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Global politics and economy – the view from Latin America and the Caribbean

26-27 JULY 2013



On 26-27 July 2013, the Socialist International held a meeting of its Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, SICLAC, in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, hosted by the People's National Party, PNP, with the participation of Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller, PNP leader and a Vice-President of the Socialist International.

The meeting was convened following consultations among members of the SI Presidium from the region and included on its agenda the election of the authorities of the Committee for the current inter-congress period. The agenda centered on two main themes: 'Strategies and regional policies to strengthen the role of Latin America and the Caribbean in the new political and global economic framework' and 'The social democratic vision and proposals for overcoming inequality and democratic deficits in



the region in building more inclusive and just societies’.

Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller, at the **opening of the meeting**, welcomed all participants and highlighted that her party was soon to celebrate the 75th anniversary of its foundation. She recalled that Norman Washington Manley, the first PNP leader, sealed the identity of the PNP as a social democratic party, dedicated to achieving independence, greater equality and social development for the Jamaican people. She underlined that this original inspiration continued today, especially in these difficult economic times with strong social pressures, citizen's demands and environmental concerns. Jamaica had undergone its own challenges of decolonisation, then economic independence, and currently that of creating a society of greater equality and inclusiveness. In relation to the economic commitments that the country had assumed with international financial organisations, the Prime Minister concluded that it was important to balance the figures, but it was equally important to balance people's lives. In this regard, the political programme of the PNP in government has been economically responsible, while stimulating employment, education, health, housing, energy and respect for the environment.

The SI Secretary General, Luis Ayala, recalled the rich relationship between the organisation and the PNP, going back to the times of PNP leader and Prime Minister Michael Manley. Portia Simpson today, at the head of the party and of the government, is a good example for the international social democratic family of a stateswoman who from humble origins has risen to lead her country, connecting with the people, and responding to their concerns. He highlighted the programmes implemented for employment and social protection by her government in spite of the difficult economic situation which she inherited when taking office in 2011, following the consequences of both the wrong policies of the previous government and the financial crisis of 2008. Social democratic and SI member parties in Latin America and the Caribbean were indeed the political force which, while strengthening democratic freedoms and citizens rights, have managed to move forward with economic policies centered on people, resulting in economic growth leading to jobs and more social protection, with emphasis on education, health, and decent pensions. Much still needed to be done to break the cycle of inequality which existed in the region, but every advance made in this regard stemmed from these policies.

Following the opening session, the Committee proceeded with the next point on the agenda, the **election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee**. Meeting prior to the opening of the Committee, the members of the SI Presidium from the region present agreed to propose that the election process should follow the procedure applied at the last SI Congress, with the appointment of an electoral commission made up in this case of the SI Vice-Presidents from the region, chaired by Bernal Jimenez, President of the PLN, Costa Rica. This proposal was unanimously accepted by the Committee. The election of the Committee Chair, open to all candidates presented up to the moment of the vote, was carried out by secret ballot. Bernal Jimenez, after asking if there were any further proposals, informed the meeting that one nomination had been received, that of the leader of the PRD, Dominican Republic and SI Vice-President, Miguel Vargas. Following a secret vote, Vargas was duly elected.

For the position of Vice-Chair, the Committee held an exchange of views with regard to maintaining a balance of one third of either gender in the posts to elect, deciding that two vice-chairs should be elected to this end. Bernal Jimenez reported that the candidacy of Márcio Bins Ely, of the PDT, Brazil, had been received. The chair of the Electoral Commission asked the meeting for a decision on conducting the election of



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the other vice-chair at this or the next meeting, as on the agenda only one vice-chair was originally foreseen. It was agreed by vote to hold the election of the other vice-chair at the following meeting of the Committee. A vote by secret ballot took place on the candidature of Márcio Bins Ely and he was subsequently elected.

Miguel Vargas, following his election as Chair of the Committee, thanked participants for their confidence and said that he was humbled to assume this responsibility which once, at the Committee's first creation back in 1980, was occupied by a man from his party, the PRD, who had left an indelible imprint on the political history of his country and on our movement in Latin America and the Caribbean, José Francisco Peña Gómez. In turn, Márcio Bins Ely expressed his gratitude, and that of his party, for his election as Vice-Chair and looked forward to working together with all the parties in this Committee.

The first main theme of discussion, **'Strategies and regional policies to strengthen the role of Latin America and the Caribbean in the new political and global economic framework'**, had two introductory speakers, SI Vice-Presidents Bernal Jimenez from the PLN, Costa Rica, and Victor Benoit, from the Union of Haitian Social Democrats. These were followed by many interesting contributions from participants. During the discussions, committee members underlined that globalisation brought with it great challenges and concurred that the region in general had emerged better from the economic crisis which began in 2008 than on previous occasions. It was recalled that the growth forecasts by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC, reflected that the countries of the region had managed to maintain positive growth figures, and the forecasts for the coming years were estimated at around 3%. Nevertheless, they stressed that it was important to be alert and to act promptly to any eventual slow-down in growth and to promote and strengthen innovation, competitiveness and policies to stimulate employment and social protection in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, with decisive action by progressive governments in the implementation of policies which not only allow economically and environmentally sustainable growth, but which also enable the peoples of the region to progress with greater equality and better living conditions for all. Other issues highlighted under this agenda item, were the reform of international institutions, especially the United Nations system, and the need for a multilateralism respectful of international law and equality among nations.

The second main theme, **'The social democratic vision and proposals for overcoming inequality and democratic deficits in the region in building more inclusive and just societies'** was introduced by SI Vice-President Marcelo Ebrard, from the PRD, Mexico, and equally included many productive interventions. Participants stressed that Latin America and the Caribbean continued being a region of serious levels of inequality, and argued that social democratic parties should vigorously press ahead with their efforts to combat poverty, achieve greater inclusion and better living conditions for all citizens. They agreed on the need for institutions and laws that recognise, respect and guarantee people their rights, for which healthy economies are necessary, promoting growth and national development. However, it was pointed out at the same time, that in countries of the region where there is sustained growth and economic dynamism, as in the case of Brazil or Chile, there can be seen in recent times the emergence of social movements that are posing new demands on governments and public policies. Committee members considered that such popular demonstrations often express the desire of people for public policies, institutions and laws which, within the functioning of a market economy, combine the creation of wealth with its adequate distribution and a network of social protection for the present and the future.

generations. This should materialise in the implementation of programmes ranging from quality early education to old age pensions and the care of the environment, as people call for greater solidarity in society and a commitment by their governments to the preservation of the natural and cultural environment for future generations.

Participants agreed that new technologies provide a good tool for our parties to be more effective in listening to the citizens, bringing people closer to politics and strengthening its legitimacy. Concluding this point, committee members agreed to undertake a process to identify key issues in the current work of SI parties throughout the region, upon which to share ideas and experiences for dealing with them. In this endeavour, current issues of concern to people in the region should also be included, as for instance the opinion of SI parties on the proposals to decriminalise some drugs to reduce violence, or making secondary and higher education more accessible to the population, or securing a greater increase in the transfer of resources from carbon emitting countries which generate global warming, to those which suffer the effects.

Following the discussions on the main themes, the Committee heard reports on **the national situation in different countries of the region**. Where progressive parties are currently in government and will be facing elections next year, as in the case of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Uruguay or Brazil, the meeting was informed of the efforts being carried out by the social democratic forces and their prospects for re-election. On the other hand, in countries such as Chile, where SI member parties are in opposition, having been in coalition government for twenty years between 1990 and 2010, it was observed that there was the strong prospect of a return to power in forthcoming elections to be held in November this year. It was noted that in Panama, where elections were due to be held in 2014, the candidate of the SI member party was currently leading the opinion polls. The situation in Haiti was of particular concern, where parliamentary and municipal elections had been deferred since 2011, adversely affecting the normal democratic functioning of that Caribbean nation. The Committee adopted a [Declaration on Haiti](#), calling for a normalisation of the political process and the carrying out of elections before the end of this year.

The meeting concluded with final words from Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller, who thanked all participants for their presence in Jamaica, appreciating their solidarity, and inviting them back for the PNP's Conference in September to celebrate its 75th year of existence.

[List of Participants](#)

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