

Ibero-Americans Reach Back into History To Combat the Empire

by Cynthia R. Rush

Aug. 4—In battling the British Empire’s attempt to wipe her nation off the face of the map, Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has brought Ibero-America’s history into the fight, as have other leaders who recognize that what is at stake in the current offensive against Argentina is the right to sovereign economic development and defense of their population’s welfare—free from the demands of usurious creditors and the austerity conditionalities of multilateral lending agencies.

One case in point was the speech by Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elías Jaua at the emergency July 3 foreign ministers’ meeting at the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, in which he referenced Argentine Foreign Minister Luis Marí Drago’s 1903 challenge to then-U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt, for violating the Monroe Doctrine when he allowed German, British, and Italian gunboats into the Americas to collect Venezuela’s debt.

In 1903, it was European gunboats off Venezuela’s shores, Jaua said; in 2014, it’s the vultures assaulting Argentina. There is no difference between them.

Fernández, in her July 29 remarks in Caracas, at the plenary session of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), quoted below, pointedly referenced the 1865-70 Triple Alliance War against the industrialized nation of Paraguay—better called the Triple Infamy War, she said—orchestrated by the British Empire to annihilate a unique American System project in the heart of South America.

Begun under the government of Dr. Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1813-40), followed by Carlos Antonio López (1840-59) and his son, Francisco Solano López (1859-70), Paraguay achieved unparalleled levels of economic independence and technological advance on the South American continent. With iron foundries,

railroads, an aggressive program of infrastructure building, an advanced educational system, and a refusal to indebt itself to foreign usurers, Paraguay sowed panic in London, which justified its genocidal war as necessary to remove a “tyrant,” and “open up” the nation to the world through free trade.

‘What We Can Be’

Marshal Solano López, to whom Fernández paid homage, waged heroic resistance against daunting odds. When Paraguay was finally defeated in 1870, out of a total population of 450,000, the imperialist alliance of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay succeeded in killing 100,000 men in combat, three-quarters of the male population, and another 120,000 who died from wounds, starvation, or cholera. Despite the lack of resources, the population resisted until the last man, and in many cases, the last child. The nation’s devastation was total.

Speaking at the José Antonio Sucre room in the Presidential Palace, which contains portraits of South America’s founders and heroes, President Fernández welcomed Paraguay’s return to Mercosur, after a year’s suspension, and offered the following tribute to Paraguay’s present, and to its past as a symbol of industrial development and heroic resistance:

“As an Argentine, I wish to begin with the portrait of Marshal Francisco Solano López ... because he symbolizes the possibilities of what we can be and what we were able to be.

“Paraguay was the first nation in all of Latin America to have trains and iron foundries; it was the first in the 19th Cen-



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In the 19th Century, Paraguay achieved economic independence and development, which was smashed by the Triple Alliance War of 1865-70. President Francisco Solano López, who led the Paraguayan resistance to the imperial attack, was praised by President Fernández as a symbol of “what we can be and what we were able to be.”

tury to become an industrial nation. We all know the history—the Triple Infamy War, as we say today, the Triple Shame War, which annihilated that project of independence and national sovereignty; it represented a real example of our history, and it ended with human life being wiped out, because after all the men were massacred, the women and children were left fighting. That’s why the things that happen in the world today are not new—they are repeated with different protagonists and in different ways.

“But I do want to pay special homage to Paraguay’s return, to the presence of its President here in this place and I wish to do so not only from the standpoint of his Paraguay today, but also from the standpoint of Marshal Francisco Solano López’s historical Paraguay, and the self-criticism that those of us whose

countries formed the Triple Alliance should carry out. I always do it, which is why my country’s media so often criticizes me.”



Navy of Brazil

The siege of Solano López’s headquarters in Humaitá by the Brazilian Navy.