ended up convinced—if he was not already—of Gorbachov's virtues. In Moscow, he not only parroted the Soviet leader in his criticism of President Reagan for defending the Strategic Defense Initiative, but he also offered the Soviets a free hand with Argentina's natural resource wealth. In addition to the scandalous fishing agreement Alfonsín gave the Russians and Bulgarians at the beginning of October (they get to keep 70% of the fish they catch in Argentine waters, while the prostrate Argentine fishing industry is prohibited by government decree from building up any independent

fleet), Alfonsín this time offered them opportunities for mining coal and building coal-exporting ports and hydroelectric projects in the South Atlantic zone, which he proposes to "denuclearize."

In exchange, Alfonsín only asked one thing: that the Soviets buy the 4.5 million tons of grain they were committed to buy this year, or its equivalent in meat and wheat. The Soviets have only bought 800,000 tons, so far.

Brazil is not far behind Argentina in giving its resources to the Soviets. At the beginning of September, when the *Washington Post* studied the strategic raw materials which Brazil possesses, it was surprised to find that several of them, such as manganese and bauxite, were being exploited with Soviet "collaboration."

Mexican Trade Minister Hector Hernández set his appointment in Moscow for the second week of October with Soviet Trade Minister Victor Ivanov. Guess what they planned to discuss—Mexican exports of petroleum, steel, and agricultural products.

Venezuelan ex-President Carlos Andres Pérez parlayed the discontent caused by a new U.S. 11.7¢ per barrel tax on imported oil into an Oct. 15 call for "concerted action" by the Latin American countries against "every kind of protectionism." Pérez then took off for a meeting with his Socialist International brethren in Europe. The "anti-protectionist" movement proposed by Carlos Andres Pérez "for the unity of Latin America" is concocted as a way of side-tracking the movement for Ibero-American integration from its fight against the IMF, into a struggle against a straw-man.

These agents, exploiting the anger caused by Washington's callous response to years of pleas for debt relief and a return to development, seek to "decouple" Ibero-America from the United States. They would commit its strategic resources to the Soviet Union, while using revenues from such sales to pay their foreign debts.

The main obstacle to Moscow and its Western cronies is Peru's President Alan García, the partisan of Ibero-American integration against the IMF and full-fledged industrialization of the continent. Spanish leader Felipe González clearly took the side of the Soviets and their banker friends, in statements published in the Venezuelan daily *El Nacional*, Oct. 3, where he provided a twisted characterization of García's debt policies and attacked him for being too rough on creditors: "I have a lot of sympathy for Alan García. It seems he has done very important things, but it seems to me it is no good to get into verbal escalation which sometimes has undesirable internal and external effects. I believe that the debt problem has two dimensions: one technical and the other political. The country which frankly lays out the reality of its situation, will get a positive response from creditors, sooner or later. When it is said in a speech that the debt is unbearable or that there is no solution except for moratorium and not paying, the creditor can respond: 'If you don't pay me, don't ask for more money.'"