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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA

SPEECH DELIVERED BY DR. LOUIS MACHADO,
PRESIDENT OF THE CUBAN DELEGATION

IN TAKING OVER THE PRESIDENCY OF THE II SESSION
OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA

Messrs. Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The much honored circumstance of presiding the Cuban Delegation of the II Session of the Economic Commission for Latin America, which is taking place at Havana, affords me the extraordinary privilege and the high responsibility of acting as president of this Conference.

If to address our words with a certain degree of security is always a difficult matter, it is even more strenuous to do so when one tries to follow the work of the Continental figure of Don Alberto Baltra, Minister of Economy of Chile, and to fill the absence of a man who, possessing such splendid knowledge as an economist and as a talented statistician with an enormous capacity for work, has guided in a bright manner the first steps of this novel International Organization, and who has, therefore, won the applause which we last night offered him as our tribute, at the close of his eloquent speech.

I have the pleasure to count him amongst my colleagues, together with other well known economists of America, which have presented their credentials to this Assembly. And with

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the cooperation of these gentlemen, which surely will not fail us, I feel confident in my collaboration to this Conference, which looks for and tries to find satisfactory solutions to the urgent problems of the economic order which Latin America faces today. Our Latin America is a land of unexplainable contradictions.

In the inner most interior of our majestic ridge of mountains there abounds an incalculable proportion of gold, platinum, silver, precious stones, iron, copper, manganese, chrome, lead, zinc, tin, nickel, aluminum, sulfur, magnesie and calcium; practically all the mineral elements which are indispensable for the industrial progress of the world.

In our subsoil there are also incalculable quantities of coal and oil, the fuel which is so much needed to fill the demands of modern industry and transportation.

Our very important rivers and falls offer in a gigantic proportion sources of inexhaustible hydroelectric energy, more than sufficient to produce a complete industrialization and satisfaction of the very complex needs which demand a high standard of living and high civilization.

Our fertile soils produce in generous quantities, wheat, corn, rice, all sorts of grains, sugar, coffee, cacao; the most varied and rich collection of tropical and semi-tropical fruits and vegetables, as also cotton, flax and a whole variety of fibres, fats and oils; and our fertile meadows and their pastures produce the best cattle in the world, assuring us an ample supply of beef, milk, hides and livestock by-products, while our immense seas offer us the most complete wealth in foods derived from these sources.

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Contrasting with the exuberant natural wealth which surrounds us, the Latin American peoples generally live in poor conditions and, in some cases, in a primitive state. Our nourishment is inadequate and insufficient. We suffer from extraordinary shortness in the midst of so much abundance. Our peoples advance with extraordinary difficulties and slowness in a world which is characterized by the speed of progress.

Which are the causes that hold Latin America back in this absurd situation of poverty in the midst of so much wealth? Why our peoples have not improved and progressed with the rhythm of the universal economic improvement giving impulse to the economic and social development of Latin America in order to disentangle the Gordian knots of our insuperable difficulties which hold in stagnation the stimulus for the development of the soil and our industries? How can we put in immediate circulation the means of our unexploited wealth which nature so generously has granted us?

These are the questions to which we are trying to find an adequate answer in this II Meeting of the Economic Commission for Latin America, more popularly known by its initials as ECLA.

We do not pretend to possess the magic formula which may at once answer these serious and fundamental questions. But we do pretend not to depart from this meeting in Havana, to which so many studious and competent economists are assisting, without having made some real advance in the common solution of our common problems.

There is no doubt that in focussing these economic problems for Latin America we are going to hear in this

Conference the most different and even the most contradictory theories and criteria or opinions. But the diversity of opinions is a characteristic of all democratic systems and even constitutes the essential base of human progress. It is only natural that in any feat or act of men there exist different points of view, and that in order to find a solution to any such problems different measures may be proposed. It must be also recognized that though the economic problems of Latin America offer in a general way common traits which are also common to all the countries of our Southern regions, there are, nevertheless, special problems which are determined by our geography, our density of population, the degree of economic development, and by the proper characters of each of the countries which now are taking part in this Meeting.

But no matter what our opinions may be about the determined problems related to the peculiar character of the American countries which we represent in this Conference, there are some general ideas about which I am sure there can be no difference of opinion, and which we all can feel certain will form an unanimous criterion of the Conference.

The economic world which we promote is not substantially different from the physical world in which we live, since matters of economy are the ones that form part of our own lives. And in the physical world, just in the measure in which we have been advancing in the progress of science, we have had to rectify concepts which formerly no one would have dared to discuss, but that today, in the light of the new knowledge which man possesses, we now know that they were totally erroneous. And, thus, the man of ancient times, in reality the man of not too many years ago, believed that the sun and all the stars in the firmament revolved around the Earth

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and that this Earth was, in fact, the center.

It was very hard to convince him to the right idea, when his own primitive senses were hardly capable of perceiving this phenomenon of the apparent daily rotation of the whole Universe around an earth where one does not feel its movements.

But modern man knows now that he can deceive himself by accepting the old phenomena and that it is necessary to pry and penetrate into these same facts in order to arrive at the knowledge of truth.

Today modern man knows that he inhabits a mere planet, certainly very modest, and encased in a solar system of which many other similar planets form a part; some are even larger in size and older in years; a solar system which, in turn, is only a small link in the gearing of a gigantic and infinite sideral system.

History is full of examples of nations which, having reached an extraordinary material growth, have fallen into the hallucination of a mirage, and, believing themselves the center of the world, have pretended to submit other lands, ordenating them as secondary satellites in the orbit of their political, social, and economic ambitions. History has shown us that such ideas invariably and implacably have only served to bring those nations to their own destruction.

Fortunately these ideas are contrary to the school of thought of the Western Hemisphere. In our Continent there is not a single nation which pretends to dominate the others in the political, economic, and social order. Amongst us, on the contrary, the theory of the Good Neighbor, which

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establishes cooperation and mutual aid between all the American countries, now reigns, and we are all convinced that there can be no peace or rest, or health or prosperity, nor progress or wealth permanently, as long as we all do not take part in the fact that we are obliged to live together in the same geographical sector.

Therefore, our America adjusting itself to the reality of the physical world in which we live, offers itself to the rest of the world as a beautiful and brotherly solar system in which each country, be it big or small, has obtained for itself a place in the sun, and rotates within its own orbit rendering its contribution to our collective progress, moving in a coordinated manner as the planets do, avoiding collisions and interferences, and being governed by the universal gravity of International friendship; and all revolving around the common inspiration of the rights of all, social justice, liberty and democracy; all ideals which are the unique and true sun around which may all the American countries evolve.

Havana, May 30, 1949.
