The Emerging Hemispheric Democracy Regime
Francis Adams

When Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez was detained last year in an attempted military coup, the Organization of American States (OAS) immediately condemned the “alteration of the democratic order” and called for his restoration to power. Chávez was back in the presidential palace within days. Although the OAS was just one voice in a chorus of domestic and international opposition to the attempted coup, it clearly played an influential role in the final outcome. The response of the OAS to the Venezuelan crisis reflects a notable transition within this regional body. The long-standing principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states is gradually giving way to an institutional commitment to democratic governance.

The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states was firmly established at the founding conference of the OAS in 1948. Delegates made sure that the OAS charter contained the following prohibition: “No state or group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other state.” As a consequence, the work of the OAS was largely limited during its first five decades to the maintenance of regional security and the promotion of inter-state cooperation.

In recent years, the OAS commitment to the sovereign rights of member states has declined and greater emphasis is being placed on the promotion and preservation of democratic governance throughout the hemisphere. The centerpiece of this evolving political agenda is the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was adopted in September 2001. The charter declares that the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter goes on to specify steps the OAS will take should the constitutional regime of any member state be threatened or interrupted. If a government believes its constitutional process is at risk, the OAS Secretary General will analyze the situation and submit a full report to the Permanent Council. The council is then empowered to adopt measures to preserve representative governance. The actual interruption of a constitutional regime will result in the immediate convocation of the Permanent Council. The council is then authorized to undertake diplomatic initiatives to restore representative democracy. If these initiatives are not successful, the council can convene a special session of the General Assembly, which is empowered to suspend the member state from the governing bodies of the OAS.
Venezuela

A post-strike economic and political crackdown by the administration of Hugo Chávez is underway in Venezuela causing domestic and international concern. The general strike, which crippled the national economy and deepened political polarization, ran out of steam at the end of January, leaving Chávez holding most of the “political cards.” Chávez implemented controversial economic reforms and announced retaliatory measures against his opponents throughout February.

Estimates suggest that the economy may contract by as much as 30 percent this year as a result of the strike. The measures taken by Chávez include fixed exchange rates and restricted availability of dollars, as well as price controls for staple foods. Critics argue that these controls leave the economy vulnerable to black marketeering, corruption and ultimately currency devaluation. Opposition private sector representatives also see these controls as targeted sanctions, preventing them from importing as well as limiting profits and thereby forcing them out of business.

Chávez has begun taking retaliatory measures against his opponents and arresting strike leaders and key opposition figures, including Carlos Fernández, a strike leader and head of FEDECAMARAS, Venezuela’s most prominent business federation. Although it is alleged that some Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA) strikers not only walked off the job, but also intentionally destroyed software and documents required to run the oil company, reports suggest that the government is seeking to intimidate its political opponents rather than impartially applying the rule of law to criminal actions.

Chávez has also initiated the investigation of private media outlets, which were politically biased in their coverage of the crisis, potentially leading to a revocation of their broadcasting licenses. In response, the OAS (Organization of American States) expressed official concern about the threat this potentially poses to freedom of expression. Although the international community is still engaged, most recently the United States, the United States and the OAS Secretary General César Gaviria for “interfering” in “sovereign affairs.”

The democracy agenda of the OAS is the product of forces both internal and external to Latin America. Clearly the region’s gradual transition from military to civilian regimes has been of critical importance. Today’s elected leaders have a fairly compelling self-interest to make every effort possible to preserve representative democracy. Collective measures to defend the constitutional order help lessen the threat of military intervention at home. There are also powerful grassroots pressures to preserve democratic governance. Painful memories of dictatorship and repression account for the near universal desire to ensure military regimes do not reemerge anywhere in the hemisphere.

The end of the Cold War has also altered institutional priorities. During the period of superpower competition, the United States, which exercises considerable influence within the OAS, was preoccupied with countering revolutionary movements in Latin America. Washington frequently viewed authoritarian regimes as both reliable allies and the only alternative to revolutionary change. With the end of the Cold War and subsiding of insurrectionary pressures, the perceived need to support such regimes has diminished. In fact, constitutional democracies are now viewed as more likely guarantors of regional stability.

The democracy agenda can also be traced to broader normative changes in the global system. In the contemporary era governments are only considered legitimate members of the world community to the extent that they respect democratic principles. There is also greater recognition, especially within the international...
Argentines are finding that the long awaited agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reached in January 2003 will impair rather than improve their immediate circumstances. The price of the rollover on $US 3.8 billion of debt owed before August 31, 2003, plus a new credit line worth $US 2.9 billion to cover other outstanding debts to the IMF, includes dramatic increases in electricity and gas rates (50 percent) and action on the foreclosure of mortgages (236,000 homes are at risk of repossession).

This month President Duhalde announced utility rate increases of 9 percent, which are expected to rise to the levels demanded by the IMF. The IMF also required that Argentina’s 24 provinces achieve a primary surplus of 0.4 percent (against the 0.5 percent deficit registered in 2002) and that they stop issuing provincial currencies and bonds, which are currently being used to pay local government employees and suppliers. The rationale for the January 2003 accord was the need to stabilize the country before presidential elections in April 27. Instead, the agreement appears to be creating the conditions for future social and political strain.

On the electoral front, the main development in February was the confirmation of Leopoldo Moreau as presidential candidate for the Union Cívica Radical (UCR). The UCR re-ran its primaries in several northern provinces following accusations of electoral fraud made by the other candidate for the UCR nomination, Rodolfo Terragno. Moreau, a long time congressman for the UCR, is currently polling 1% of popular support and has only a few weeks left to catch up with presidential hopefuls Néstor Kirchner (17.6% vote), Carlos Menem (15%), Adolfo Rodríguez Sáa (14.2%), Elisa Carrió (12.6%) and Ricardo López Murphy (8.1%) (La Nación Online, 22/02/03).

Despite these shortcomings, the democracy agenda of the OAS is clearly a step in the right direction. The regional body has helped establish representative democracy as a normative obligation among member states. Latin American governments are thus more accountable to the international community and, most importantly, to their own people.

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New Politics, Old Protests in Bolivia

Judy Meltzer

Violent riots in the streets of La Paz left nearly three dozen dead and over a hundred injured as a dozen government buildings were seized and set on fire by thousands of striking police officers and civilians protesting the imposition of a new income tax by President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. The tax hike, perceived as a result of the conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), coincided with demands for a pay raise by a restless national police force. Although the President withdrew the proposed tax, the political crisis continues, with the Central Bolivia Workers Union organizing a 48-hour general strike and demanding the resignation of the President and Vice-President. President Sánchez de Lozada has little political room to manoeuvre. On the one hand he faces strong internal opposition to austerity reforms from the left, and on the other, a growing deficit that must be reduced in order to meet the conditions for a bridging loan from the IMF.

In a country characterized by poverty and the political and economic exclusion of its indigenous majority, social protest has become a way of life. Despite being one of the first countries in the region to adopt neoliberal reforms, over 60 percent of Bolivians continue to live below the national poverty line and blame the failure of these reforms, combined with imposed eradication of coca-crops - an important rural livelihood - for their continued plight. In a historically exclusionary political system, social mobilization has been one of the few options available to express popular dissent. This most recent incident stands out, however, for two reasons: it was one of the most violent demonstrations since Bolivia’s turbulent transition from military dictatorship to civilian rule in 1982, and it comes in the wake of a reconfiguration of national politics heralded as a new era of inclusion for indigenous and peasant populations.

Recent shifts in the political landscape had lead many to feel optimistic about a new era of inclusive democratic politics in Bolivia. That is, although mobilization might persist in the political bolkit of Bolivians, it would be mitigated by the fairly dramatic insertion of the indigenous populations into mainstream politics. Landmark elections in the fall of 2002 had transformed political representation in Bolivia. Two parties representing indigenous and peasant populations, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) headed by Evo Morales, leader of a peasant coca-growers movement, and Movimiento Indígena Pachakutik (MIP), won 27 percent of the vote. MAS placed second overall, less than 2 percent behind the winning Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR) party of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada.

This new configuration of political actors altered a longstanding system in which power had been rotated among three traditional parties. Although this system had brought stability, it came at the expense of meaningful representation of the majority of Bolivia’s marginalized electorate. Political reconfiguration in 2002 was attributed to various factors: the decline of several traditional parties following changes leadership; the “coming of age” of indigenous and peasant movements, for which institutional decentralization had increased opportunities for political participation; cross-sectoral disenchantment with the failure of neoliberal economic reforms to address the highest levels of poverty and inequality in South America, which was exacerbated by the elimination of coca crops; and perceived intervention by the U.S. in domestic politics (Van Cott; Mayorga, FOCAL Andean Forum 2002 )

Sánchez de Lozada has been simultaneously attempting to placate national and international political interests. He has reached an agreement with the IMF on a new economic framework for 2003, and has taken significant steps to quell domestic unrest, including a cabinet shuffle, a freeze on tax increases and consideration of the resumption of some level of coca production. However, the political crisis has maintained momentum. Calls from heterogeneous social sectors and leaders of the opposition for the resignation of the President signal that despite new forms of representation, the poverty-stricken, politically disillusioned population does not have the confidence in or time to wait for by-the-book institutional change. Unfortunately, calls from both inside and outside the formal political system for the resignation of the President threaten to derail the democratic process in Bolivia.

Notwithstanding different contexts and constituencies, parallels between the political crises in Bolivia and Venezuela stand out. Attempts to force the resignation of the president appear to have superseded the threat of military coups as the means to bring about political change in South America. Although this may be testament to the durability of political democracy in the region, elections in rapid succession do not present a viable solution, either for redressing poverty and inequality, or for long-term democratic stability.

This latest crisis also brings urgency to questions
about the role of the international community and multilateral mechanisms in supporting socio-economic development and preventing democratic rupture. In particular, it underscores the need for the OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter, still in its infancy, to build upon experience to date to enhance its capacity to prevent and to mediate constitutional solutions in situations of political deadlock, at the request of national governments. It is important that growing enthusiasm for the Charter and the new brand of multilateralism that it represents be accompanied by an equal, if not greater, focus on the underlying issues that are bringing democracy to the brink of rupture—persistent poverty, inequality, inadequate social services, and an absence of “everyday” citizenship rights.

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**Why Impeachment Failed in Paraguay**

Paul Haslam

After months of speculation, the Senate of Paraguay voted not to impeach President Luis González Macchi on February 11. The Senate hearings had formally begun on January 23 when President González Macchi was accused of failing to perform his duties, incompetence, torture and generalized corruption. Despite the fact that not a single Senator defended his administration, González Macchi was able to attract 18 votes, three more than the minimum required to prevent his impeachment. Although all parties were divided in the vote, significant factions of the ruling Colorado Party (ANR) chose to stand by the President (ABC Color Digital, 11/02/03).

How was a president, who was so unpopular that even his ministers and top ranking civil servants were unwilling to defend him and so irrelevant that he reportedly had few meetings to fill his schedule, able to beat off the impeachment? (ABC Color Digital, 30/12/02)

The power game that was evolving in advance of the presidential elections set for April 27, 2003 is more important in explaining this outcome than the validity of the charges levelled against the President.

Two issues dominated the power game around the impeachment process: concerns over who would replace González Macchi once he was impeached; and the political manoeuvres of the recently selected presidential candidate for the ruling Colorados, Nicanor Duarte Frutos.

### Who Replaces González Macchi?

The question of who would replace González Macchi was a long-standing reason behind the unpopular president’s successful hold on power. According to the constitution, the first-in-line to replace him was the vice-president followed by the president of the Senate. As long as Julio César Franco of the opposition Liberal Party (PLRA) (elected in August 2000) had occupied

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**Chile**

On January 14, 2003, the Supreme Court voted to strip five Concertación deputies of their parliamentary immunity as a result of an investigation into allegations of bribery occurring at a vehicle-testing centre in Rancagua. The deputies affected were Juan Pablo Letelier (Socialist Party), Víctor Manuel Rebolledo (Party for Democracy), Jaime Jiménez (Christian Democrats), Cristián Pareto (Christian Democrats) and Eduardo Lagos (Radical Party). The ruling was not an indication of guilt, but rather that the Supreme Court considered that there was sufficient evidence to proceed to a criminal investigation. The ruling deprived the five deputies of their parliamentary privileges and the government of Ricardo Lagos was effectively reduced to a majority of one vote in the Chamber of Deputies (See Spotlight December 2002).

However, the investigation into the bribery scandal by Judge Carlos Aránguiz and Judge Gloria Ana Chevesich threatens to further implicate high-ranking members of the governing coalition. In connection with his initial investigation of the so-called “GATE S.A. case”, Aránguiz ordered the arrest of Carlos Cruz, a former minister of Public Works described as a “technical operator” for President Ricardo Lagos (El Mercurio, 9/01/03). GATE S.A. was a consulting company that allegedly channelled public funds and payments from private subcontractors into salary top-ups for public officials and the political campaigns of the Concertación. Lagos has committed himself to defending Cruz.

In mid-February Judge Aránguiz announced the expansion of his investigation of the bribery scandal into the misappropriation of public money and the use of Minister’s discretionary funds (El Mercurio, 14/02/03).
the vice-presidency, the ruling Colorado party had been unwilling to impeach González Macchi (also a Colorado) because it meant passing the presidency to the opposition. Franco resigned his position in October 2002 in order to devote himself to his bid to be president. His resignation once again opened the possibility of impeachment if the Congress could agree on a vice-presidential successor to Franco or could accept the current President of the Senate (next-in-line after the V.P.), Juan Carlos Galaverna, as President of the nation.

However, the coalition of forces in Congress made both these scenarios unlikely. President of the Senate, Galaverna was in charge of calling a joint session of Congress to select a new vice-president. He refused to do so as the only vice-presidential candidate likely to win the support of the majority of party factions was one that was sympathetic to the presidential aspirations of exiled strongman General Lino Oviedo. Keeping such a candidate out of the vice-presidency (and therefore out of the presidency should González Macchi be impeached) was crucial to both Galaverna and the Colorado party leadership under Nicanor Duarte Frutos. A pro-Oviedo vice-president might have been able to lift the ban on Oviedo’s participation in the upcoming presidential elections and represented a significant threat to the Colorado Party’s continuity in power.

Given the failure to select a vice-president, the decision to impeach González Macchi meant sending Juan Carlos Galaverna to the presidency. However, the lack of support for Galaverna from the party factions in the Senate – and his own party - was a determining factor in the failed impeachment.

The Interests of the Colorado Party Leadership

Nicanor Duarte Frutos, the presidential candidate for the Colorados, was strongly in favour of the status quo and opposed both the selection of new vice-president and the impeachment of González Macchi – for reasons related to his electoral campaign.

Duarte Frutos did not want another member of the Colorado Party, namely Juan Carlos Galaverna, occupying the presidency for the three months prior to the presidential elections on April 27. In this scenario, the President of the Senate represented a potential adversary – a threat that was underlined by reports that once Galaverna had gained the presidency he was planning to suspend the upcoming elections (ABC Color Digital, 12/02/03). On the other hand, with González Macchi isolated and irrelevant in the presidency, Nicanor Duarte Frutos would be able to mount a full frontal attack on the government without being compromised by his association with it. This strategy, of course, depended on him avoiding being identified as the central architect of the impeachment’s failure.

Duarte Frutos’ interest in preserving the status quo also corresponded with the interests of other political actors. As long as Galaverna, a representative of the oficialista faction of the

Guyana

The recent death of Desmond Hoyte, former president and leader of the Guyanese opposition party, the People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), on 22 December 2002, may provide some new and much needed momentum to overcome the present political impasse.

Since March 2002, Hoyte and his party had walked away from the peace dialogue table with the current administration of Bharrat Jagdeo (People’s Progressive Party/Civic - PPP/C), when it became clear that the government would not accept the PNC/R’s power-sharing proposal. The PNC/R’s proposal aimed to reduce racial tensions and violence by including both parties in the cabinet according to proportional representation. As it currently stands, the winning party has no obligation to include the opposition in the cabinet and its executive committees (LAN, Caribbean Report, 03/02, 01/03).

Hoyte’s reputation was built on the economic recovery experienced by Guyana during his presidency from 1985 to 1992. In spite of this success, Hoyte remained unable to reduce the racial tensions that characterize the political debate. Both leading parties play the racial card to win votes. Traditionally, the Afro-Guyanese population backs the PNC/R while the Indo-Guyanese population supports the PPP/C.

On February 23, 2003, the PNC/R elected its new leader, Mr. Robert Corbin, who accepted to meet with President Jagdeo. It is anticipated that during this meeting both parties would resume the dialogue, which has been stalled since last year. It is hoped that relations between the government and the opposition will improve as a result.
Colorado Party (ANR), was next in the line of succession some opposed to the ANR leadership would vote against the impeachment. Furthermore, Luis González Macchi himself could be counted on to use political patronage to sway a few votes. In the final analysis, this constellation of political interests came together to frustrate the impeachment.

As a result, Luis González Macchi will remain as President of Paraguay until the elections of April 27. At that point in time, the issue will once again be reopened. Paraguayan law requires that the change of government will not occur until August 15. Faced with a four-month wait before assuming power, the newly elected and newly legitimated president may well try to negotiate González Macchi’s resignation in exchange for protection from prosecution.

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Panama

Cooperation efforts between Central American nations were strengthened in February as Panama finalized free trade agreements with the other Central American nations and hosted a summit with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe in response to trans-border problems related to Colombia’s ongoing conflict.

Panama, which is being promoted as a prospective location for the headquarters of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), is negotiating free trade agreements with Central America and the Dominican Republic on February third and fifth respectively. It is estimated that trade between Panama and Central America amounted to $US 330m in 2002. The agreement with the Dominican Republic will allow over 100 products from both countries to be traded free of tariffs (Latin American Newsletter 05/02/03).

Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso also hosted a summit on February twelfth that brought together the Central American and Colombian presidents to discuss trans-border issues related to Colombia’s civil conflict. In mid-January approximately 50 Colombian paramilitaries infiltrated the small villages of Paya, Púcuro and Boca de Cupe in Panama and assassinated four indigenous caciques (chiefs). The main objective of this meeting was to design a common strategy to combat rebel groups associated with terrorism in Colombia as well as to analyze the drug trafficking in the region. It is anticipated that the Central American presidents will sign acuerdos regionales efectivos in order to strengthen regional cooperation on these issues.

Canada Supports De-mining in Central America

Claudia Paguaga

Canada reaffirmed its commitment to the Ottawa Convention and its leadership role in the promotion of peace and democracy in the hemisphere by announcing the donation of $CAD 250,000 to the Organization of American States (OAS) Program for the Elimination of Antipersonnel Mines in Central America in February. The Canadian representative to the OAS, Paul Durand, declared that one of the priorities of the Canadian government is to support the goal of a hemisphere free of landmines.

The Organization of American States began addressing landmine issues in Central America in the mid-1980s when these nations struggled to resolve internal conflicts. During these conflicts, landmines were placed around military facilities and in rural areas. Even after the peace accords were signed in the 1990s, the destructive legacy of landmines continues to threaten the lives of many in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala.

In 1991, the Secretary General of the OAS, with technical advice from the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), requested the assistance of Member States and permanent observers to launch the Assistance Program for De-mining Central America (PADCA) under the auspices of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD). Since the inception of the PADCA in the early 1990s, several countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela, the United States and Canada among others, have donated financial support and equipment and have supervised several de-mining operations. As the overall goals of clearing landmines have evolved, the OAS expanded PADCA into the Comprehensive Action Against Antipersonnel Mines (AICMA) program - a multi-faceted program that would tackle all
Reinvigorating Canadian Policy Towards Cuba

Cristina Warren

On January 22 of this year, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham invited all Canadians to participate in a national dialogue on how Canada’s foreign policy efforts and resources can best promote Canadian values and interests, determine what should be Canada’s place in the world and set long-term foreign policy directions. The Dialogue on Foreign Policy consultations will be carried out through public meetings and input from citizens, parliamentarians and experts, as well as through an internet discussion forum. In June 2003, the Minister will report to Canadians on this consultation.

This article is a response to this invitation and highlights the need for renewed Canadian leadership on advancing human rights and a peaceful economic and political transition in Cuba - the stated objectives of Canada’s policy towards the island.

The last significant public consultation on Canadian foreign policy took place in 1994 and 1995, initiated by the then new Liberal government of Jean Chrétien. At that time, many Canadians deeply interested in Canada’s policy with Cuba were pressing the Canadian government for a closer relationship with the island, the reinstatement of development assistance, as well as criticizing U.S. policy toward Cuba. Widespread support was expressed for the introduction of constructive engagement in June 1994 as Canada’s policy towards Cuba. Building on Canada’s longstanding tradition of using its relationship with Cuba to symbolically highlight its distinctiveness from the United States, the government challenged Washington’s hard-line approach toward Cuba. Nicaragua and Guatemala pose the greatest challenge to mine clearance in Central America because approximately 8,000 unexploded devices are still scattered throughout Guatemalan territory and approximately 73,000 mines remain to be located and destroyed in Nicaragua. Regardless of this alarming reality, according to OAS officials, it is expected that Nicaragua and Guatemala will be free of landmines by 2004 and 2005 respectively.

It is evident that much work remains to be done in terms of having a landmine-free hemisphere. Even though Central American countries have made a significant commitment to eliminate the mine problem, their efforts require the continued support of the international community in order to succeed. With sustained assistance from the donor community, such as the contributions to the OAS program made by Canada, France and Italy, the goal of making the hemisphere a mine-free zone is feasible.

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providing humanitarian aid, advice and technical assistance. According to the Canadian government, these ties would underpin an orderly transition in the island’s economic and political spheres. Criticism of U.S. policy towards Cuba, particularly the Helms-Burton Act, formed an important component of Canada’s policy.

A lot has changed since the 1994-95 review. Engagement policies have become the standard for most Western countries dealing with Cuba. At the same time, the political atmosphere in Cuba had clearly hardened by 1997, ending a period of uneven progress toward economic and, to a much lesser degree, political reform. Prime Minister Chrétien ordered a review of Canada’s bilateral activities in March 1999 to protest the jailing of four prominent dissidents, resulting in a number of adjustments to Canada’s policy of constructive engagement. These included modifying Canada’s development program priorities (including terminating most human rights programs that dealt directly with the Cuban government), ending Canada’s facilitation of Cuba’s reintegration into the Western hemispheric community, reducing the profile of Cuba in Canadian foreign policy and public diplomacy and suspending high-level contacts. More recently, in the Fall of 2002, senior-level contacts were renewed, signalling a diplomatic thaw despite the lack of progress in human rights or any improvement in the hardened political climate that culminated in Canada’s March 1999 policy review.

With regard to Canada’s relations with the rest of the hemisphere, beyond Mexico, this relationship has not yet achieved a priority comparable to the more established relationships with Europe, Asia and, especially, the United States. What is clear, however, is that the success of Canada’s deepened relationship with the rest of the hemisphere will depend on real progress in economic and governance issues throughout the region. Accordingly, if Canada is serious about becoming more closely linked with the Americas, difficult regional challenges such as advancing human rights and laying the groundwork for a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba should become renewed priorities.

This would require that Canada’s current subdued, low-profile approach to constructive engagement be reinvigorated with renewed leadership – in order to make much more effective use of the numerous foreign policy assets Canada can draw on. Its credibility as a democratic, bilingual, multicultural, prosperous, free and open society that strives for the universal realization of human rights and a high standard of living for all, as well as its historic independent foreign policy stance towards Cuba (vis-à-vis the United States), its role as architect of constructive engagement as a policy approach towards the island and its past leadership on this issue, are important sources of influence, both inside Cuba and in the realm of international public opinion. This is particularly so given the Cuban government’s interest in seeking and enhancing its international recognition and respectability. Although Canada’s current policy framework provides a good foundation to work towards achieving its stated policy goals, the following adjustments are recommended in order to complement and leverage the impact of the policy:

**Working Towards Advancing Human Rights**

Canada has made excellent use of multilateral channels at the United Nations General Assembly and at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) to express its concern about the US embargo towards Cuba and the situation of political and civil rights in the island. In April 2002, for the eleventh year running, Canada co-sponsored a resolution at the UNCHR encouraging Cuba to improve its record on political and civil rights.

One of Canada’s priorities, however, should be to ensure that the promotion and protection of human rights is better integrated into its bilateral relations with Cuba. Although Canadian government officials repeatedly assure that they bring up the topic of human rights at every high-level meeting with Cuban government officials (most recently during the November 2002 visit of Secretary of State Denis Paradis who raised concerns about the rights of a number of imprisoned Cuban journalists), these concerns should not be left solely to quiet diplomacy. Rather, Canada’s concern for human rights should also be expressed publicly.

**Supporting Cuba’s Emerging Independent Civil Society**

Comprised of political and human rights organizations, independent journalists, libraries, labour unions, professional organizations, study centres, economic cooperatives and environmental groups, the democracy movement inside Cuba has gained significant strength and momentum since the early 1990s in spite of the significant obstacles put in place by the Cuban government. Despite the varying institutional missions and ideological positions of these groups, the vast majority of these organizations strive toward a peaceful transition to democracy. A number of concrete proposals and initiatives for change have been made over the course of the last
few years. The growing momentum of this movement since the 1990s coincides with Cuba’s increased linkages with the international community since the end of the Cold War, highlighting the vital role international actors have played and can play in the future in legitimizing and protecting this movement.

Canadian development cooperation activities related to civil society focus on those groups legally recognized by the Cuban state, such as a number of tolerated non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and religious groups. Activities involving civil society groups not legally recognized in Cuba include regular monitoring of the cases of imprisoned dissidents and meetings with a range of Cuban representatives, including human rights activists and opposition figures, by officials at the Canadian Embassy in Havana. High-level Canadian delegations to Cuba also often meet with prominent dissidents (however, these meetings are not normally included in their official agendas). While these activities are useful, much more could be done to support these groups inside Cuba simply by raising public awareness of their existence and by publicly supporting calls for dialogue and peaceful political change inside Cuba. The European Parliament’s recent awarding of its prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas is but one example of how this could be done.

Upon closer inspection, however, this “trend” must be questioned. In most cases, after taking power these same leaders rushed to reassure the international financial community that major economic policy shifts were not on the horizon. Fashion sense is leading political sense and even the most “radical” leaders have shed military fatigues on the campaign trail for business suits in the presidency.

At the same time, these leaders are a heterogeneous group with distinct political backgrounds and varying commitments to democracy that makes it difficult to consider them as part of the same “new left.” Leaders like Lagos and Lula are beyond reproach in their sophisticated social democratic commitment to building democratic institutions. The populism of Chávez and Rodríguez Sáa is much more problematic, but overall the “new left” demonstrates a commitment to democracy that is, in many cases, stronger than the right (WNEZ Radio, 4/11/02).

What is new in the “new left” is the agenda of democratic incorporation. Just as the classic era of populism represented an attempt to incorporate (and often control) the organized few years. The growing momentum of this movement since the 1990s coincides with Cuba’s increased linkages with the international community since the end of the Cold War, highlighting the vital role international actors have played and can play in the future in legitimizing and protecting this movement.

Recent political changes in Latin America have been hailed across the political spectrum as evidence of a “return of the left” in Latin America – described by detractors as a potential threat to regional economic stability and heralded by the critics of economic globalization as signalling the decline of neoliberalism.

At first glance, there appears to be ample evidence to support these claims. Most prominent is the “Bolivarian Revolution” promoted by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and the convincing presidential victory by Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva in Brazil. In Ecuador, left-leaning Lucio Gutiérrez, won the presidency through an alliance with the country’s largest indigenous organization. In Bolivia, indigenous and peasant-based parties with an anti-neoliberal platform won nearly a third of the vote in the national elections of 2002, one such party placing only two percent behind

President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In Peru, former president Alan García and his left wing Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) party won almost half of the regional governments in November 2002. In Chile, the Concertación government has been led by Socialist Ricardo Lagos since 2000 and on the eve of elections in Argentina the “anti-imperialist” Adolfo Rodríguez Sáa has been topping the polls for months.

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The political shifts in the region represent neither a return to an old left of the 1960s nor the emergence of a thoroughly new one. The ideological and Marxist-inspired agenda of the old left is gone. The “new left” is only unified by its rejection of the current neoliberal model, known as the Washington Consensus, not a commitment to a new one. And yet, that rejection is not ideological in itself, but experientially based in the enduring problems of poverty, political and economic exclusion, and limited opportunities experienced by the majority of Latin Americans.

What is new in the “new left” is the agenda of democratic incorporation. Just as the classic
era of populism represented an attempt to incorporate (and often control) the organized working classes, the “new left” in Latin America is also looking to incorporate the politically and economically excluded, this time from the informal sector and among indigenous groups. Some of the new leaders such as Chávez, Gutiérrez and Lula personify that journey. In the Andes, the decline of traditional elite-based parties and their ability to mobilize the vote has opened a space for new political actors from disadvantaged groups to burst on the scene. Without working parties, democracy has become more direct bringing a new set of problems and possibilities.

The “new left” is thus neither new nor left. Its agenda is the incorporation of the excluded into the mainstream and its appeal is found in the failure of the Washington Consensus reforms to significantly raise living standards in the hemisphere. It has potential to deepen democracy and focus policymakers on poverty and inequality in the region.