

Leopoldo Zea spoke at the Permanent Forum for Latin American Affairs' inaugural ceremony. Referring to the changes in contemporary history after World War II, he stressed the need for Latin America to unite and become part of the world-wide trend of forming large territorial blocs which, united, strive towards economic, technological, cultural and military coordination.

ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1815, Simón Bolívar wrote a letter from Kingston, Jamaica, where he was living in exile, that could be considered the "birth certificate of America". In it he imagined a continent, with three centuries of colonialism in common, that could unite in the pursuit of freedom. The letter says, "It is a grandiose idea to create one nation in the New World - united within and facing the outside world with a single voice."

He was obviously not referring to Washington's Pan American integration effort, a hundred years ago. Bolívar's focus was to unite the Latin American people first, then move to include the American continent as a whole and then the world. It was in this vein that he went on to say, "We have the same heritage, language, customs and religion. We should, therefore, have one government to confederate the states to be formed."

Bolívar said elsewhere, "As time goes by, hundreds of years, we would have a nation that incorporated the entire world, a federal one." Although these words were expressed one hundred and sixty-five years ago, the goal of uniting America freely remains a utopian dream for the future. There have been many attempts in the political arena, and now in the economic one. Long ago, Bolívar said: "Several factors, such as conflicting interests and dissimilar personalities divide America."

Latin America: a voice or an echo?

*Leopoldo Zea**

Our times emphasize the challenge we face as a region to make the utopian dream come true. Europe, divided by languages, cultures, religious faiths, personalities and interests, that have been the sources of mortal blows in the past, is coming together to face common goals. This integration will go beyond Western Europe, it will include Eastern Europe and with it Russia -one domain from the Atlantic to the Ural mountains.

The same phenomenon is occurring in Asia, as a united Pacific Rim is formed by different nations. Black Africa unites peoples who do not want to be objects of discrimination, discrimination which in the past has justified inhuman exploitation. Divided Arab nations in the Persian Gulf face a similar crisis. These countries, previously united by religion, now seek integration to break the chain of colonial domination.

The crises generated by the process of forming blocs reaffirms our need in Latin America to make the old dream of uniting come true. Facing a world of economic blocs, our governments eagerly seek formulas for fitting into these groups as independent nations. There are several options. Which would be the best for Latin America? For each separate country? Would it be joining the United States, now turning south to us as she is displaced from Europe and Asia by recent regional blocs? Would the best option be joining the Europeans? The Pacific Rim? After all, we do have oceans in common with both blocs. Should each country decide independently?

Long ago, when the Latin American people were fighting for their independence from three hundred years of Spanish and Portuguese control, the German

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philosopher Hegel wrote, "America is the future. Its historical importance is yet to come, perhaps as a struggle between North and South America." He added that in order for this to take place, "... America must separate from the world in which, until today, history has been shaped. What occurs there now is nothing but an echo of the old world and a reflection of a foreign life."

Our America, primarily Latin America, has routinely sought a tree's shade to hide under, or a voice to echo. Today, an analogous problem occurs when alternatives are mentioned. Which would be our best option, the United States, Europe, Asia? That is, which tree's shade shall we seek for the future? Whose voice do we want to echo? In other words,

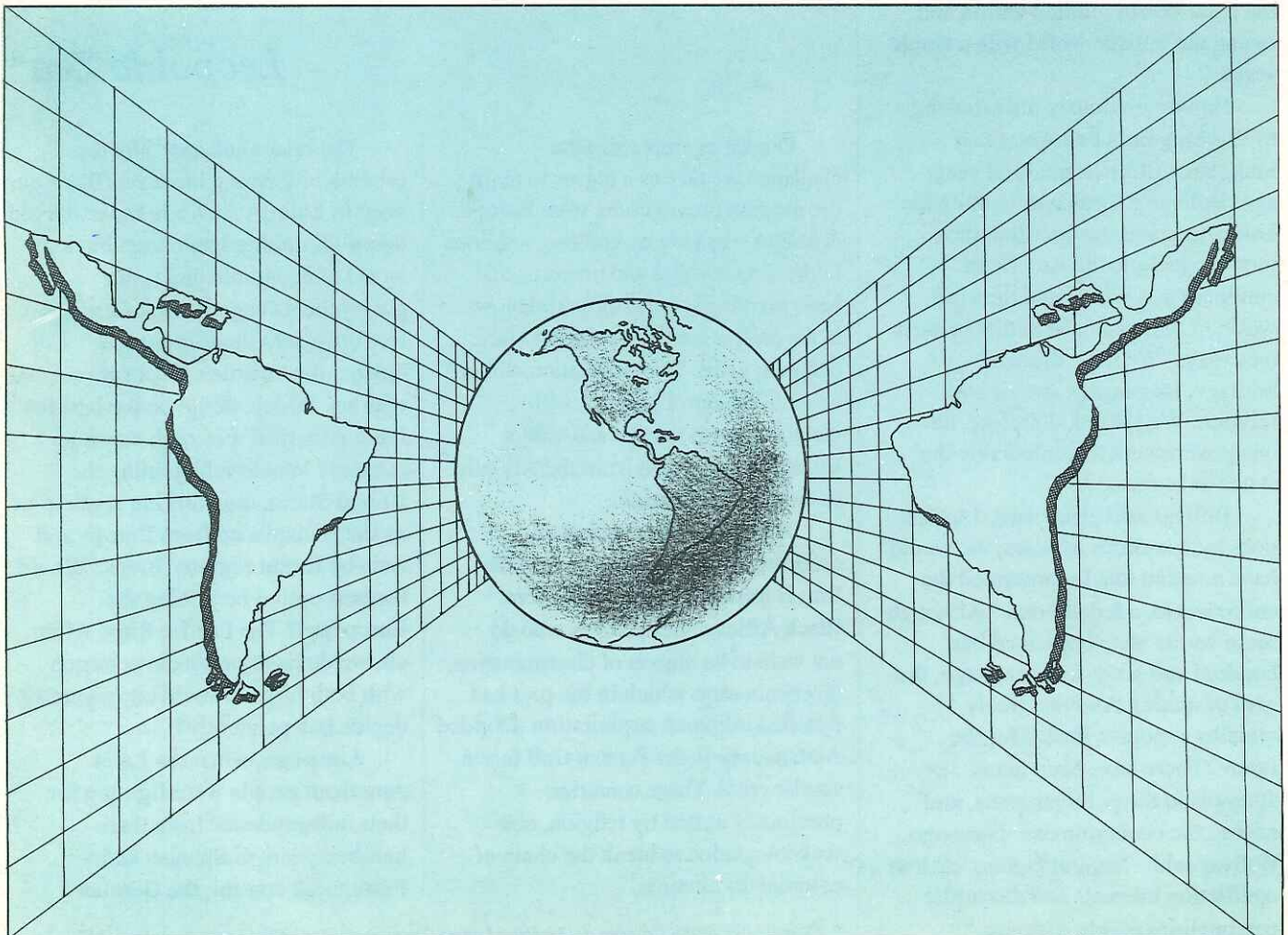
we are talking about the best choices for new colonialism. The options will only be correct, if they meet the region's specific needs, which means fulfilling its own needs, not those of the owners of trees and voices.

Priority must be given to the alternative that will allow our America to make the old dream of unification come true. Our region, as a whole, has enough resources to implement our own development. We also have enough hands to work collectively toward converting this wealth into the vehicle for our own development.

Do we need technology? Of course we do, but we can buy it with the resources we generate. What about markets? We have our very own people, the same market that the

United States seeks after having been displaced from Europe and Asia. Why, then, not attempt that integration before pursuing other choices that could simply mean subordination to new dependence models? Moreover, choosing to integrate into a specific bloc should take place with the benefits for this America in mind, rather than placing America at the service of those offering options.

Latin American integration projects have failed in the past due to dissimilar political and economic interests among countries. However, Europe is now demonstrating that a variety of interests does not necessarily have to be a barrier against uniting behind a common goal. Education and culture have been



Latin America must decide whether to be a voice or an echo.

mentioned as the most appropriate vehicles for integration ever since independence. This is the reason that political liberation leaders have been followed by intellectual emancipation leaders. Freedom attained with weapons had to be followed by mental processes to eliminate the habits imposed by colonialism during three centuries.

A great deal of reflection is now being focused on what might have been the path of our America had the leaders who followed Bolívar, San Martín and Morelos, understood, as those original leaders did, the relationship between the freedom of each country and that of the other countries on the American continent. America would have been a different place if the Paezes, Santanders, Flores and Santa Cruzes had understood and implemented Bolívar's plan.

Unfortunately, they all maintained the customs imposed by the colonizer's education and culture. The policy was to implement separate projects and thereby protect their own interests. Those who led the peoples of America to political independence attempted to fill the power "void" created by the lack of a Metropolis, thereby preserving established patterns of separation.

Today, we feel that the situation could be modified, following the same habits and the customs which originally hindered integration. The countries of the American continent were, after all, "integrated" under colonialism. The day that every child, young person and adult is aware of what we have in common with others in Latin America, such as our history and culture, will be the day that the dream of unification will become reality.

Today it is this preoccupation that brought together representatives from Latin American countries on their own initiative to join in an effort to apply education and culture, and create an awareness of the relationship between each one of our peoples and the rest of the continent.

This is the purpose behind the Permanent Forum for Latin American Affairs: to focus on stimulating, supporting and promoting parallel activities in Mexico as well as in the other countries represented. I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and honor at having been made a part of this remarkable effort for regional integration.

We have assembled, under the patronage of the *Universidad*

Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM (National University of Mexico), an educational and cultural institution involved with integrating academic work being carried out on different Latin American countries. Further, we work in an amphitheater named after Bolívar, a hall which has witnessed several times events focused on stimulating the integration of our region.

This University represents its commitment to Latin America within its coat of arms: in the center the profile of the region; and the logo, one that reflects a race of many races, which is not a race, but a spirit. The spirit that brings people and nations together without discrimination.

UNAM actively works to provide information about the region in which Mexico finds itself. It promotes activities which increase awareness of our common cultural and historical roots without neglecting the expression of each country's individuality. We are conscious that we can make the dreams of our political and intellectual emancipators come true in the near future. 