

Rick Arnold's Summit Journal

December 14, 2006

Reflections on the two Summits held in Cochabamba, Bolivia

The Social Summit for Peoples Integration was held conterminously with the II Summit of the South American Community of Nations during the first week in December, 2006. You will notice that I avoided using the word 'parallel' in relating the two Summits held in Cochabamba as the Morales Government has insisted on this given that a special effort was being made by the organizers of this Presidential Summit to include significant input from indigenous communities and popular sectors from throughout this hemisphere. The question remains to what extent the distance that traditionally existed between 'pueblo' and 'government' shrank this time around, if at all?

Some positive sign posts: Out on the streets of Cochabamba the panorama was markedly different from the scenes that Canadians witnessed at the Summit of the Americas held in Quebec City in 2001, and oft repeated at other heads-of-state gatherings where a 'free trade' agenda was being promoted. While some lightly armed police were in evidence close to the meeting area for the South American Presidents and the traffic was re-routed in the immediate vicinity, there were no chain-mail fences erected and no clashes took place between security forces and demonstrators opposing the official Summit.

Top level government officials from most of the South American nations in attendance did heed the call from the host country's President to participate in the thematic discussions and debates being held at the American Institute campus, the site of the Social Summit. Government representatives participated as panelists in at least half of the 13 thematic areas being focused on, and other government officials in their tell-tale dark suits were seen in the audience during several of the events.

Members of the Hemispheric Social Alliance along with the Bolivian organizers for the Social Summit were accorded the opportunity to meet with Ministers and Vice-ministers (representing the 12 South American governments) who had gathered in Santiago, Chile on November 22nd and 23rd to work on drafting the final Declaration for the Presidents' Summit in Bolivia. The document **Civil Society Organizations on the Road to the Construction of the South American Community of Nations** ([click here to read the English text](#)) was presented to these government officials in Santiago (which we subsequently heard caused a bit of a stir in some official quarters).

Ministers from the South American nations assembled at the II Summit in Cochabamba also received a small delegation from the Social Summit, and they presented a summary of the main conclusions coming out of the 'thematic areas' discussions held at the Social Summit. During the all-Presidents meeting on the morning of December 9th, Hugo Chavez made a point of reading from the Social Summit's Final Declaration document. It should also be noted that in marked contrast to many of the heads-of-state gatherings in the recent past, the thrust and cut of the deliberations among the Presidents was televised live.

Though a rumoured appearance of Evo Morales during an evening session of the Social Summit in the Coliseum did not materialize, his government's Ministers were very much in evidence rubbing shoulders with the social movement activists. Casimira Rodriguez, Bolivia's Minister of Justice met for two hours one morning with the Canadian CF-United Church delegates. A majority of Bolivia's new Constituent Assembly were also present

throughout the days of the Social Summit. On Friday afternoon, December 8th as the conclusions from the thematic work areas were being read out, the packed Coliseum received a surprise visit from Ecuadorian President-elect Rafael Correa to a thunderous ovation.

Evo invited indigenous communities and popular movements to a final mass rally in the stadium to which an estimated 35,000 people turned up. He also issued an open invitation to the Presidents to attend. Besides Evo, Chavez, and the Vice-President of Argentina (Kirchner did not go to this Summit), and Daniel Ortega all said a few words to the assembled multitudes, as did several popular sector leaders such as Blanca Chancoso from Ecuador.

The correlation of forces in South America continues to shift left: Rafael Correa's clear electoral victory in the second round of Ecuador's elections occurred just days prior to the II Summit of the South American Community of Nations, and it will undoubtedly strengthen the anti neo-liberal forces within the burgeoning 'pink tide' tent. However, being still in the position of President-elect, Correa had to leave much of the II Summit-speak to Evo and Chavez. Over the past year in particular, the electorate throughout much of Latin America has delivered a series of votes for new leadership - to stand up to the US, to focus on social priorities, and to have the state re-establish a predominant role in determining the economic course for the nation (over and against the basic tenets of neo-liberalism).

In the II Summit of Presidents, the pragmatists slowed the pace of change: Lula, Bachelet, and Tabare lived up to their billing as the 'pragmatists' within the 'pink tide' tent as they effectively slowed down the pace of implementation re. the South American Community of Nations by not agreeing to operationalize full-fledged mechanisms such as that of a Permanent Secretariat (a pro-temporare will tick-over in Rio for 2007). Though the preamble to the Presidents' Declaration of Cochabamba is full of good intentions, and in that respect compares favourably to earlier documents produced when right-wing governments were in the ascendant, the 'pink' pragmatist plus Alan Garcia of Peru were still able to inject into the text references to the importance of investing in infrastructure etc. in order to compete successfully in the global economy. Some media pundits in Bolivia suggested that the stronger wording that was in the original draft of the Presidents' Cochabamba Declaration (that could be traced to social movement pronouncements) was omitted in the final version. However there remains in the Cochabamba Declaration a clear commitment on the part of the Presidents to improve mechanisms of interchange with 'civil society'.

Next meeting dates in the construction of the South American Community of Nations: The next regular meeting of the 12 South American to advance the discussions around the South American Community of Nations (CASA by acronym in Spanish) will take place in Cartagena, Colombia in December 2007 (Argentina apparently turned down the chance to host it in 2007). A curious choice to hold the next heads-of-state in Colombia since Uribe and his Vice-President boycotted this Cochabamba gathering (?). There was general agreement re. an urgency to move on the 'energy' file, so Venezuela will be the location for an extra-ordinary meeting of the 12 nations in February of 2007.

A last comment – the more things change, the more they remain the same(?): Raul Zibechi in an article appearing after the CASA meeting concluded entitled Integration's Bitter Hours, argues that the majority of the Presidents at the II Summit in Cochabamba supported the option of continuing along the large infrastructure projects (some 300) route, many with export markets in mind. This concept of 'development' held the day particularly as this was Brazil's position (the largest economy). Raul notes that at the end of November in a speech in the Amazon area of Brazil, Lula was reported to have said that the Indians, Quilombos (descendants of African slaves), environmentalists as well as his own

government's Ministry of Public Policy should stop acting as "blocks to development". Raul points out that the Presidents did not listen to the popular movements who have been putting forward a strong critique of this 'development' model, as well as criticizing the governments' definition of 'progress'. Though in general Chavez and Morales were also questioning these old assumptions, there is a renewed push coming from Venezuela to support the Gasoducto del Sur project which is a mega-project with potential mega-implications for indigenous communities, the environment, a new level of indebtedness for the region, and etc.

[\(Top of Page\)](#)

December 9, 2006

The Final Assembly

The final assembly of the Social Summit for People's Integration took place on December 8th in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Part way through hearing 14 report-backs from the Summit's earlier thematic area discussions, news broke that the recently elected President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa was coming to talk to the 3,000 people overflowing the coliseum. The crowd erupted in heated applause and there was a crush of photographers as Correa bounded in from a side entrance and on to the stage.

The symbolism of the moment was not lost on all assembled that President-elect Correa had come directly from the airport to be with the popular movements and indigenous nations first prior to going to the opening protocol act with the other South American Presidents. His first words to the majority indigenous crowd were in Quechua which brought an immediate and positive response from a very animated gathering. He made several promises which reflected his campaign promises in the recent Ecuadorian elections. Included among them were promises to not sign any 'free trade' agreement with the USA, and to get a new royalty deal with the big foreign oil companies. The existence of U.S. military base in Manta Ecuador is to be reviewed. He brought the house down when at the end of his few words he said "If I let you down, kick me out".

The Social Summit coincided with a Presidential Summit to set the underpinnings for a South American Community of Nations. There was a major breakthrough in what had been a previous pattern of keeping the Presidential deliberations as far away as possible from civil society. Besides the fact the entire discussions among the 10 Presidents were being televised live, government ministerial representatives took part in debates with civil society in at least seven of the thematic areas being focused on at the Social Summit.

Not that these debates weren't tinged with a little anger at times from some of the popular sector leadership who had been excluded by governments in national decision-making for such a long time. In the "infrastructure" theme area discussion that I attended there was a gulf between an official who when talking about impact of mega-projects on communities stated that they would always check with the communities to see how they were doing once the project was in operation. The comeback to that was a rather heated 'you have to get the community agreement before any sod is turned'. Likewise another official talked about the importance of building roads to link 'islands of population' to which the reply was do you think that no people live between these 'islands' or there is no ecosystem to take into account? A Bolivian official newly appointed by Evo Morales took a different tack

from most other officials when he stated that `we are public servants and our first obligation is to listen to you´.

The Social Summit had projected that there would be some 3,000 people in attendance, but in the end 4,400 registered. A final declaration was agreed to by all and sent immediately to the Summit of the Presidents. Part of this civil society document was read into the official proceedings by President Chavez of Venezuela. Around the question of water (as one example) the Social Summit demanded among other points: - That water be considered a human right and a cultural good belonging to all people - Exclude water from any commercial agreements - Map out all the fresh water reserves on the continent to guarantee their protection - Prohibit mining and oil extraction in water reservoir areas - Establish a regional dialogue among governments and social movements for the creation of a South American Convention on water.

People came to this Social Summit with mixed feelings running between hope and skepticism, and this won't have changed fundamentally as delegates prepare to head home. They have experienced broken promises and meddling from a powerful northern neighbour in the past, so will be on guard to see if promises are going to be fulfilled down the road. However, we have all taken note that at least half of the assembled South American Presidents are thinking very differently than before, thanks to the years and even centuries of resistance by indigenous nations and popular movements to foreign influences and to domination by local elites. Common to all Summit-goers was the determination to put meat on the bones of the oft-heard chant, "Another Americas is possible!"

[\(Top of Page\)](#)

December 8, 2006

Getting to know Cochabamba



It has been some 25 years since I was last in Cochabamba and the city has changed! It is easily three times the size than it was back then, and it now ranks as the fourth largest city in Bolivia. (*Click on the photo for more pictures from Bolivia.*) Cochabamba has opened its arms to some three thousand people from indigenous nations and popular movements in the Americas, including some 15 delegates from Canada - all here to participate in the Social Summit for Peoples´ Integration. Later on today the Presidents and government officials from 12 South

American nations are arriving to try and arrive at agreements on the fundamentals for a new South American Community of Nations.

Cochabamba was founded in 1574 and gets its name from the joining of the Quechua words `cocha` and `pampa` which together mean swampy plain. During the heyday of Potosi's silver boom in the seventeenth and eighteenth century the Cochabamba Valley developed into a primary source of food for that agriculturally unproductive area. Today the valley is still an important agricultural centre producing not only cereal crops such as maize and wheat, but also citrus fruits, as well as accounting for the bulk of Bolivia's dairy products.

As I walked around the central Plaza Colon last night, I felt at times as if I could have been in Victoria Park in Cobourg! Most of the trees were covered with Christmas lights and a live band was playing holiday music in the amphitheatre. Families were ambling about taking in the sights and sounds in what would seem to be an eternally peaceful city setting.

However Cochabamba is also well known as the place where the plague of privatizations of essential services such as water was stopped. In 2002, with the national government of Bolivia signing an agreement with a foreign transnational company to take over the water works in Cochabamba, the city dwellers awoke to find that suddenly the cost of having running water in your house was being set by the company and was more than many could afford. Despite these higher prices the service was deteriorating. The people of Cochabamba organized and rose up against this privatization of their water. Both the government in La Paz (the capital of Bolivia) and the new corporate `owner` said that it was a done deal that couldn't be reversed. But the townspeople persevered despite police and army persecution and proved that citizens can stop such unethical deals as the one signed with this foreign transnational.

The water supply in Cochabamba has reverted back to a locally controlled cooperative structure and new investments are being made in the system under the watchful eye of the municipality. Several other towns and cities in our hemisphere and around the world have taken heart from the Cochabamba example and successfully opposed the privatization of an essential staff of life.

It is into this storied city that the Social Summit and the Presidents' Summit come. There are liberal doses of both hope and skepticism regarding the outcome particularly of the Presidential discussions around the establishing of a Community of South American Nations. People have become accustomed to the great divide between governments and peoples when it comes to these types of Summits. Two members of the Ecuadorian official delegation who I was talking to yesterday expressed surprise when I told them that of course they were free to attend the Social Summit at any time. Same thing with a Reuters correspondent in town who was long used to reporting on Presidential meetings inside barriers and cordons of armed police squads that made it difficult to get back out to where the people meet.

The Bolivian government of Evo Morales has gone to great lengths to break down these barriers between governments and their peoples, both figuratively and literally. The presence of police is minimal and the long chain link fence barriers such as we saw for the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City are absent. Now it is up to the heads-of-state to walk-the-talk and hopefully usher in a new era for South America. We shall see soon enough.

[\(Top of Page\)](#)

December 7, 2006

Opening Ceremonies



Last night the opening ceremonies were held for the Social Summit for People's Integration in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The locale was the coliseum of the Instituto Americano and the place was packed and rocking. Most of those present were Quechua or Aymara from Bolivia and neighbouring countries. Bright indigenous clothing, all-colours-of-the-rainbow flags, smudge smoke from the purification ceremonies and chants in various native languages as well as in Spanish signaled that this would be an unforgettable evening for the Canadians present in the crowd. (Click on the photos to see more pictures from the event.)

Two Canadian Aboriginal leaders were asked to be on the main stage prepared to say a few words to the assembled masses. I felt honoured to be asked to translate for them when their time came. The controlled chaos of the dancing and chanting on the floor of the building was mirrored by musicians and other speakers milling about as the organizers struggled to keep up with an ever evolving order for the events. Rumours that a Bolivian Government Minister would likely show up to bring greeting from President Evo Morales proved to be true. Half way through the proceedings Casimira Rodriguez the Minister of Justice brought those greetings and addressed the crowds in native tongues.

Finally it was the turn of John Beaucage, Grand Council Chief for the Union of Ontario Indians to speak and he approached the microphones with Tarrance Whiteye by his side. John had me first explain in Spanish that whenever he spoke he would always begin with a few words in the Ojibway language, which is what he proceeded to do. It was the first time all night that the crowd quieted right down and then exploded into thunderous applause with no translation possible or needed.

John sent greetings from the 42 native reserves in Ontario that he represents to the Government of Bolivia, to Evo Morales the President, and especially to all the peoples and Nations in Bolivia. The reaction was immediate and deafening. He then spoke of the respect he had for the indigenous ceremonies that had opened the evening's proceedings, an important detail that had been missed by previous speakers. The elders in attendance instantly recognized this as signaling that though Canada and Bolivia may be thousands of kilometers apart, in the observance of native customs all distance was compressed.

John talked about Canada as a rich country where most of the native population was living in poverty. He talked about exploitation and the forces of assimilation in the North, and

again brought the house down when he said that even after 100 's of years of mistreatment, "Like you in Bolivia, we in Canada stand firm"! He closed with words in Ojibway and again had the rapt attention of the thousands in the coliseum. The applause once John had finished went on seemingly for ever.



Coming down off the stage both John and Tarrance were surrounded by people wanting to give them a warm embrace. Even I (in my role as translator) had never received so many hugs in such a short period of time. As we slowly made our way back to the spot where the other Canadians were seated, we got news that the Minister of Justice wanted to see all the Canadians the next morning early and was prepared to come to our hotel. Casimira Rodriguez did indeed show up at our hotel the next morning and took two hours out of a busy schedule to fill us in on the current state of affairs in Bolivia!

The Peoples Summit runs for another three days, and meanwhile the Presidents of the South American countries will be arriving on December 8 to discuss the conformation of a South American Community of Nations. More on the Social Summit happenings and on emerging opportunities for dialogue with high level government officials from the 12 South American governments in the next report.

[\(Top of Page\)](#)

December 3 , 2006

Enroute to Cochabamba

Today I am traveling down to Cochabamba, Bolivia to attend the Social Summit for Peoples' Integration. It is the day after Mr. Dion was chosen as the new leader for the Liberal Party, and two days after Prime Minister Harper made a lightning trip to Mexico to attend the controversial investiture of Felipe Calderon as the new President of Mexico. During that trip Mr. Harper also met with another ideological soul-mate, Alvaro Uribe who is the President of Colombia. Though several new Presidents have come to power in Latin America during 2006, most of them centre-left, it is noteworthy that Mr. Harper has made no effort to attend those investitures.

Until very recently most of the heads of state in Latin America had been bowing their heads and carrying out the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF and other international financial institutions have frequently claimed in the past that the only route to 'development' was to privatize state assets, and allow unfettered access for large corporations to a nations raw resources. All this to prepare the ground for the inevitable arrival of 'free trade' which was to stretch all the way from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska.

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was to be signed by all nations in the Americas (minus Cuba) in 2005, and it was supposed to be a defining moment in a process that both Washington and Ottawa had been pushing for several years. However mounting popular sector opposition in Latin America along with the election of several Presidents willing to stand up against the IMF-Washington economic formula, have recently derailed the FTAA.

The twelve Presidents of South America are gathering in Cochabamba December 8-9 for the second summit of the South American Community of Nations (SACN) which will focus on and promote South American integration. Fully half of the Presidents in attendance will be looking to ensure that the poorest sectors of their populations are the principle beneficiaries of any new trade and development arrangements.

CANADA IS IN DANGER OF MISSING OUT AS A TIDE OF CHANGE SWEEPS THROUGH SOUTH AMERICA

With the Harper government apparently content to try and shore up a few remaining ideological soul-mates south of the Rio Grande, Canada is at risk of being isolated from major changes in our hemisphere such as those being discussed by the 12 Presidents at the meeting in Bolivia. A few of the reasons that the emergence of the SACN needs to be taken seriously by other trading nations:

- The SACN countries have a combined population of 377 million inhabitants (some 75 million more than the United States)
- The SACN bloc of countries represent the fifth largest economic unit in the world
- The SACN is now globally the number one producer and exporter of food.
- The Amazon area bordered on by eight South American countries is acknowledged to be the 'lungs of the world'.
- 27 percent of the fresh water in the world is in this sub-continent.
- South America is home to 8 million square kilometers of forests.
- SACN nations have significant proven reserves of gas and oil, and the producer countries in South America are key actors with increasing clout on the international geopolitical scene

THE SOCIAL SUMMIT FOR PEOPLES' INTEGRATION

Part of the reason for networks like Common Frontiers to come to the December 6-9 Social Summit in Bolivia is the opportunity to discuss the question of 'integration' as seen from the perspective of people and organizations. There may also be opportunity to dialogue with governments interested in the opinion of 'civil society'. There will be a lot to be learned in the coming days as delegates from all over the Americas exchange ideas (and organizational e-mail addresses!). And that is part of what I hope to be able to write about in future reports from Cochabamba.