

Ibero-America Briefs

Mexico Calls for CELAC to Replace China in the U.S. Supply Chain

The Sept. 18 summit in Mexico City of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) benefitted from a speech delivered remotely by Chinese President Xi Jinping, which recalled earlier CELAC-China cooperation to achieve regional development. But the keynote address delivered by host Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) back-pedaled from that earlier approach and instead proposed that “together with the United States and Canada, we reach an agreement and sign a treaty to strengthen the internal market in our hemisphere, which is currently in the red in relation to Europe and, especially, with regard to Asia.”

López Obrador argued that the Americas are a bigger consumer market than Asia, and can also replace those nations in the U.S.’s supply chain: “Let’s bear in mind that the Western Hemisphere has only 24% of the population of Asia. Nevertheless, we consume 20% more than that continent; that is, per-capita consumption in the Americas is \$23,347 a year, while in Asia it is \$4,716.... The proposal is simple. It is a matter of reactivating the economy of our hemisphere in order to produce what we consume in the Americas.”

Although as the host he had invited Xi to speak, López Obrador made no mention of China in his speech. Rather, his speech was a pitch “to build in the Western Hemisphere something similar to what was the economic community that gave rise to the current Euro-

pean Union”—which has proven to be an utter failure.

Mexico Says Belt and Road Initiative Is Off the Table

Mexico’s Ambassador to China, Jesús Seade, told *El Financiero* on Sept. 13 that the China-initiated Belt and Road Initiative “has yet to demonstrate that it is something which is necessary, and at this time it is not perceived as the step to take.” While he spoke of Mexico’s interest in increasing trade with China, and attracting Chinese investment into such money-makers as the tourist and hotel “industry,” Seade officially took Mexico’s joining the BRI off the agenda.

The announcement was clearly demanded by Washington, which has also been openly organizing a regime-change destabilization against AMLO this entire year.

Citibank has emerged as a key player in this operation. On Sept. 12, Manuel Romo, head of the Mexican branch of Citigroup, revealed to *El Economista* that his Citibanamex is “coordinating” meetings between Mexican officials and directors of the first 25 U.S. companies which Citibanamex believes should move from China to Mexico. More will follow, he promised.

Argentine President Calls Climate Change the ‘New Paradigm of Development’

Argentine President Alberto Fernández has apparently fallen for the gambit that by joining the “global cli-

mate crisis” bandwagon leading into the November COP26 summit, Argentina might receive debt relief. On Sept. 8 he hosted a virtual “High-Level Dialogue on Climate Action in the Americas,” attended by several Ibero-American and Caribbean heads of state, U.S. climate czar John Kerry; UN Secretary General António Guterres; the British president of COP26, Alok Sharma; and representatives of the private sector, academia, banking, etc. The purpose was to adopt a common regional policy heading into COP26.

Earlier this year, Fernández had announced that Argentina would join China’s Belt and Road Initiative to spur great development projects; now he said he has decided “to place climate and environmental action at the center, and as a priority of my government.” He even called “environmental social justice the new name of development for the region.”

Fernández is seeking the support of the Biden White House for Argentina’s request for a new IMF standby loan, and has discussed the idea of exchanging “climate action” for debt relief with Kerry and IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva.

Here, listening to “the cries of our Earth and our people,” he announced that he will elaborate a national climate-change adaptation plan and promote the transition to renewable energies. He also appears to have heard the cries of the IMF’s Special Drawing Rights, and proposed they be applied as “a great environmental solidarity pact” for low- and middle-income countries, to “reduce climate shock and financial shock,” and to help extend debt repayment terms and lower interest rates.

Blinken to Central America and Mexico: ‘Let Them Eat Democracy’

U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken and USAID Administrator Samantha Power met at the UN on Sept. 23 with high-level officials from Mexico, Panama, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize, to discuss priorities for that region. Migration was top on the agenda.

Economic transformation so that people no longer flee starvation, poverty, and lack of jobs, health care, education or protection from drug gangs? Not as long as the Blinken/Power duo has anything to do with policy. Blinken told the meeting that “the United States prioritizes the fight against corruption and impunity,” and “encouraged leaders to fortify democratic institutions and the rule of law,” because that, he claims, “will open more doors to foreign investment and generate more economic opportunities.” In case anyone missed that regime-change threat, Blinken and Power pressured Nicaragua’s neighbors to support U.S. regime-change operations against that government.

Biden Administration Threatens El Salvador with Its ‘Venezuela’ Treatment

U.S. Chargé d’Affaires in El Salvador, Jean Manes, went on the Salvadoran *Frente a Frente* TV program on Sept. 22 to compare President Nayib Bukele’s government to the “dictatorships” of Venezuela and Nicaragua—two countries being economically strangled by U.S. sanctions in the name of “defending democracy.”

Manes droned on about the consensus in Washington among both Republicans and Democrats that democracy is on the “decline” in El Salvador,

before dramatically reading a list of actions she claimed came from the “playbook of dictators.” She then asked: “What country am I speaking about? Nicaragua? Venezuela? Here?” Salvadorans should answer, she ordered. That, she said, justified the Sept. 20 announcement that the State Department had added all five members of El Salvador’s Constitutional Court to the so-called “Engel’s List” of Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Hondurans denied entry into the U.S. as accused “perpetrators” of corrupt or anti-democratic acts. (Guatemala’s Attorney General and Secretary of the Public Ministry were also added.)

The discussion in Washington of cutting aid and loans to El Salvador, combined with unease at home over the consequences of Bukele’s adoption of the speculators’ volatile Bitcoin as legal tender in El Salvador, has only made his government more vulnerable. On El Salvador’s Independence Day, Sept. 15, the opposition was able for the first time to pull off fairly large demonstrations against “Bukele the dictator.”

Bukele, still the most popular president in Central America, has a sense of humor, however. He responded by naming himself on Twitter “the coolest dictator in the whole wide world.”

The Bannon Factor in Bolsonaro’s Attempt To Build a Fascist Movement

Brazil’s President, Jair Bolsonaro, faces institutional and popular opposition which not only threatens his chances for re-election in the 2022 presidential elections, but could also lead to his possible impeachment before his term ends. His Sept. 7 Independence Day gambit of organizing his supporters to come out in a show of force on his behalf across the country, brought out tens of thousands, but far less than he has previously been able to mobilize. The next day, he was

forced to back down from his demagogic rants before two of those rallies that he would close down the Supreme Court.

But while not every Bolsonaro supporter is a fascist, the dynamics of the social formation built up around his figure are moving in that direction. Bolsonaro exhorts his supporters to be prepared to take action into their own hands, famously instructing a rally in August: “Everybody has to buy a rifle, damn it! Armed people will never be enslaved.”

The role of British asset and provocateur Steve Bannon should be investigated. Bannon coordinates closely with Bolsonaro’s son and political advisor, Eduardo, and has lined up gullible Trump networks behind Bolsonaro. With Eduardo at his side, Bannon told a U.S. rally in August, that the 2022 presidential election in Brazil is “the second most important in the world.” The American Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) held a conference in Brazil on Sept. 3-4, on the theme “Freedom is not gained, it is conquered,” to which Don Trump, Jr. sent a video charging that *China* is planning to steal the 2022 elections in Brazil.

Cuba Accelerates Vaccination Campaign Against COVID-19

Cuban officials announced on August 31 that by the end of September, the government will have vaccinated all Cubans eligible for immunization, including children aged two and up, with at least one dose of Cuban-developed anti-COVID vaccines. The Health Ministry’s Director of Science and Innovation, Dr. Ileana Morales Suárez, said the goal would be a challenge, but one which Cuba can meet, because it has enough vaccination centers and trained personnel to vaccinate more than five million people in a month.