

# *Rick Arnold's Summit Journal*

*November 5, 2005*

In the end, it was the unitary spirit of the III Peoples Summit of the Americas that prevailed in Argentina, while the parallel Summit of heads of state mired down on the U.S. agenda of spreading "free trade" to all corners of the Americas.

## **An Achievable Alternative**

During November 1-5 in the coastal Argentinian city of Mar del Plata, over 12,000 participants registered for 157 workshops, panel presentations and major forums - all dedicated to promoting discussion and debate on future directions for our hemisphere, as seen from a peoples' perspective. From this vantage point the continent's social agenda should take priority over a commercial one. Trade would serve to strengthen national economies, and would be specifically targeted at eliminating poverty, and on the creation of decent jobs. The Peoples Summit conclusions stand as an achievable alternative to the "free trade" models currently promoted by Washington and being cheered on by Canada - where the interests of investors and large corporations are paramount.

The III Peoples Summit was an unqualified success by all measures. It rivalled and perhaps even surpassed Quebec City's II Peoples Summit in 2001 given the large number of registered participants involved in the first three days of informational and educational sessions. The Peoples Summit's final declaration was read out at a final Assembly where some 5,000 people adopted it unanimously [available in [English](#) and [French](#) at [www.commonfrontiers.ca](http://www.commonfrontiers.ca)].



## **The Big March**

November 4, the day of the big march, dawned cold and rainy. This did not dampen the enthusiasm of the marchers as they gathered at seven a.m., unfurled their banners and country flags and began to chant. The colourful columns of people were estimated to number more than 40,000 people and to stretch for a kilometer or more. Canada's block of between 75 and 100 people was up near the head of the march. We created some chants specifically suited to the time and place, such as "Persona non-grata, Bush in Mar del Plata!"

The three hour long march ended up at the city's football stadium which was soon packed. The crowds listen to the Summit's representative Blanca Chancoso, an indigenous leader from Ecuador, read out our final declaration to thunderous approval and the beat of drums echoing throughout the stadium. She was followed by Venezuela's President, Hugo Chavez, who promised to take the Peoples Summit Declaration to the President's Summit that was just then getting underway behind barricades re-inforced by 12,000 police and troops. Chavez denounced the Bush administration's military and diplomatic agenda for the region. Chavez also stated his resolve that the so-called "Free Trade Area of the Americas" (FTAA) would be dead and buried by the end of the President' Summit.

## **Shoestring Budget**

Though the Peoples Summit was run on a shoestring budget (30 well used computers in cramped quarters in the "media centre", as opposed to more than 500 new computers in

comfortable quarters made available to the media in the cordoned off section of the city), the grass roots messages got significant attention by both mainstream and alternative media. Stopping the "free trade" agenda in the Americas was a key message being communicated, along with an end to Washington's militarization in our continent, and a call for foreign debt to be cancelled immediately.

If George Bush expected that his trip to Argentina would provide a welcome respite from scandals at home, he misjudged the size and strength of the opposition that awaited him on the streets of Mar del Plata. In Quebec City where only one President dared to speak out against plans to sign an FTAA accord by January 1, 2005, now there were five. The FTAA missed its signing date thanks to rising opposition in all countries in the Americas, an opposition that is likely to bring in other new governments in the coming weeks and months. New administrations that will join the ranks of those already willing to stand up to Washington.

### **Embarrassment**

Canada's role at the President's Summit was an embarrassment, and completely out of step with the changes sweeping across much of the Americas. Canadians might have expected some sort of learning curve from our government so recently burned by the US refusal to honour a NAFTA tribunal ruling on soft wood lumber that found in Canada's favour. The lesson from this experience for Latin American governments contemplating future "free trade" deals with the U.S. is that Washington won't adhere to any rules or rulings that go against its perceived best interests.

Given all that went on at recently concluded two Summits in Mar del Plata, Canada needs to rethink its position towards the other peoples and nations in the Americas. Canadians need to let Ottawa know that we wish to be participants in the building of an Americas free from economic exploitation and military domination. We can begin to reclaim our hemispheric right of all being known as "Americans", and to promote a life affirming agenda for people from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, able to live in sovereign, interconnected societies that are just, respectful of diversity, and committed to taking common action in the face of the many challenges at hand.

***Posted by Rick, Nov 5, 2005***

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***November 2, 2005***



Organizers of the III Peoples Summit taking place in **Mar del Plata Argentina** November 1-5, ran out of printed credential tags when more than 6,000 people registered on the opening day. During the course of this Peoples Summit participants from every corner of the Americas will have to choose among some 160 forums, round tables and workshops that will take place. The opening night ceremony was electric as delegations from the different nations waved banners, chanted and danced on the spot to live bands blasting out salsa and rap.

After some 13 hours in the air from Toronto to Mar del Plata, I landed at the local airport to see U.S. service personnel, Black Hawk and Huey helicopters on the tarmac. It was a reminder that there is also another Summit happening here from November 4-5, that of all the Presidents minus Cuba. Local newspapers comment on the fact that a U.S. AWACS airplane is constantly overhead and U.S. warships are patrolling the coast. Public opinion polls in several South American countries have established the fact that Bush is the most reviled U.S. President in modern history. Such is the concern in Washington for Bush's safety here that all the Argentine hotel employees in the hotel where Bush is likely to stay were sent home several weeks ago, and were replaced with personnel flown in from the States.

### **Heavy Security**

Shades of the previous Summits held in Quebec City in 2001, The Argentine government has cordoned off a 250 square block area with 14 kilometers of heavy duty 8 foot high fencing to protect the dignitaries from any eventuality. The host nation has also mobilized 12,000 police and troops to keep the peace.

However, a lot has changed in the four years since Quebec City as many new Presidents have been elected that aren't willing to blindly follow dictates from Washington. The President of the host country Argentina is a case in point, brought to power in the aftermath of an economic meltdown in 2002 in a country that was supposed to become the poster boy for the success of policies that the U.S. champions, such as privatization and cut backs of social services. He has promised to move away from those policies and strengthen the role that the state plays in assuring redistribution of wealth to all Argentines.

### **150 Canadians**

Argentine soccer legend Maradona will join Nobel Peace Prize recipient Esquivel in a huge march and rally on November 4. There are approximately 150 Canadians who have made their way to Mar del Plata and will be marching together under a Common Frontiers banner that states in four languages that "Another Americas is Possible". The march will end up in the city's soccer stadium where the Peoples Summit final Declaration will be read out, and the President of Venezuela will address the crowd. He is expected to condemn those countries still pushing the Free Trade Area of the Americas (of which Canada is a prime mover) as well as having a few choice words for the Bush administrations role in hemispheric and world politics. Cuban musical icon Silvio Rodriguez will close the Peoples Summit and have people signing and dancing in unison prior to heading home with spirits renewed to work on a different future for our Americas.

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