

[Speech given by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, during the May Day Rally in Revolution Square, May 1, 2001 \[1\]](#)

Date:

01/05/2001

Distinguished guests;

Workers;

Compatriots:

Exactly one year ago today, we gathered here for a historic rally. On that day, for the first time in 41 years, the traditional May Day March was changed to a Public Forum. It was an unforgettable moment in an unforgettable struggle.

The filmed images of that memorable day must be carefully preserved, so that future generations can see how their parents and grandparents achieved victory, and so that they may relive in part the emotion of the time.

The struggle did not cease when the boy returned with his father; it had barely just begun. We realized that the reasons behind that tragedy and others remained intact, and decided that we would not give up the fight, as we swore in Baraguá, until they had all been removed.

After 42 years of heroic resistance to a cruel and genocidal blockade, we have entered the new millennium with renewed energy and greater strength.

A new era of struggle was opening. The empire, much more powerful than ever before, had become the sole superpower. But our people, recently freed from neo-colonial status, saturated with McCarthyism propaganda and lies, poorly educated and almost illiterate politically, had made a colossal leap in history: they had eradicated illiteracy and graduated in universities hundreds of thousands of professionals with a far greater level of political consciousness than their historical adversary.

Our people have now achieved the highest degree of unity ever, and gained vast political experience and moral, patriotic and internationalist strength; these are the people who resolutely endured the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Missile Crisis, the dirty war, an ever more rigorous economic blockade, the demise of the USSR and the socialist bloc, and predictions of the impossibility of survival and an inevitable collapse.

Today, we are facing an enemy that is powerful in every way, except for ethics and ideas, with no message or response for the grave political, economic and social problems weighing down on the world today.

Internationally, there has never been such confusion, discontent and insecurity. On the brink of a

profound political and economic crisis, imperialism cannot escape from its own shadow. It is condemned to plundering the rest of the world to an ever greater extent thus fomenting universal discontent and rebellion, even among its own allies.

Throughout almost two centuries, the indigenous population and other peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean have been the victims of the United States' policy of expansion to the west and south of the original 13 colonies that declared their independence from British rule in 1776. First, in their advance towards the west they practically exterminated the indigenous peoples. Later, in 1835, they promoted the independence of Texas, where U.S. settlers were already living in large numbers. In 1847, they invaded Mexico, unleashing a brutal war; as a result, in February of 1848, they took possession of 55% of Mexico's territory. And so they continued, exterminating the native peoples or displacing them from the lands they had lived on for centuries, and buying up territories of former European colonial powers to annexate them like they had done with Texas or conquer them like the territory stolen from Mexico. Thus, the United States, nurtured by large migrations from Europe in the second half of the 19th century, had become a powerful and prosperous nation, while the states from the Patagonia to the Canadian border that had rid themselves of Spanish colonial domination after the independence struggles begun by Venezuela in 1810, remained divided and isolated.

On June 20, 1898, the United States launched a military intervention in Cuba, at a moment when after a heroic and lengthy struggle by its finest sons and daughters our country was on the verge of achieving its independence from an exhausted and bankrupt Spain. Our country remained occupied by the U.S. forces for almost four years.

In 1902, the troops of the United States of America left the island, after the establishment of a neo-colony whose natural resources, lands and services it would retain under control with the additional support of an amendment imposed on our Constitution granting the United States the legal right to military intervention in our country. The glorious party created by Martí had been dismantled; the Liberation Army, which had fought throughout 30 years, was disarmed only to be replaced with an army organized and trained by the United States in the image and likeness of its own. The arbitrary and unfair right to intervene under any pretext was used on more than one occasion.

Puerto Rico, Cuba's twin sister in the liberation struggle, like "the two wings of a bird," was turned into an U.S. colony, and retains this unfortunate status until today. Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua and other Central American nations, and even Mexico, have been the victims of direct or indirect military intervention by the United States on repeated occasions. The Isthmus of Panama was occupied to complete construction of and guarantee access to the strategic canal that the United States controlled for almost a century. The U.S. pervasive presence in the rest of the South American nations was achieved through large investments, coups, military regimes and growing political, ideological and cultural interference. After World War II, the United States ran them all to its liking.

The first major curb on U.S. expansionism and political and economic control of Latin America came about in Cuba with the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959. This ushered in a new stage in the history of the hemisphere. The price paid by our country up until today is well known, and it was almost dragged to a nuclear war.

Everything that has been done in this hemisphere by successive U.S. administrations, right up until now, has been strongly influenced by their obsession and fear over the troubling presence of the Cuban Revolution, from the days of the mercenary invasion of the Bay of Pigs and the Alliance for Progress, to Bush's statements from the bunker in Quebec, where he invoked the name of José Martí, attributing to him a misinterpreted quote about freedom. Actually, although the triumph of the Revolution troubled them, its remarkable resistance for over four centuries sometimes creates the impression to have driven them insane.

With a despicable wretchedness that will go down in history as an unprecedented example of infamy, all

of the governments of Latin America, with the exception of Mexico, joined more or less willingly in the isolation and blockade of Cuba. The OAS was so severely damaged that it has never recovered. Today, when a massive annexation of Latin American countries to the United States is being plotted, no one can explain the continued existence and spending of money on that repugnant institution, morally bankrupted forever by such an unscrupulous and treacherous behavior.

What the OAS did back then, as an instrument of the United States, is what the United States wants to do today with the FTAA not to isolate Cuba, but rather to liquidate sovereignty, to prevent integration, to devour the resources and frustrate the destinies of a group of peoples who --leaving out the English speaking-- add up to a total population of more than 500 millions with a shared Latin-based language, culture and history.

If the OAS sold its soul to the devil back then, betraying and selling out Cuba, so that the Latin American countries could receive, as a reward, the Cuban sugar quota on the U.S. market totaling several million tons, along with other favors, then what can be expected today of those bourgeois and oligarchic governments, devoid of any political or ethical principles, who voted alongside the United States in Geneva? Out of opportunism or cowardice, they provided the extreme-right U.S. government with the pretexts and justifications needed to maintain the genocidal blockade, and even a potential excuse for aggression against the people of Cuba, all served up on a silver platter.

Dragged along by the ill-fated annexationist current, it is only logical that many others, in the desperation created by enormous and unpayable debts and total economic dependence, will be led to the suicide of the FTAA.

There are Latin American politicians for whom talk of free trade is music to their ears, as if they were still living in the middle of last century, depending solely on the export of basic commodities and clamoring for the removal of U.S. tariff barriers. They have not realized that the world has changed, that many of those commodities, like fibers, rubber and other materials, have been replaced by synthetics, or foodstuffs like sugar by high fructose corn syrup, with a higher sweetening power and fewer calories which is thus preferred by many people; or artificial flavors like vanilla, strawberry and many others that imitate tropical and semi-tropical fruits. Their mindsets are frozen on the demands of half a century ago. Neoliberal poison and other lies have definitely blinded them, and still have large sectors of the population stultified; they do not understand the basics of the problems they suffer, because nothing is explained to them, or information is hidden from them.

There is absolutely no doubt that the governments of at least two of the most important countries in Latin America, those of Bolivar's Venezuela and of Brazil, the largest and most highly populated Latin American nation, understand these realities, and are heading up the resistance.

For Cuba, it is positively clear that the so-called Free Trade Area of the Americas, under the terms, the timetable, the strategy, objectives and procedures imposed by the United States, would inexorably lead to Latin America's annexation to the United States. This kind of association between an enormous industrial, technological and financial power and countries that suffer tearing poverty, underdevelopment and financial dependence on institutions under the aegis of the United States, which controls, directs and makes the decisions in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and others, imposes such inequality that it is tantamount to nothing less than the total absorption of the economies of the Latin American and Caribbean countries by that of the United States.

All of the banks, insurance companies, telecommunications, shipping services and airlines will be U.S.-owned. All business will pass into the hands of U.S. companies, from the big retail store chains to pizza outlets and McDonalds.

The chemical industry, automotive, machinery and equipment industry, as well as other basic industries will all be U.S.-owned.

U.S. transnational companies will own the major research, biotechnology and genetic engineering centers and large pharmaceutical companies. The patents and technologies, almost without exception, will be U.S.-owned. The best Latin American scientists will work in U.S. laboratories.

The big hotel chains will be U.S.-owned.

The so-called entertainment industry will be an almost complete U.S. monopoly. As an almost exclusive supplier, Hollywood will produce movies and television series for the movie theaters, television networks and videocassette market of Latin America. Our countries, where consumption of these products is already around 80%, will see an even greater growth in their prevalence, as destructive to their values and national cultures as they are. But, how very wonderful that two or three Disneyland will surely be built in Central and South America!

The Latin American nations would continue to serve basically as sources of raw materials, producers of primary commodities and enormous profits for big transnational capital.

The U.S. agricultural sector receives some 80 billion dollars in subsidies and will continue receiving them in the future, whatever the disguise, although its per capita and per hectare productivity is much higher, due to the use of large and sophisticated machinery and abundant fertilization. It will grow genetically modified grains, with much higher crop yields, heedless of its implications for human health.

As a consequence, crops of corn, wheat, rice, soybeans and other grains will practically disappear from many Latin American countries that will be left with no food security.

When a major drought or other disasters affect agricultural production in entire regions of the world, in large countries like China, with abundant hard currency reserves, or India, with fewer reserves but a certain amount of financial resources, they could find themselves obliged to buy tens of millions of tons of grains. If this happened, the prices of these products could reach unattainable levels for many Latin American countries, if their own grain production is wiped out by the FTAA. No matter how large the crop yields are the United States can only produce a small percentage of the food needed by a growing world population, which is now over 6.1 billion. A decrease in food production in Latin America would affect not only the Latin American countries, but also the rest of the world.

Latin America will continue, under ever more difficult and intolerable conditions, to play the sad role of a supplier of raw materials and increasingly cheap labor, as compared to the salaries paid in the United States, which are 15 or 20 times higher than what the big transnational companies pay in the factories they have opened throughout the region. What is more, these factories employ fewer and fewer people as automation expands and productivity grows. Therefore, the notion that large numbers of jobs will be created is an illusion. The agricultural sector, which tends to provide employment for a higher number of workers, will be affected by the elements mentioned earlier. As a result, unemployment will grow considerably. Germany and other European countries have unemployment rates of up to 10%, despite the enormously high number of industries and services there.

The Latin American nations will be compelled to become large free trade areas with low taxes or none. These countries have begun to compete with each other, seeking foreign investment at any cost. They are invited to produce seasonal vegetables and tropical fruit that could supply the whole U.S. market with less than a million hectares of well-cultivated lands.

Perhaps they will be visited by a larger number of American tourists who will travel throughout the vast territory of Central and South America, staying in U.S.-owned hotels, traveling on U.S.-owned airlines and cruise ships, using U.S.-owned communications services, eating in U.S.-owned restaurants, and shopping in U.S.-owned stores, where they will buy goods produced by U.S.-owned companies with Latin American petroleum and raw materials. Latin America will export oil, copper, bauxite, meat (as long as it is free of hoof and mouth disease), bananas and other fruits, if there are no non-tariff protectionist

measures in place, and perhaps a few handicrafts.

What will be left? The worst paid and most grueling jobs in U.S.-owned companies, or employment as servants in the homes of U.S. executives and managers, highly qualified professionals, or what is left of the local bourgeoisie. Only a minority of the privileged bourgeoisie and the working aristocracy will stand to gain anything. Large masses of workers will be laid off, as it is the case today in Argentina, where the unemployment rate is between 15% and 20%, and this without any kind of unemployment benefits. This are the fruits of neoliberalism, despite the tens of billions of dollars of foreign capital invested, the privatization and sale to foreign companies of almost all state companies, and the enormous debt contracted through the large loans received.

The FTAA will mean more neoliberalism, less protection of the national industry and interests, more unemployment, and more social problems.

It is absolutely certain that national currencies will be lost. None of them will survive; they will all be replaced by the US dollar. Even without the FTAA, there is already such a rising trend involving numerous countries that follow in the steps of the decision adopted by Ecuador. The U.S. Federal Reserve will dictate the monetary policy of every one of them. The FTAA, which will only benefit big transnational capital, will not benefit American workers either, as many will be laid off. That is why their representatives protested so strongly in Quebec, just as they had fiercely protested before against the WTO in Seattle.

If Cuba did not have an independent monetary policy, it would never have achieved the sevenfold appreciation in the value of the peso between 1994 and 1999, nor would it have been possible to endure the special period.

Two decisive elements were at play: non-membership in the International Monetary fund and an independent monetary policy.

The minute that everything I have said until now about the FTAA happens, it will no longer be possible to speak of independence, and annexation will begin to be a reality. And this is absolutely not an overstatement.

The worst, saddest, most shameless and hypocritical thing of all, is that they intend to take this monstrous step without consulting their peoples. This is all the democracy that can be expected from the imperial power and its lackeys.

I am firmly convinced that Latin America and the Caribbean can be devoured, albeit never digested, by the decadent empire, because the peoples will ensure that our continent's nations rise up from their ashes and integrate, as they must integrate and unite in search of a greater, more dignified destiny. However, it would be much better if the hundreds of millions of Latin Americans and Caribbeans were spared the difficult stage of the subsequent struggle for our liberation.

We must prevent annexation, and resolutely demand, from this moment forward, that no government is allowed to sell out a nation behind its people's back! There can be no annexation without a plebiscite! We must build an awareness of the dangers and of what the FTAA will entail.

We must revive Bolívar's dignity and his dreams, and the dignity and dreams of San Martín, O'Higgins, Sucre, Morazán, Hidalgo, Morelos, Juárez and Martí.

Let nobody be fooled into thinking that the peoples will sit back doing nothing and allow to be sold like slaves at an auction!

Today, we will stage the first protest. Within a few minutes, we will set out with hundreds of thousands of Cubans, on a Latin American protest march on the United States Interests Section, shouting this

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slogan: Annexation no, plebiscite yes! Annexation no, plebiscite yes! Annexation no, plebiscite yes! Let it ring out loud and clear, and be heard all the way up in Washington!

Today, in the company of hundreds of leaders and representatives of the workers of Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia and Africa, we say: Latin American and Caribbean Independence or Death!

Ever onward to victory!

Overcome!

Verbatim Versions- Council of State

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