

BCA Dispatch

Newsletter of the **Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy** November 2005

Man's inclination to justice makes democracy possible; but man's capacity for injustice makes it necessary. —Reinhold Niebuhr

CHAPTER NEWS (Continued on Page 8)

Chapter Calendar

** World Social Forum, Caracas **

The Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy's next meeting will be on **Wednesday, November 16 at 7:00 p.m. at Cambridge Friends Meeting**, 5 Longfellow Park (9-minute walk from Harvard Square west on Brattle St.), Cambridge.

This year the **World Social Forum**, begun in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, will be in 3 locations at once: Karachi (Pakistan), Bamako (Mali), and **Caracas (Venezuela)**, Jan. 25-29. The giant Caracas summit will enable a Boston delegation to air its democratic solutions in our struggle with greed, mendacity, and violence.

Come to this meeting and bring your last-minute proposals. You may decide to join the delegation, and witness Venezuela and the Bolivarian revolution itself. **Sergio Reyes** will speak, and link you and your ideas to the delegation. See story p.7-8 in last month's *Dispatch*. Sergio says: "*The Boston Delegation Organizing Committee is in the process of consulting grassroots organizations for their ideas to bring to the Forum. The Boston proposal will have to do with building mechanisms of grassroots international cooperation to bring about social change here and abroad. Please check www.lfsc.org/wsf/ for more information or to be part of the consultation.*"

After this WSF discussion, we will show the last 1/3 of the video **Argentina: Hope In Hard Times**, interrupted at our last meeting.

— Refreshments —

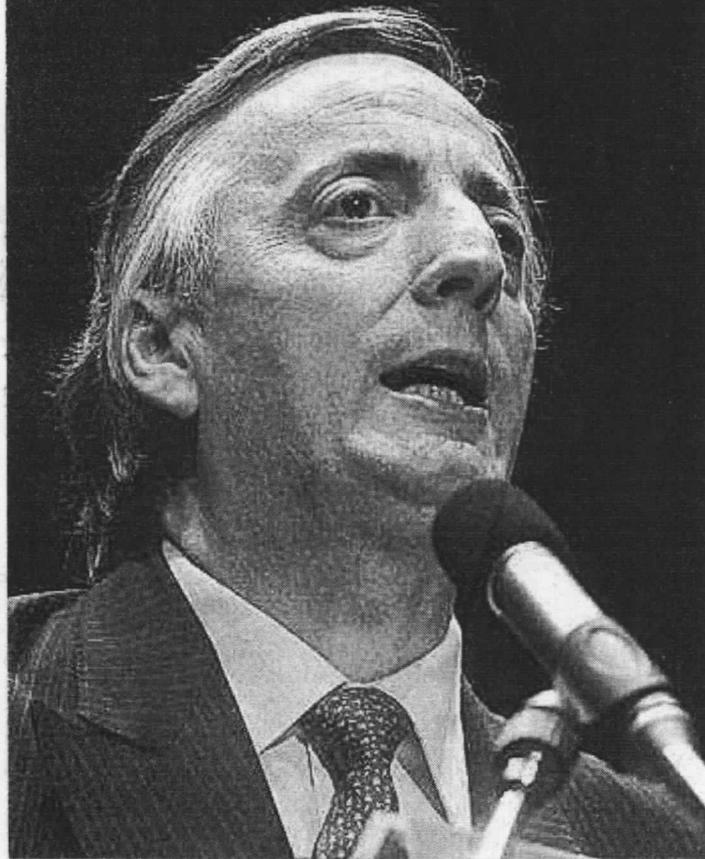
Chávez Rebukes Bush

50,000 Reject Militarization, Free Trade

by Jordana Timerman, *The Nation*, 6 November 2005

Some aspects of George Bush's travels have become commonplace, including massive protests, sporadic violence and tight security operations. All of these usual elements—notably the imperial-style arrival of the US president with an entourage of 2,000 people and four AWACS surveillance systems—were present at the Fourth Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

But the opposition to Bush and his proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), as well as neoconservative economic policies and capitalism in general, took on a creative twist this time, with a massive march that ended in a rally at a sports stadium involving a heterogeneous group of Latin American leaders: Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, Bolivian socialist leader Evo Morales, Argentine leaders (Continued on Page 2)



Argentina's President Néstor Kirchner

Néstor Kirchner's Argentina Rising from IMF Ashes: A Journey Explained

by Ivan Briscoe www.opendemocracy.net 25 May 2005

A contrast between two events on successive days in Buenos Aires' central Plaza de Mayo in March 2005 reveals that two years of President Néstor Kirchner's economic boom and therapeutic bad temper have not healed Argentina's social wounds.

At the first, on March 23, Juan Carlos Blumberg led a service at the city cathedral in honour of his son, Axel, killed a year earlier following a botched kidnapping for ransom, and since then the face of a vigorous campaign against the lawless underclass. A day later, a much larger and recognisably Argentine multitude — middle-aged couples wearing Combative Classist Current headgear, youngsters in scrappy t-shirts, bereaved mothers in white headscarves — gathered to remember the military coup of 24 March 1976 which propelled into power the country's most brutal dictatorship. (The painted slogan on a nearby wall neatly summed up the hours of strident haranguing from the rally's PA system: "They are the insecurity.")

Between the two gatherings stretches Argentina's ageless political divide — fearing the state versus distrusting the poor. It is a gulf materialised in the ever-advancing fences around private estates (countries) in the richer suburbs of Buenos Aires, but it is also one that the current president is proving miraculously (and perhaps momentarily) able to bridge.

Two years after being sworn into office on 25 May 2003, Kirchner stands high in the roll-call of Latin American left-wing leaders — Hugo Chávez, Luis Inácio Lula (Continued on Page 6)

Chavez Rebukes Bush (Continued from Page 1)

of the unemployed, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, singers from all over the continent, and, of course, Diego Maradona, legendary soccer hero.

A counter-meeting, the Summit of the People, began in the city on Monday, and concluded on Thursday with recommendations to summarily suspend FTAA talks, combat inequality in the region, and "energetically reject the militarization of the continent promoted by the empire of the north."

At the culminating event of the march against Bush, Chávez called the stadium in which over 25,000 demonstrators had gathered the "grave site of the FTAA."

He also proposed a Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (ALBA, a Spanish acronym meaning "dawn") to replace the controversial FTAA. Regional opponents of Bush's free trade agreement accuse it of fomenting inequality and placing poorer countries at the mercy of wealthier ones. The Bolivarian alternative proposes regional integration with the goal of fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Chávez's speech reflected the diplomatic problems encountered in the writing of the Summit of the Americas final text. Venezuela refused to agree to a note, inserted by US representatives, mentioning "the 96 million people who live in extreme poverty," in Latin America and the Caribbean unless there was also mention of the "37 million poor" living in the United States.

ALBA, according to Chávez "must be built from the bottom...It will not be built up from the elites, but from below, from our roots." He listed examples of ALBA in action, citing the sale of Venezuelan petroleum to fourteen Caribbean countries at a 40 percent discount and with an interest rate of one percent over twenty-five years, with the ability to pay off the debt with goods and services instead of cash.

"It was a turning point in Latin American history," claims Marcelo Langieri, academic secretary of the Sociology faculty at the University of Buenos Aires. Langieri, who was one of 160 cultural and political leaders invited to travel the 400 kilometers from Buenos Aires to Mar del Plata on a train dubbed the ALBA Express, emphasized what he considers a paradigm shift in the dialogue. "Not only was the FTAA questioned, but also the neoconservative economic model and capitalism," and by somebody in a position of power such as Chávez's.

Chávez revealed that he would be presenting an Alliance Against Hunger plan to the Summit leaders. He promised \$1 million from Venezuela for the project, which proposes eradicating starvation within the next decade.

Signs carried by the crowd included "Stop Bush" and "Pirate Bush, out of Mar del Plata." Crowd estimates varied, from 25,000 cited in the New York Times to 50,000 people cited by organizers.

The march and rally at the soccer stadium had an important celebrity factor attracting further attention to the cause. The ALBA Express, which included a special VIP car for Maradona, was cheered on by fans along the way to Mar del Plata, and stopped several times in the night to greet people gathered at stations.

Soccer legend Maradona attracted considerable attention to the march by announcing on his Monday night television show that he would be protesting Bush's arrival in Argentina. Maradona, who is not known for his political views, has a close relationship with Cuban president Fidel Castro, built during recent years when he spent time recovering from drug addiction in Cuba. In a press conference on Thursday Maradona referred to Bush as "human garbage." However, he did not actually march, going directly from

the train to the stadium.

"Argentina is worthy; Let's kick Bush out," was Maradona's message to the stadium protesters.

Langieri discards the idea of separating Maradona's star power from the anti-Bush cause. For Langieri the importance of the message is expressed by the fact that a national hero such as Maradona would promote it. "Maradona is not a politician. What Diego said is the truth."

Though the march to the stadium and the gathering there were peaceful, a separate demonstration by far-left groups ended in chaos and violence. Reaching the barrier area, a group that spread out over an avenue for over six blocks faced off against police forces. A segment of this group--about 200 people--were prepared for confrontation, masking themselves to avoid recognition and as protection from tear gas. Most of the demonstrators fled when police forces responded to rock-throwing with tear gas, but others turned on storefronts--setting a bank on fire and breaking windows.

The Summit of the Americas ended Saturday in a deadlock: Mexico, the United States and 27 other nations pushed to set an April deadline for more talks on free trade, but that was opposed by Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela. And in the end it is not clear what effect the opposition to Bush will have on regional cooperation. Will the promise of unity demonstrated by the Summit of the People and the peaceful marches lead to real alternatives to US foreign policy? Or is Bush merely the latest rallying point for anti-capitalism leading to riots and vandalism? Regardless, it seems to be that opposition toward Bush and his policies has created a powerful space, one which regional leaders, especially Chávez, are more than willing to take advantage of.

Jordana Timmerman is assistant for communication at the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth in Buenos Aires

Venezuela's "Bolivarian" Alternative to FTAA*

What ALBA Features:

- * socially-oriented trade
- * regional integration
- * endogenous development
- * boosts capabilities of weakest countries
(“Compensatory Fund for Structural Convergence”)
- * food self-sufficiency
- * democratized intellectual property rights
- * necessary price controls
- * access to public services
- * transnational privileges subordinated to local needs

Ed. Comment: Compare ALBA's features US's New Deal programs in Depression and in Wartime.

* Source: "ALBA: Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean"

by Teresa Arreaza, Venezuelanalysis.com, 30 Jan 2004

GOP Captures Public Broadcasting Can We Shun Propaganda, Hone Our Truth?

by Timothy Karr, CommonDreams.org, 31 October 2005

The new president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) has stacked the agency's offices with White House propagandists and GOP loyalists in a bold-faced effort to carry forward Kenneth Tomlinson's right-wing crusade against public broadcasting.

CPB President Patricia de Stacy Harrison—a former chairwoman of the Republican National Committee who was tapped by the CPB board in June—has hired senior officers from the State Department's "Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy" division, which oversees government efforts to "advance U.S. interests and security and to provide the moral basis for U.S. leadership in the world."

"Public diplomacy" is gov-speak for propaganda. The CPB was created to shield public broadcasting from political interference, not to be a megaphone for the White House. Harrison's latest hires prove that the Republican loyalists at the CPB haven't been deterred from their quest to turn America's treasured public broadcasting system into partisan echo chamber.

Three new CPB hires all previously served with Harrison at the State Department, where she served as assistant secretary for educational and cultural affairs and acting undersecretary for public diplomacy and public affairs. They followed close behind her when she joined the CPB:

* Tom Isgitt, now CPB's vice president for government affairs, was a driving force behind the campaign to place pro-American propaganda in Arabic media worldwide to win Arab support for the war on terror. Before joining the State Department, Isgitt was a manager for international public relations giant Burson-Marsteller; the firm has a history of placing key players in George W. Bush's presidential campaigns into top public relations jobs across the industry.

* Mike Levy, the new CPB vice president of communications, served as Harrison's chief of staff when she headed the RNC. At the State Department, Levy developed "pro-active media strategies" to increase support for U.S. counter-narcotics initiatives in more than 100 countries as part of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. He also previously worked as special assistant to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao and as press secretary to several GOP congressional campaigns.

* Helen Mobley, hired as CPB's senior director of corporate communications and planning, worked closely with Harrison to manage the State Department's efforts to bring Afghan women to America to showcase new freedoms after the downfall of the Taliban regime. Mobley also was deputy director of scheduling during George W. Bush's first presidential run and has been active in GOPUSA.com, Bobby Eberle's Texas-based campaign "to spread the conservative message throughout America." Eberle became known earlier this year for having hired J.D. Guckert—aka Jeff Gannon—as his White House correspondent...

The packing of CPB with individuals more comfortable with selling U.S. propaganda than with honest journalism sends a not-so-subtle signal to those working in public broadcasting that truth is out and spin is in.

Harrison got her own position at CPB through her political con-

nections to then-Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson, who also heads the Broadcasting Board of Governors—which oversees the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio and TV Marti and other government-run international broadcasting. Tomlinson's successor, current CPB Chairwoman Cheryl Halpern, is another big GOP fundraiser who spent seven years as a member of the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Tomlinson is currently being investigated for efforts to impose his political agenda at CPB by funding programming with a pro-government slant, secretly monitoring PBS and NPR for signs of "liberal advocacy journalism," as well as hiring unqualified political cronies like Harrison...

Timothy Karr is the campaign director of Free Press. He was the executive director of the MediaChannel and Media for Democracy.

Editorial Comment:

Corporatization is what is happening to every federal and semi-federal department and agency under the current GOP regime. The model is the monopolistic, private megacorporation, not tolerating the variety of independent, specialized, nonprofit and local corporations popping up that enhance Community America while reducing risk for their innovators and local financiers. The monolithic state is its glory—the hallmark of monarchy, communism and fascism—feeding vampire-like on the energies of employees, customers, and taxpayers as well as the limited bounty of the earth. Its enemy is diversity, balance of powers, and emergence of new power structures—especially decentralized, self-nourishing networks. USA-Inc. is "terrified" of these forces, and understandably calls them/us "terrorists" along with the Koran-thumping, suicide-bombing desperadoes (and Bible-thumping Timothy McVeighs) around the world.

We SHALL overcome USA-Inc. We shall, because the Enlightenment of Locke, Voltaire, Whitman, Gandhi, and Springsteen has seeped indirectly into the bones even of the barely schooled, who take to the computer at least as eagerly as to the glitzy motorcar. Like the rebound of post-Hitler Germany, the repeatedly anti-Bush results of opinion surveys in America—South as well as North, East as well as West—reveal that undercurrent.

What remains for us, who are already losing interest in ad-saturated TV and now hubris-loaded propaganda, is completing our turn ("voluton") toward our informed neighbors whose charms are personalized truth and wit, not canned, universalized entertainment. Yes, we must learn defensive jamming, but more importantly we must come to rely on the blogs in our heads and tongues—not mere "news" ("1000 points of light") but 1000 local "wikipedias" where dark, hot truth is distilled from chaotic sources of local experience and science.

Mediating this populist soft-blog network we may envision an All-Communities Webcast news service—"Democracy Now" multiplied by 1000. We may finance slick global reportage with donations enabled by that All-American complaint come real—Tax Refusal, for the portion that goes for war and propaganda.

We used to have rumor and opinion leaders. We still do, but with telephone and internet they are more inventive, ever more a match for the dinosaur of monopolistic, self-consuming, Corporate USA.

POPULAR GOVERNANCE IN NEW ENGLAND

Participatory Budgeting Coming? AfD Explores Models in Burlington VT

by Dave Lewit, Alliance for Democracy

Democracy is supposed to mean "the people rule". Today, *We the People* seem to be crippled in both legs. One leg is constrained by our winner-take-all electoral system where a fraction of the electorate sets all the rules, the agenda, and sometimes—as in Washington today—loots our political and financial heritage. The other leg is twisted by corporate leaders and their herd of managers and shareholders who dumb us down by controlling media and manipulating our elected officials, who override our Constitution (a compromised system to start with) with secretly constructed and secretly adjudicated trade treaties, and who corral our poorer youth into an imperial army to control world resources and create markets. It's called Globalization.

Localization is a reasonable answer to corporate globalization. Stimulate local self-reliance and regional integration. These are the aims of the newest program of AfD's Campaign on Corporate Globalization and Positive Alternatives—"Popular Governance in New England".

The second roundtable conference in this series was held in Burlington, Vermont, on September 24th, in the cozy conference room of the city's Center for Community and Neighborhoods. Under the watchful eyes of wide-angle and close-up video cameras, and tracked by AfD's Ruth Caplan and her laptop, 13 civic leaders from Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and DC examined citizen participation, particularly "participatory budgeting" in cities and towns of New England and Brazil—where PB has burgeoned and set examples for thousands of municipalities there and around the world.

We were to have exchanged views with Gianpaolo Baiocchi, a Brazilian sociologist now at UMass/Amherst, but Hurricane Rita threatened his in-laws in Houston and he went there instead, leaving AfD's Dave Lewit to pinch hit. The roundtable was led off by former city councilor and state representative Terry Bouricius and Burlington's director of economic & community development Michael Monte, both founders of Burlington's ward assemblies where citizens gather to recommend city budget priorities something like their Brazilian counterparts. Burlington's mayor Peter Clavelle and citizens Wanda Hines and Jules Fishelman brought first-hand observations. Dave followed with the example of Porto Alegre, in turn followed by Boston City Councilor Chuck Turner revealing the complex politics of his city's fragmented citizen participation. Last was Ned Perry—Concord, Massachusetts' veteran town moderator who explained how that town's finance committee and open Meeting has successfully functioned.

Lively discussion among all of us, and in groups of six, brought out insights such as

- In Porto Alegre and elsewhere in Brazil, support by the city administration is essential, and citizens participate heavily because their participant-elected Council of the Budget has real authority in carrying forward their wishes, and gets results for all. (We don't yet know the impact of the troubles of Brazil's President Lula.)
- Cities in Vermont are less autonomous than in Massachusetts, for example, having to obtain a charter change from their state legislature for major initiatives, and having their taxes collected by

the state. Participation in Burlington ward assemblies is light, in part because the city government has been very sustainability-minded for two decades. Pro's, con's, and circumventing of charter limitations were discussed. Getting the power of "home rule" would be one step toward municipalities being able to ban corporations from engaging in certain activities, e.g., banning corporate factory farms as has been done in Pennsylvania, and even banning corporate personhood.

- In Boston, after tax-capping in 1981 made upscale property growth the main source of city revenue increase, corporations managed to cop 100 tax privileges, forcing gentrification at the expense of minority, immigrant, unemployed, elderly, and other low-income citizens. With budget hearings limited to late stages of the mayor-controlled budgeting process, citizens are active mainly with federal Community Development block grants. But active councilors like Chuck are opening up citizen participation in demanding and controlling a share of revenues from the rent of city-controlled land in their neighborhoods—formerly siphoned off by the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the development corporations.
- In Concord MA, a detailed "Warrant" and "Finance Committee Report" educate citizens about the draft budget prepared by citizens and town professionals, and large numbers turn out at the Annual Town Meeting for open discussion and voting on the town's many discretionary budget areas.

AfD's Campaign leaders will make a 30-minute DVD of highlights to be shown on cable TV and in organizing meetings all around the region, to promote citizen participation and control of their tax money and other resources. We look forward to an enlarged Spring roundtable on democratically-based economic models, and possibly a mini-Congress of Local Governments, including Canadians in both. By making cities and towns more responsible in their spending, citizens can reduce their dependency on absentee corporate boards and governments, and re-start democracy.

"Collaborate or Collapse" Message to New England Cities & Towns

by Neal Peirce, WashingtonPostWritersGroup, 17 April 2005

Call it, if you will, the American way: thousands of tiny little governments, each with its own council, each in command of its own tax collector, police and fire chiefs, emergency call center, road crews, park and library staffs—and more.

In a simpler age, amateur local government worked well enough. Neighbors helped neighbors, services were personal and often volunteer-manned, and the costs weren't high.

Even today, many people leave urban areas in search of small towns where they expect the old, informal culture—and low costs.

But the system has veered off the tracks, with escalating costs and rising frustrations. And what's the top culprit? Sprawl, says Angus King, Maine's immediate past governor. King's planning director, Evan Richert, found that when a small town in the path of suburbanization passes the 3,500-person mark, citizens start demanding a town manager, more police and professionalized services—and budgets start to soar.

Though they've added jobs since 1980, Maine's cities and regional centers have simultaneously lost residents to outlying towns within commuting reach. Smaller town populations—and duplicated government services—have risen fast. King's economic development director drew a 20-mile circle around Augusta and found 91 fire trucks serving 95,000 people. Not one of the monster trucks—priced from \$100,000 to \$500,000 and up—was jointly owned.

Hit by rising costs, the towns end up competing furiously for property taxes and development. And with suburban spread, Maine has spent close to \$750 million on new schools since 1980, even though the state's total student enrollment has actually declined.

"We pay due respect to local control but it comes at a high cost," says King. "We have 205,000 school kids in 186 school districts, each with its own superintendent, curriculum, purchasing office—about one superintendent for each 1,200 kids."

Result: the competing values of fiercely guarded home rule and Yankee love of frugal government are rubbing together like tectonic plates—in "full collision," says John Baldacci, Maine's present governor. A spirited tax revolt is under way and the state has started to impose caps on local spending—which it subsidizes through a major share of the state sales tax.

But Maine is now going a step further with a "regionalization" program of cash incentives for localities that agree to curb local tax rates through systems of shared services between towns or school districts.

Maine's current high government costs just can't be sustained, says Charles Colgan, an economist at the University of Southern Maine: "It's going to be collaborate or collapse."

Indeed, the test may be whether the small 18th-century town government form so popular in New England and other parts of the Northeast and Midwest, indeed reflected in smaller town and county governments nationwide, can survive at all without dramatic increases in joint service districts and shared tax bases.

But without state goading, it won't happen fast. State governments need to pierce the veil of each town or school district's bookkeeping and insist: "We need to know how state grants are being spent. Understandable and comparable numbers—real transparency—that's our price for continued support."

The good news is that standard accounting programs, rapid advances in digitized data processing and Internet dissemination make data comparison infinitely easier than it used to be. It makes political sense, as Colgan suggests, to give local governments a major role in devising details of the new transparency—different towns define services differently, and they'd know best how to harmonize systems.

But once that's done, we can expect a sea change in accessibility. Citizens, the media, governors and legislators will be able to make accurate comparisons of performance for individual towns and school districts and start pressing for radically increased collaboration and budget economies.

In Maine last week, I did discover that the twinned cities of Lewiston and Auburn, facing each other across the Androscoggin River, have hit on close collaboration as a way to rebuild economies devastated by the loss of textile and shoe factories.

Old downtown mill buildings are being handsomely restored, arts, culture and health care are playing a big role, and new industries have been coming (along with a massive Wal-Mart distribution center).

But what's most amazing is how the citizen leaders of these

historic rival cities hurry to tell visitors of their new civic government collaboration. Twenty-three intercity agreements have been negotiated, encompassing multiple "joints" -- the airport, economic growth council, 911 center, recycling, purchasing and more.

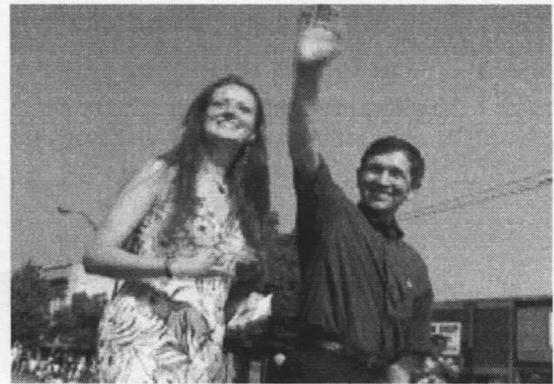
Now the cities are looking at merger of every other function, from police to public works. "Nothing's sacred, everything's being looked at," Auburn Mayor Normand Guay told me. And who will he be negotiating with? Lionel Guay, mayor of Lewiston—his brother!

From historically icy independence to a new fraternalism? If it can start in turf-protective New England towns, then why not everywhere?

See more at www.postwritersgroup.com/peirce.htm
Contact Neal Peirce at nrp@citistates.com.

At Last: Wedding Bells for Dennis Kucinich UK Mate Young, Worldly, Spiritual

by Evelyn Theiss, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 30 Oct 05 (excerpts)



Elizabeth Harper and Dennis Kucinich

...On May 4, Elizabeth Harper walked with her boss into Dennis Kucinich's Capitol Hill office for a meeting and immediately noticed three things. In the reception area, she saw a visiting nun in white robes. In his inner office sat a shelf bearing an illustration depicting "light consciousness" and a bust of Gandhi. She studied the lean and intense congressman and felt an attraction. "Now this is an interesting man," she thought.

Dennis had also closely observed Elizabeth, a statuesque Englishwoman with waist-length red hair. "I saw her eyes go to the light consciousness picture, then to the Gandhi bust, then to me," he says. "It was like one, two, three. That's when I knew."

Within an hour, he called his friend, actress Mimi Kennedy, best known for playing Dharma's mother on "Dharma & Greg." "I met her," Dennis said. Kennedy knew exactly what he meant. She gave a little yelp of joy...

After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Kent, Elizabeth spent 16 months in a rural Tanzanian village, where she lived in a concrete-block, tin-roofed house, and worked as an advocate for regional development. "It was there, and in India, that I learned that people who our society thinks have nothing, and who live in the poorest conditions, still find so much joy in life," she says...

When her mother went to Dennis's Web site she realized he was so much like Elizabeth. "It just seemed heaven-sent." She, too, found the age difference—Elizabeth's 27 years to Dennis's 58—insignificant. "This is about a meeting of souls."

da Silva, Tabare Vazquez – who in their various ways are seeking to bring about the most significant feat of social reengineering on offer in the world today. But that is not all: he is also supported, according to opinion polls, by around 70% of the population – this in a country which in 2001-02 flirted with its own annihilation.

How has Néstor Kirchner managed it, and what does his achievement reveal about the kind of democracy that the structures of power in Argentina and Latin America make possible?

Kirchner's Project

As the offspring of a strict Catholic mother in a windswept Patagonian outpost, it is perhaps no surprise that Kirchner invokes hell and the Passion to illustrate his undertaking: "we are coming out of the deepest crisis step by step in what has been and still is Argentina's calvary," he told Congress in his 2005 state of the nation address.

Not unlike Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Kirchner's most irascible spasms and snubs to protocol are aimed at those who can be blamed for leading the country into the pit. Target number one, which few Argentines would dispute, has been foreign business and finance. Thanks to the vast export potential of Argentina's land expanse following the devaluation of the peso, Kirchner and his economy minister, Roberto Lavagna, appear to have swiped three-quarters off the value of \$100 billion in private bonds (barring the 24% of holdouts), forced the renegotiation of over sixty contracts with privatised utilities, and reduced the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to a whimper. Kirchner even took the liberty of comparing IMF chief Rodrigo Rato to the devil, hours before they met to review the debt burden in late 2004.

At the same time, the local architects and vested interests of the pre-Kirchner system (where, the president says, "genocide, theft and corruption proliferated") have been hauled off-stage – excluding, of course, the Argentine electorate that voted for Carlos Menem in 1989 and 1995. Kirchner, twice arrested for his Peronist youth movement affiliation during the "dirty war" of the 1970s, has thrown himself into the cause of justice for its victims; he dressed down the army at one gala dinner, and secured a repeal of the two bills (Full Stop and Due Obedience) that protected death squad officers from prosecution. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court, the army, the police and a feudal province were drained of their most notorious racketeers.

To anyone acquainted with the neighbourhood assemblies that sprouted across a cashless and pot-banging Buenos Aires in early 2002, these initiatives will sound somehow familiar. Then, tirades against corrupted, self-serving institutions were a staple of everyday communication, while the shuffle of presidents (five in a fortnight) and scramble for new economic policies conveyed the death of an entire political order. "What interests me is the nature of power and how to take power," Luis Zenko, coordinator of an assembly in the down-at-heel barrio of San Cristóbal explained at the time.

Three years on, Zenko has other things on his mind. "I've bought a house," he tells me proudly. "Economically, I'm doing very well out of the tourists, and I just don't have time for politics any more." Near the San Telmo market stall where Zenko displays his paintings every Sunday afternoon, the Movement of Unemployed Workers, two of whose young piquetero (picketeer) leaders were gunned down by police in a 2002 roadblock, exhibits its own produce: largely home-made jam.

The days when the outcry surrounding those murders could force the then president, Eduardo Duhalde, to cut short his presidential mandate are long gone. "For the last year, the government has insisted that we can't carry out any more road-blocks, especially in the capital," declares Axel Castellano, one of the movement's activists, who explains that the

government has forged alliances with the more moderate picketers so as to isolate and cripple the more radical. "We can no longer grow by demanding more unemployment subsidies. It's virtually impossible now to sustain the struggle."

Two consecutive years of 9% economic growth, combined with a public sector surplus unprecedented in recent Argentine history (at around 4% of GDP in the first five months of 2005), have certainly laid the groundwork for a pacification of society. As poverty rates have fallen to around 40% of the population (from 57% in late 2002) the clamour of people on the verge of destitution has subsided: no longer do the middle classes sell their possessions, or the poor huddle so assiduously around giant stew cauldrons. The sediments of economic collapse are still visible – tiny children living in city streets, wafer-thin scavengers searching through rubbish – but there is some hope that the promising economic trends may one day trickle down to their depths.

"Obviously there's still a long way to go," argues Luis D'Elía, head of one of the largest picketer groups, the Federation of Land and Housing (FTV), which claims 150,000 members, and is now closely tied to Kirchner after years spent harassing the state for food and homes. "But in contrast to the 1990s, we feel we're on the right path. And if we stay on this path, in eight or ten years we'll get back to what Argentina once was."

Under other leaders, a boom of these proportions might have induced complacency, or at least spurred reconciliation with foreign lenders. But Kirchner is intransigently proactive: commentators in the Argentine press speak frequently of his regular scrutiny of opinion polls, his obsessive interference in ministerial minutiae, or his lust for "opening new battlefronts." No sooner had the debt swap been settled in early March, for instance, than Kirchner publicly berated price rises at Shell and Esso service stations; within hours, picketers belonging to D'Elía's federation had occupied several of their service stations, and the day's news was decided.

A source from the president's close circles, quoted in the magazine *Veintitrés*, offers a strategic insight: "Power is consensus and authority. Kirchner needs to be centre stage as a matter of survival. Once he has imposed his authority and has the people's backing, then he negotiates." One crucial electoral fact helps account for this: Kirchner won only 22% at the ballot box in April 2003, coming second to "fellow" Peronist Carlos Menem. A week later, Menem withdrew from the second round of voting as opinion polls revealed that his core vote – an alliance of the very rich and very poor, demanding public order and cheap dollars – would be thrashed by a landslide majority clinging desperately to Kirchner, who thus became president by default.

What Kind of President?

Yet explaining the Kirchner regime through its supposed lack of legitimacy – similar to many analyses made of Zapatero's post-11 March administration in Spain – fails to do justice to Argentina's rich, recondite and utterly exceptional political culture. Ideologically, Kirchner is widely regarded as progressive, nationalist and a supporter of tougher state intervention: as he put it to Congress, "we are once again giving the state the neurons that have been taken away from it." But he is first and foremost a Peronist, a member of that party's warring nomenclature, and a caudillo from Patagonia who governed his province of Santa Cruz – where there are more square kilometres than inhabitants – as if it was his back garden. Many in the business community are even said to admire him for spiriting \$500 million out of province coffers and into Switzerland just months before devaluation.

To his critics, Kirchner is therefore a shining example of that authoritarian tradition excoriated by Domingo Sarmiento in his classic work on the tyranny of Juan Manuel de Rosas, Facundo

(1845): the vastness and vanishing horizons of Argentina gives rise to "a well of poetry," but also to "the dominance of brute force, preponderance of the strongest, authority without limits."

And just as Menem effected almost all his privatisations without consulting Congress, Kirchner is accused of rolling out the state, his state, without noticing those who believe differently: "He only wants to concentrate power," argues Sergio Berensztein, a political scientist from Torcuato Di Tella University. "He takes decisions alone, or with a very limited group of people. He doesn't have cabinet meetings or engage in dialogue with other political leaders. He has no disciples or teachers."

For those who stand to benefit, of course, little harm is done. In the Brukman textile factory, whose struggle for workers' control starred in Naomi Klein & Avi Lewis' film *The Take*, they recall the president's intervention vividly. "He put his big arm on my shoulder and said: 'what can I do to sort this out'" recounts one of the seamstresses, Mathilde Adorno. "Three days later, the padlocks on the door of the plant had been removed." The same tactile behaviour – slapping backs, grasping shoulders – is said to have enjoyed less favour with Roberto Lavagna, who allegedly demanded that the manhandling cease.

Yet the thin line Kirchner has trodden between authority and authoritarianism has significance far beyond the anecdotal, and raises two vital structural concerns about the direction his rule is heading in.

First, the crisis of December 2001 manifested above all else that Argentina's institutions were in grave disrepair, and corroded by personal or partisan interests at almost all levels: how else could most of an \$8 billion financial injection into the country's financial system that August end up leaving once again as capital flight? But if these institutions are to be restored – and with them the public's faith in their neutrality and fairness – then can this be done by a hyperactive, hyper-interventionist head of state?

This quandary is all the more compelling now that the country's economy has effectively been restored to its pre-crisis level of 1998. Should Kirchner build on this economic achievement by seeking to accumulate political power – and he clearly hopes to acquire part of the Peronist party machine in Buenos Aires province in October's legislative elections [decisive victories for Kirchner—Ed.]— then the likelihood of disengaging the judiciary, the security forces and bureaucracy from their political masters would appear to be diminished, and the same crisis in Argentine society doomed to be repeated.

Yet should Kirchner dare to stand back and cultivate an independent state apparatus, he faces the dangers that it will fall into the hands of rivals or criminal networks (as happened recently to the airport police, infiltrated by drug-trafficking gangs). In this context, Kirchner's liking for the occasional institutional purge is understandable, even as it exacerbates the very tendencies it seeks to eradicate.

A second, closely related dilemma stems from Kirchner's own attacks on the errors of the past. His declared aim is to steer the state toward a more social function, in which it can guarantee "dignity" and public services and impede the ever-widening breach in wealth. His avowed enemies include big business and the mass media, whose status is echoed by UNDP surveys on perceptions of the real power-holders in Latin America; Kirchner has accused them of forging the favourable deals and "easy earnings" of the Menem years of the 1990s, while the state withered on the branch.

True or not, the fact is that inequality, and with it the decline in public services, has yet to be reversed: indeed, the economic recovery has gone hand-in-hand with an even greater breach in income, while over half of the new jobs created in Argentina are on the black market. Pugnaciously redistributive Kirchner's rhetoric may be, but the country's economic vitality has rested on intensive agriculture, high-cost tourism and local industry

protected behind a weak peso – none of which would appear suited to cure this failing, even if they have salvaged a bankrupt state.

No Alternative?

These two concerns are bound to dog Kirchner and whoever succeeds him, just as they will most of the left-leaning cohort now governing the continent. But the president's immediate future is more likely to be determined by the evolution of a coalition that embraces almost all it sees – from Blumberg's "zero tolerance" to the picketer masses – at a time when the excuses of hellfire and national crisis may no longer bind everyone together.

A series of salary-related protests, unsurprising in a country where real wages have fallen on average 20% since 2001, have already mounted an inflation scare, and exposed the stark differences between economy ministry orthodoxy and the clamour from what Lavagna calls "the populist sectors."

D'Elia, for his part, is keen that the president decisively flushes out "the conservative elements and recalcitrant right in his government's entrails," and is pledging that "the next fight" will be against the privatised utilities. "No way do I think we should renationalise companies or anything of the sort," Lavagna tells the *Financial Times*. "Democracy or dictatorship of the market" respond the thousands of posters stacked up in D'Elia's campaign offices.

At some stage, economists warn, the recovery will end and new doses of foreign investment will be required, mandating an end to Kirchner's purple ire. In the meantime, the president's show will surely continue to draw from the wellspring of "populism", patching over the conflicts that will not go away in the name of simple, nationalist, even bellicose leadership; the recent spat with supposed ally Brazil appears to have fitted the bill.

To be "populist," in the eyes of the west, is to forsake what is sensible or desirable for what attracts popular support, muddle-headed as that may be; in the worst cases in Argentine history, such as 1982, it has led to war and disaster. But perhaps, in this case, the greater harm would have been done in the last three years by legal purity and democratic propriety. "When he rules like a one-man show, you have to see him as the child of his country," argues sociologist Julio Godio. "He has two souls, and history will say which wins. But we have to support him all the same – otherwise we'd be on the edge of a precipice." Imperfect, demagogic and obsessive: it would seem like an ideal combination for dictatorship, were it not also the best bet for a stable democracy in Argentina. ■

Kirchner at Summit, Mar del Plata, Argentina

—Bill Van Auken, *World Socialist Web Site*, 7 Nov 05 (excerpt)

US officials indicated that they were taken aback by Néstor Kirchner's speech, which denounced the role of the International Monetary Fund and US-backed policies in provoking the catastrophic economic collapse of December 2001 from which millions of Argentines have yet to recover.

"Kirchner's speech was very disappointing," a US diplomat told the Argentine daily *Clarín*. "He kept talking to his people. The truth is his harshness surprised me."

The "harshness" of the Argentine president, however, was a pale reflection of the mass hatred exhibited by the Argentine people towards Bush, whose presence in the country provoked not only the demonstrations and rioting in Mar del Plata, but strikes by teachers and public employees throughout the country.

LETTERS

Just Returned from Argentina

We are just back from a visit to Argentina where we presented the Spanish version of the film to several very interested audiences. It was good to see what is happening 3 years later. Many recuperated factories doing well, including Brukman and Ghelco which appear in our film, more of the middle class back at work, continued road blockades from piqueteros whose unemployment situation—that of many industrial workers—has not been resolved. Kirchner's branch of the Peronist party just made substantial gains in mid-term congressional elections. Some expect him to address more social issues now, but we'll have to wait and see. Next week is the Summit of the Americas (minus Fidel) in a coastal town in Argentina and there are massive protests planned in a "Fuera Bush de Argentina" campaign. Some Argentines are welcoming the growing influence of Venezuela in S. America, others resent it.

—Melissa Young, film maker, Clinton WA

CHAPTER NEWS

Happy Birthday to **Paul Brailsford**, celebrating 90 years with feasting and dancing at the colonial 1640 Hart House in Ipswich!

At our 19 October chapter meeting we saw [most of] Melissa Young's video on boot-strapping Argentinians after their IMF-led melt-down. Attending was **Marianne Leavy-Sperounis** who commented on participatory budgeting in Argentina, and alerted us to Lawrence MA mayoral debate featuring budgeting and citizen participation—**Cynthia Ritsher** and **Dave Lewit** attended. Turns out that Marianne mostly organized the event—keep it up!

Diana Licht went the distance to the State House in Montpelier VT to join 150 others at a special convention of Second Vermont Republic—the secession movement, keynoted by **Jim Kunstler**. **Jim Hogue** arrived on horseback as "Gen. Ethan Allen". Two resolutions guarantee continued growth of the movement.

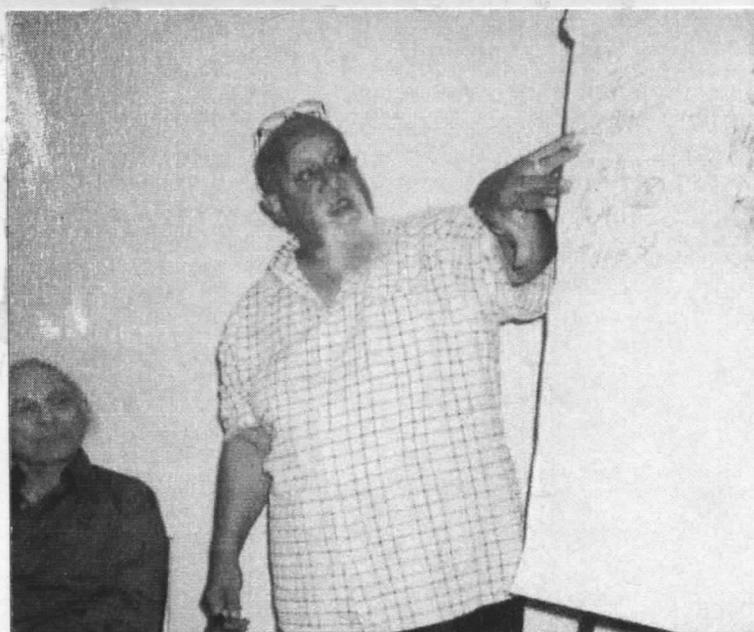
Jed Schwartz testified spontaneously at a State House hearing after **Jonathan Leavitt** and **Jason Pramas** introduced a bill to return privatized water facilities to MA cities, barring corporations.

Charlie Derber launched his new book *Hidden Power* with an exciting talk at Boston College on transitions from democratic to corporatist regimes and vice-versa, in the US. Bush's administration is the culmination of the Reagan Regime—the 3rd corporatist regime since the Civil War.

ACTION ALERTS

Thu, 10 Nov, 7pm. Cambridge. "**Poison Dust**": a video exposing widespread effects of DU uranium poisoning of tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians in Iraq. DU is extensively used in US munitions. US Veterans Administration is silent. Central Square branch library, 45 Pearl Street. Free buffet. Info: 617-244-8054.

Tue, 15 Nov, 7pm. Cambridge. **Militarization of Space: A Policy Debate**. with Lt.Gen. **Daniel P. Leaf** (Vice Cmdr, USAF Space Command); **Theresa Hitchens** (Director, Center for Defense Information). MIT Bldg 6 Room 120 (Call 617-253-0108 for detour instructions to Room 6-120.) Info: Tech & Culture Forum at MIT, <http://web.mit.edu/tac>



Chuck Turner at Burlington roundtable – see page 3.

JOIN THE BCA

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN BOSTON TO LOVE BCA

Please help us as we fight to make a better future for ourselves and our children -- Join the Boston/Cambridge Alliance for Democracy. (Cut out this form and send it to:

Dave Lewit, 271 Dartmouth St. #2h, Boston, MA 02116.)
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EDITORIAL REQUEST

BCA Dispatch and/or NewEnglandAlliance.org needs an **Associate Editor** to develop **personal news**. She or he would write a column each month profiling one member or associate, and help readers know what other members are up to. So the AE would chat with many Alliance people on the phone, and would obtain photos for profiles. People would know that we care! AE would also learn a lot about what **chapters** and kindred organizations are doing, and that would be valuable news. Such information will help to build the Alliance locally and regionally, and to build a **network** of all system-changing organizations! See **Editor's phone/ email below**. **THANKS!**

COLOPHON

Dave Lewit, Editor 617-266-8687. Pls apply as Asso. Editor. 271 Dartmouth St. #2H, Boston MA 02116. dlewit@igc.org
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