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Dennis Chavez and The Inter-American Ideal, 1936-1962

John Granato II

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John T Granato II

Candidate

History

Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

Jason Scott Smith, PHD , Chairperson

Judy Bieber, PHD

Linda B Hall, PHD

**DENNIS CHAVEZ
AND
THE INTER-AMERICAN IDEAL
1936-1962**

by

**JOHN T GRANATO II
BACHELOR OF ARTS
HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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History**

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DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to my loving mother and father who never lost faith in me through whatever challenges came my way. Their wisdom and love have, and always will be with me.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the amount of research conducted on the accomplishments of Dennis Chavez, U.S. Senator from New Mexico, little is known about his activities in Latin America. Most of the studies completed to date focus on Chavez's domestic accomplishments, creating an image of a man who primarily focused on New Mexico issues. This study seeks to expand the image of Dennis Chavez to incorporate his exploits in Latin America through an analysis of documents located in his papers, the Congressional Record, and various periodicals. An analysis of the available documentation reveals that Dennis Chavez created a vision that the entire Western Hemisphere would be united as allies, trading partners, and neighbors based on the ideals of the Good Neighbor Policy. From the mid 1930's to his death in 1962, Dennis Chavez used the tenets of Inter-American Solidarity under the Good Neighbor Policy as a template for his vision of United States and Latin American relations. Dennis Chavez's rhetoric changed during the years leading up to World War II, during World War II, and Cold War periods, but his vision of a united Western Hemisphere remained the same. However, despite his efforts in Latin

America, Chavez failed to make any significant changes in United States-Latin American relations, leaving behind small success and an incomplete vision. In combing through his papers, Congressional records, State Department records, and memoirs, this project will contribute to the ongoing scholarly dialogue on Dennis Chavez.

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Chapter One Introduction

Dennis Chavez is often cast in the light of a New Mexico *patrón*, who fought to develop New Mexico through some of the most tumultuous times in United States history. He was a champion of the New Deal, and a great manipulator of federal programs. He also was known for abuse of power and nepotism, but these were overshadowed by the positive impact he had on the lives of many New Mexicans as well as citizens of the United States, and various Latin American countries. It is this positive impact toward Latin America that I hope to explore to show how Dennis Chavez worked tirelessly to better the world of his generation.

Dennis Chavez was born and raised in New Mexico. His heart was focused on raising New Mexico from the frontier territory he grew up in to a legitimate and strong member of the United States. One does not have to look far to see the impact he left on New Mexico. The highways New Mexicans drive on, the reservoirs and dams that control and secure their water, and the National Forests that give New Mexico the name “The Land of Enchantment,” were all materially impacted by Dennis Chavez’s efforts.

The problem with this description of Dennis Chavez is that it is too one sided and incomplete. Dennis Chavez, by the end of his life, was one of the most effective Senators in New Mexico history. At the same time he was working to forward the cause of New Mexico, he too was working to champion the people of Latin America. When he first went to Congress, Chavez was quickly convinced that the Big Stick Policy and Dollar Diplomacy were not effective, if not a menace, to understanding Latin America. When

Franklin D. Roosevelt and Cordell Hull began the Good Neighbor Policy, Dennis Chavez supported it, and used it to advance his plan for Latin America. His exposure to the Good Neighbor Policy was the beginning of his interest in, and life-long support for, cultivating a close relationship with the other nations in our hemisphere.

The Good Neighbor Policy is one of the well-known topics in United States history. This was a concerted effort on the part of the United States to abandon intervention in Latin American affairs, expand commerce, foster scientific and cultural exchange, and act in general as a “Good Neighbor.” Most of the scholars agree that the primary agents of the Good Neighbor Policy were Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Sumner Welles, and Cordell Hull—with each bringing their own personality and expertise to Latin American diplomacy. Perspectives vary on who began the Good Neighbor Policy, when it began, and its main purpose. For instance, Edward Gurrant’s early work *Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy* argued that Roosevelt began the Good Neighbor Policy for the sole purpose of bringing “mutual benefits to the entire Hemisphere.”¹ Bryce Wood in his book, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, stated that Hoover began the Good Neighbor Policy, and Roosevelt carried it forward for primarily economic reasons based on the idea of reciprocity. Irwin F. Gellman in turn espoused in, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, that Roosevelt did have a clear policy specifically targeted towards Latin America. He further highlighted that the policy emerged from reactions to world developments both in Latin America and abroad. Finally, Frederick Pike in his book, *FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos*, acknowledged the efforts of Coolidge and Hoover, but argued that under Roosevelt the

¹ Edward O. Guarrant, *Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy*, (Albuquerque, Nm, The University of New Mexico Press, 1950), 212.

Good Neighbor Policy took shape and was carried forward for economic, security and political reasons.

In *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, Guerrant provided a survey of the essential features of the Latin American policy of the Roosevelt administration. It was one of the first attempts to provide a comprehensive analysis of the full story. He attempted to demonstrate that the vast majority of the statements and actions made by key officials of the Roosevelt administration fit into five major categories: the abandonment of intervention, recognition of new governments, quest for law, expanding commerce, and cultural and scientific relations. Guerrant assumed that these statements and actions were a part of a well thought out vision toward Latin America. A significant portion of the book deals with the Inter-American system, peace initiatives, reciprocal trade agreements, and the exchange of ideas. The book is primarily a chronological description of events covering the period from 1939 to 1945, and offers little analysis. However, Guerrant shifted the discussion from a topical approach to a chronological approach, which he argued, was done to “emphasize the tremendous influence of World War II on the Latin American policy,” and presented “a more accurate picture of the Good Neighbor Policy from 1933 to 1945.”²

Starting with Montevideo in 1933, Guerrant analyzed the various Inter-American conferences, with significant attention paid to Argentina, the expropriation of United States oil properties in Mexico, and the general policy of non-intervention. Guerrant espoused that the “keystone” of the Good Neighbor Policy was Roosevelt’s hands off policy toward Latin America. He remarked that from the time Roosevelt was inaugurated

² Guerrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, VII.

in 1933 to his death in 1945 the United States strictly adhered to the idea of nonintervention. He also argued that the Inter-American Conferences played a crucial role all the way through the Truman administration culminating in the publication of the “Blue Book” by the State Department in 1946. The “Blue Book” was a systematic analysis of the Argentine problem in regards to World War II. Guarrant also provided a concise analysis of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements. He then moved on to the impact of Roosevelt’s science, technical, and cultural programs. Finally, Guarrant discussed the wartime policy of the United States in which he maintains the United States achieved most of its goals in Latin America. As an early work on the subject, Guarrant provided a good survey of the major developments within the Good Neighbor Policy. However, there was much work to be done on the subject.

In *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, Bryce Wood traced the origins of the Good Neighbor Policy from the intervention in Nicaragua in 1926-27 to its final days after the death of Roosevelt. He argued that the public reaction to “Imperialism” spurred a new evaluation of the United States Latin American policy in the late 1920s. Wood stated, “At the end of World War I, the United States found itself in an unprecedented position with the twenty countries of Latin America.”³ The power of the United States in Latin America was unchallenged and unrivaled by any other power around the world, especially when it came to the Panama Canal. Because the United States was primarily unchecked, many Latin American republics distrusted and feared the “Colossus to the North.” Because of this distrust, Wood argued that relations between North and South America were deteriorating and that the origins of the Good Neighbor Policy are found in

³ Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good neighbor Policy*, (New York, WW Norton Company Inc. 1961), 3.

the Hoover administration which attempted to improve relations in 1927 after a serious situation in Nicaragua.

Wood claimed that, “the intervention in Nicaragua...soon became a complicated and difficult undertaking, and was the principal experience that brought about durable and significant changes in policy before 1933.”⁴ The significance of this event, Wood states, “becomes apparent when it is remembered that with the Peace of *Tipitapa* in 1927 there commenced a period of about thirty years in which the United States refrained from the use of its armed forces to impose its will upon the nations of Latin America.”⁵ This affair and the “war scare” gave the Coolidge and Hoover administrations reason enough to abandon an interventionist policy in Latin America. Wood also suggests that the Roosevelt administration only followed suit after a bad experience in Cuba.

By 1928 it became apparent that the United States needed a set of new principles to guide its policy in Latin America. The Monroe Doctrine, as a guide, was based on a threat to the Western Hemisphere from abroad. Also, military intervention became very costly, both monetarily and politically. Wood claimed that the shift in policy from the old policy to a new one was born more out of experience and disenchantment than some intellectual analysis or calculation.

Wood further asserted that even though the shift began with the Hoover administration it was the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration that made significant changes in policy that came to be known as the Good Neighbor Policy. He emphasized that the Good Neighbor Policy was worked out in steps and was not a coherent self-contained policy that was well thought out and executed. Wood saw the actions of

⁴ Wood, *The Making of the Good neighbor Policy*, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Roosevelt, Hull and Welles as a systematic retreat from the defense of United States businesses' property rights in search of good will in Latin America.

Wood outlined three principal aspects of the Good Neighbor Policy. First, was the discussion of nonintervention and noninterference—that is the United States would not undertake further military action against any Latin American countries, nor use its influence to interfere or direct their internal policies. Second was the failure of reciprocity from Latin American republics. Wood argued that once nonintervention was accepted, policymakers struggled to answer the question of how to protect the lives and property of United States citizens and promote democracy within Latin America without the use of force. Eventually, Wood postulated, they settled on the idea of reciprocity. Reciprocity in the case of the Good Neighbor Policy was the idea that if the United States did not intervene militarily or interfere in their sovereign rights, Latin American republics would in turn respect the property and lives of the United States. Unfortunately this ideal of reciprocity was ineffective because it was too slanted towards the United States and Latin American Countries did not trust the United States had their best interests in mind. Ultimately it became necessary for the United States to adopt another set of policies. The final aspect of the Good Neighbor Policy was Pacific Protection, or the settlement of disputes about properties expropriated through negotiation and arbitration. Once the use of force to resolve property disputes was no longer an option, the State Department induced those private individuals and corporations adversely affected by property disputes in Latin America to change their practices and policies in order to fit within the overall interests of the United States. This phase of the good Neighbor Policy unfolded from 1933 to the advent of World War II.

Irwin F. Gellman's addition to the dialogue, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945*, reiterated the primary claims of Bryce Woods and Edward Guerrant. Gellman asserted that the Republican efforts in the 1920's did not constitute a clearly stated and executed policy, and only during the Roosevelt administration was a clear policy was formed. Gellman further argued that the Good Neighbor Policy was not a well thought out set of actions, but a series of reactions to developments and circumstances in Latin America and Europe. He further argued that the term "Good Neighbor Policy" was an accident of rhetoric, but provided a convenient umbrella to lump the numerous changes in policy towards Latin America.

Another aspect of Gellman's work is the assertion that Roosevelt's efforts in Latin America should not be viewed outside the context of other international developments. For instance, he explained how the developments in Europe leading up to World War II created an environment where it was more acceptable to support Western Hemisphere regionalism instead of more European entanglement. He describes how Roosevelt could gain support for his Latin American policies in Congress and in the public much easier than he could gain support for his policies in Europe.

Gellman, like most Good Neighbor authors, maintained that the primary aspects of the Good Neighbor Policy were the abandonment of interventionist policies, the initiation of economic measures that would converge during World War II into a distinct foreign aid program, and the active cultivation of cultural and military contacts under the guise of the Inter-American system. He argued that each of these aspects aided in creating stability for United States interests, broadly defined as United States property and lives. Gellman also echoed that the Good Neighbor Policy was spearheaded by

Roosevelt, Sumner Welles, and Cordell Hull, and that the policy began to fall apart first with a mutual distrust between Welles and Hull and then completely began to falter with their resignations. The final nail in the Good Neighbor's coffin was the death of Roosevelt. Latin America would not see a concerted effort like the Good Neighbor Policy until John F Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

Finally, Frederick Pike's work, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos*, was a welcomed addition to the history about the Good Neighbor Policy. Pike took his readers from the Republican years of the 1920s to the after-effects towards the end of the twentieth century. Although his work did not drastically depart from the main arguments made by the previous authors, Pike did offer new insights into the role that the Great Depression and the American public played into the formulation of the Good Neighbor Policy. In his work he outlined how the economic situation around the world as a result of the Great Depression and a distrust in further European intervention as a result of World War I, created a more receptive public towards Latin America involvement as many became isolationist in nature. Pike maintained that the Good Neighbor Policy was capitalized by Roosevelt, and driven by Welles and Hull. However, Pike argued that world circumstances drove hemispheric policy more than any grand vision of neighborliness. In fact, Pike argued that the Good Neighbor Policy was more about economic, defensive and political gains, and once the economic and security concerns subsided, so too did the Good Neighbor Policy, essentially marginalizing Latin America for the rest of the century.

As the United States flourished in the 1920s it marginalized those who were unable to participate. Often these groups were defined by race, ethnicity and economic

status. Even though Bryce Woods argued that the Good Neighbor Policy began with the Hoover and Coolidge administrations, good economic times made Latin America less relevant for any real policy to emerge. When the Great Depression struck, Pike argued, Americans became more welcoming towards Latin Americans, and this formed the foundation for Roosevelt to begin to build the Good Neighbor Policy. Pike argued that the Americans distrust of Wall Street and European entanglements really left Roosevelt no choice but to develop better hemispheric relationships.⁶ Pike stated, “to some considerable degree, American interest in Latin America that made possible the Good Neighbor Policy era grew out of disillusionment with Europe and a desire to isolate not only the United States but all of the Americas from old world contagion.”⁷ Pike pointed to the failure of the London Conference and the success of the Nye Hearings as reinforcing isolation from Europe and pushing more investment in Latin America. Roosevelt acknowledged this fact, and from his inaugural speech on he sought to create the impression that Latin America counted.⁸

Pike stuck to the assertion of most Good Neighbor scholars that Roosevelt, Hull, and Welles were the primary agents of the policy. According to Pike, Roosevelt left the primary functions of the Good Neighbor Policy to Welles and Hull, and only intervened when a compromise needed to be made. Pike asserted that Hull set many of the policies and operated within the guidelines of free enterprise and free trade. He also claimed that Hull lost his cool often, especially with those who did not agree with him. Conversely was Welles was not vested in perpetuating United States capitalistic pursuits, which often

⁶ Frederick B. Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos*, (Austin, TX, University of Austin Press, 1995), 29.

⁷ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos*, 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

put him at odds with Hull. Pike suggests, Roosevelt often bounced between the two looking for some sort of compromise.⁹

Finally, Pike asserted that the Good Neighbor Policy was driven less by some benevolent vision and more from the perspective of economic and security concerns, which were one and the same. He stated, “Ultimately for the United States to be strong enough to defeat any and all potential enemies, it would have to develop its economic capacity to the fullest degree.”¹⁰ Pike asserted that it was from this perspective that the United States gave up intervention and sought out stronger economic and defensive ties. Pike asserted that the United States operated from a stance of reciprocity and only sought to be as good a neighbor as required to get what it needed economically and defensively.

It was within the context of the Good Neighbor Policy that Dennis Chavez formulated his ideas toward Latin America. He championed non-intervention, economic and cultural development, and hemispheric defense. Chavez viewed the Good Neighbor Policy as the solution to many problems within the Western Hemisphere. He simply believed that if the United States would make good on its promises toward Latin America, she would have strong military, economic, and cultural allies that would ultimately strengthen the United States. Once the debate on entering another European war arose, Dennis Chavez was adamant that the United States strengthen its ties with Latin America, and limit its ties with Europe. Once World War II started, he supported the war in the only way he could—calling upon the resources of Latin America. After the war, Chavez worked to shore up Inter-American Solidarity in direct opposition to

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 174.

Communism. He saw the destitute and unstable countries of Latin America as a perfect foundation for the roots of Communism. He believed that if the United States did not address the poor uneducated people of Latin America, the security of the United States was at risk. Also after the war, Chavez tried to cultivate closer relations for economic reasons. This support for Latin America would draw him into a very controversial position during the initial rise of Juan D. Perón; President of Argentina, dictator, and eventual thorn in the United States State Department's side.

Dennis Chaves supported Latin America because of his devotion to the idea of Inter-American Solidarity. Dennis Chavez stated "I take special interest in Latin-American affairs, perhaps because I am of Spanish ancestry, but principally because I believe that a strong union of western hemisphere nations is the surest means of promoting international peace today. If our countries are strong industrially, economically, and politically, we can assure peace for the world because none will dare attack us."¹¹

A study of Dennis Chavez's interests in Latin American affairs completes the picture painted of a great man in New Mexican and United States history. Just like an author, poet, or artist is best known by his/her most famous work, leaving their unfinished work forgotten or diminished, Dennis Chavez is best known for his domestic policies, and is hardly recognized for his work in Latin America—a masterpiece cut short by his death in 1962.

Throughout his career as a Democratic statesman of New Mexico from 1933 to 1962 Dennis Chavez was a masterful politician and leader. His exploits in that regard

¹¹ *Good Highways –Promoters of Good Will*, Dennis Chavez to American Road Builders Association, February 9, 1949, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

have been recorded and written about by Rosemary Diaz in, “El Senador, Dennis Chavez: New Mexico Native Son, American Senator and Statesman, 1888-1962,” Edward Lahart’s, “The Career of Dennis Chavez as a Member of Congress, 1930-1934,” and Roy Lujan’s, “Dennis Chavez and the Roosevelt Era, 1933-1945.” All of these works provide an outstanding overview of Dennis Chavez’s accomplishments politically within the United States, but ignore his beliefs, impact and accomplishments in Latin America throughout and beyond Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy.

Lahart’s 1958 master’s thesis focused primarily on Chavez’s involvement in state politics, the House of Representatives, and his campaign for the Senate seat in 1934 against Bronson Cutting. He focused mainly on political stories and only covered a very concise time period. Lahart also ignored Dennis Chavez’s beliefs and actions in Latin America. Likewise, Roy Lujan’s dissertation “Dennis Chavez and the Roosevelt Era, 1933-1945”, focused solely on Dennis Chavez and domestic issues. Lujan’s primary focus was on how Chavez sought to incorporate New Deal projects into New Mexico and chronicled how Chavez became an influential “Patron” in New Mexico politics. He covered a wide range of topics to include public works in New Mexico, POW’s, Native American issues, and his efforts with Civil Rights and Fair Employment practices. Unfortunately Lujan made little mention of Dennis Chavez and Latin America.

Rosemary Diaz’s dissertation is a biography of Dennis Chavez beginning with the arrival of the Chavez family in New Mexico during the re-conquest of the Pueblos to his death in 1962. She touches on a number of topics ranging from his political indoctrination as a young man, his aspirations and accomplishments during the Great Depression, and his impact during World War II and post war periods. She mentions in

her introduction that “an unappreciated legacy of El-Senador involves his international and Western-Hemispheric influence.”¹²

In my opinion the largest gap in the body of literature is Dennis Chavez and his exploits in Latin America stemming from the Good Neighbor Policy and on into the Cold War era. In my study I hope to bring an in-depth analysis of Dennis Chavez’s involvement in Latin America. There have been sporadic comments throughout other studies on his accomplishments, but all have left several questions unanswered. First, why did Dennis Chavez take an interest in United States foreign policy in general and Latin American foreign policy specifically? Second, what was his over arching philosophy towards United States-Latin American relations? Third, what was Dennis Chavez’s view of Latin America during the years leading up to and during World War II.? Fourth, how did he adapt his philosophy during the beginning of the Cold War? Fifth, why did he interact with Argentine president, Juan D. Perón, when the United States State Department did not trust him, and how did this interaction fit into his over arching philosophy? Sixth, what role did Puerto Rico play in his view of Latin America, and how did it fit into his philosophy?

To answer these questions, I have broken this study down into four chapters. The first chapter discusses Dennis Chavez’s position towards Latin America during the years leading up to World War II. Chapter two shows how he adapted his philosophy to the pressures of the Cold War. Chapter three discusses the tensions between Argentine president Juan Perón and the United States, Dennis Chavez’s involvement with Perón,

¹² Rosemary T. Diaz, “El Senador, Dennis Chavez: New Mexico Native Son, American Senator and Statesman, 1888-1962,” (masters thesis, Arizona State University, 2006), 9.

and how it fits into his philosophy. Lastly, chapter four specifically addresses what role Dennis Chaves played in Puerto Rican development and why.

Throughout his career, Dennis Chavez was a champion and advocate throughout Latin America. In his support for Puerto Rico, and his call for investment in Latin America, he espoused an overarching philosophy centered on the idea of Inter-American Solidarity. Dennis Chavez religiously espoused that the United States should invest in, and support, inter-American solidarity more vigorously than any other relationship around the world. He was deeply drawn to Latin America for two reasons. First, his connection to the majority of Latin Americans through the Spanish language and heritage provided a natural link and affinity. Secondly, Dennis Chavez viewed the pressures of the development of Latin American countries as similar to those experienced in his native state of New Mexico. Because of who he was and how he fit into the history of the time, Dennis Chavez was called to play a role on the world stage. He answered that call, and his successes and failures impacted his world then and our world today.

Chapter Two

World War II, Latin America, and Dennis Chavez

One of the most patent examples of Dennis Chavez's philosophy toward Latin America is found in examining his actions leading up to and during World War II. During this time, Dennis Chavez chose to take the position of a Continentalist as opposed to that of a pure Isolationist or Internationalist. In this Chapter, I will explore how as a Continentalist Dennis Chavez argued that the United States should not get involved in the war, and should instead invest in Latin America. He felt that the best way to protect the United States from any aggression was through promoting solidarity within the Western Hemisphere. In espousing his beliefs he came up with a six point plan, which was never adopted, to keep the United States out of war. However, once the war started he supported the allied cause with all his heart. One of the ways he did so was ensuring that the United States had adequate resources and supplies from Latin American countries. Thus began Chavez's life-long promotion of Latin America.

As Dennis Chavez began his role as one of New Mexico's senators, the rise of fascist governments and their quest for territory drew the attention of many people around the world. Consequently, the question of whether the United States should get involved in this problem of expansion naturally was on many people's minds. Dennis Chavez, like many at that time, chose to take an isolationist approach towards European affairs. Unlike most Isolationists, however, Dennis Chavez used the rhetoric of the Good Neighbor Policy to advocate strong economic and military ties to Latin America, what would later be called the Continentalist approach. It is important to recognize that Dennis Chavez did not create the Continentalist view, nor was he a major agent of the Good Neighbor Policy. He used these tools to help him define his foreign policy philosophy.

Prior to his election to the Congress and eventually to the Senate, Dennis Chavez watched as the United States rose from World War I as one of the world's strongest nations. The high demand for United States machinery, automobiles, and farm equipment fueled investment in Latin America and abroad. Mark Gilderhus explains that during the postwar period United States exports to Latin America rose from 16.2 percent in 1913 to 25.9 percent in 1918 and to 26.8 percent by 1927. In the Caribbean, the United States dominated the market, accounting for 53.2 percent of imports in 1913, 75 percent in 1918, and fell to 62.9 percent in 1927. As a consequence, United States investments increased from \$1,641.4 billion in 1914 to \$5,5369.7 billion in 1929.¹³ The increase in investments over time came as a mixed blessing. Many Latin American republics welcomed this influx of investment, but knew that it came with a price. Often times this money would come attached to United States foreign policy objectives.

By the time Chavez took his Congressional seat there was growing consensus that the United States should steer clear of European problems as well. This was true of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and many other prominent politicians. The memory and fear of repeating the experiences of World War I dominated American foreign policy. Throughout the 1920s many Americans questioned the motives of the United States government's involvement in the First World War. With the onset of the Great Depression and the change in political guard, the conservative internationalism of the Republican twenties became the object of scorn. Many Democrats came to believe that recent foreign affairs had served the interest of international bankers and investors—two of the most distrusted groups in America during the early 1930's. These suspicions

¹³ Mark T. Gilderhus, *The Second Century: U.S.-Latin American relations since 1889*, (Wilmington, DE, Scholarly Resources Inc, 2000), 60.

coupled with the economic nationalism of the early New Deal made an assertive foreign policy seem the work of the old fashioned, selfish diplomats.

These suspicions and a change in the political guard eventually led to the creation of neutrality laws specifically designed to prevent American involvement in another such war. In the 1930s, four such laws were passed. The first came as a result of hearings held by a Senate Select Committee in 1934, led by Senator Gerald Nye, Republican from North Dakota. This committee was charged with looking into the allegations raised in the book *Merchants of Death* (1934). This book claimed that the United States had been drawn into the fighting by an alliance between bankers and munitions manufacturers. Nye's committee interviewed and questioned several businessmen, historians, and diplomats and came to the conclusion that the United States had not truly been neutral in the years leading up to their involvement in 1917. The committee determined that America could only have avoided conflict by avoiding financial dealings with embattled countries—that economic ties with countries at war would most likely result in war again. This quest for neutrality set the political climate during which Dennis Chavez formed his ideas about United States involvement in European affairs.

When it came to Latin America, Dennis Chavez would latch onto the philosophy of Inter-American Solidarity following his election to the United States Senate. He would carry this ideal all the way through his political career often drawing on its main tenets in many of his speeches and writings regarding Latin America.

At the Inter-American conference in Buenos Aires on December 21, 1936 many American Republics agreed to a common set of principles known as the *Declaration of Principles of Inter-American Solidarity And Cooperation*, which formed the foundation

of the Inter-American system. These principles seemed a natural progression of an ongoing relationship that was premised on the belief that each country had a similar affinity toward a democratic form of government, ideals of peace and justice, similar goals politically, economically, socially, and artistically. This affinity obliged them to maintain solidarity through peacetime and war time, and work for the common defense of the Western Hemisphere—which is why Chavez welcomed and supported Roosevelt’s implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy.¹⁴

Part of the foundation of Dennis Chavez’s adoption of the Inter-American Solidarity principles was the Good Neighbor Policy of President Roosevelt and Secretary Hull. Chavez saw the Good Neighbor Policy as an important shift in the way the United States viewed Latin America. He believed in the intent to treat Latin American republics as good neighbors instead of using Dollar Diplomacy and a Big Stick mentality. During the early years of the Good Neighbor Policy, Dennis Chavez fully supported FDR’s efforts. He saw a bright future with Latin America and the United States enjoying a symbiotic relationship and willingly fit this belief into his overall philosophy.

There were three principle aspects of FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy. First, was the advent of nonintervention and noninterference—that is the United States would not undertake further military action against any Latin American country, nor use its influence to interfere or direct their internal policies. The second aspect of the Good Neighbor Policy was “pacific protection:” and the settlement of disputes through negotiation and arbitration. For the first time in its relations with Latin America, the State Department put national interests first rather than the interests of private American

¹⁴ U.S., Department of State, Publication 1983, *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 351-352.

business. The final aspect of the Good Neighbor Policy was the creation of a network of trade with Latin America.

During the years leading up to World War II, the Good Neighbor Policy had to transition from an economically motivated policy to one of defense and solidarity. Many of the Good Neighbor authors argue different points of change, but all agree that the United States had to change and did. Wood argued from 1933 on the United States and Latin America engaged in a game of give and take under the ideal of reciprocity for the protection of United State's property and citizens. In 1939 and the years leading up to World War II, the United States increasingly became fearful of increased advances by Axis powers into Latin America, and thus shifted the focus of their efforts from the protection of property and lives to the protection and solidarity of the Western Hemisphere.¹⁵ He argued that from the time of the Panama Conference in 1939 official statements paid less attention to reciprocity and the Good Neighbor Policy and was more dedicated to the continental solidarity.¹⁶

Pike suggested that from 1933 to 1937 the Good Neighbor Policy on the surface appeared to be economically motivated. He stated, "From the president down, the persons who designed hemispheric policy concerned themselves primarily with figuring out how to cast the New World off from the economic doldrums in Europe and to summon a rising hemispheric tide that would lift all American boats."¹⁷ Even though economic considerations were at the fore, security was always a factor to be considered. Before 1937, security was defined in terms of the protection of United States investments from political and economic instability. By 1937, Roosevelt and his cabinet decided that they

¹⁵ Wood, *The Making of the Good neighbor Policy*, 310.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹⁷ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos*, 228.

could no longer afford to ignore the inevitability of a confrontation with Germany.¹⁸

Roosevelt did not believe that the Western Hemisphere could be isolated from another major war in Europe, and therefore his focus was shifted from economic matters to matters of security.

Guerrant argued very much the same as Wood and Pike, that is that the focus of the Good Neighbor Policy was in a way an effort to repair the damage from its interventionist policies earlier in the century. Guerrant argued that the United States “succeeded remarkably well in convincing the Latin Americans that the Colossus to the North had become the Good Neighbor.”¹⁹ During the years of 1937 and 1938, Roosevelt worked to gain the cooperation of Latin America in opposing Axis infiltration within the hemisphere, but that he and his administration had their work cut out for them.²⁰

Gellman argued that the United States began to speak of Inter-American solidarity after the appeasement at Munich in September of 1938. On November 6th of 1938 Welles called for hemispheric solidarity at the Lima conference. Welles stated, “As a nation we will assure ourselves that we are in a position to defend ourselves from all aggression from whatever source it may arise, and to be prepared to join with our fellow democracies of the New World in preserving the Western Hemisphere safe from any threat of attack.”²¹ Some argued that this was a call for an American League of Nations, but Roosevelt retracted from that interpretation, and instead reasserted that the United States would defend the Western Hemisphere from foreign aggression under the Monroe

¹⁸ Ibid., 228-229.

¹⁹ Guerrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, 135.

²⁰ Ibid., 139

²¹ Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 74.

Doctrine.²² This reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine was of course directed toward Germany more than any other European nation. Gellman noted how Germany had won a great level of influence in Latin America during the Great Depression and had regularly distributed anti-United States propaganda.²³

For the most part Dennis Chavez agreed with the Good Neighbor Policy, however, he soon developed a different vision of what the policy should accomplish. He believed that United States policy should go further than supporting and investing in Latin America to ward against Axis incursion into Latin America. He argued that the United States should invest solely in Latin America and limit involvement in Europe altogether. For instance, he professed that the United States needed to increase efforts towards cultivating economic and cultural relations with Latin America. Second, the United States needed to arrange for and provide funds for the construction of a Nicaraguan canal and possibly one in Mexico at *Tehuantepec*. Third, the United States needed to build the transcontinental highways to and through Latin America, similar to the Pan-American Highway. Also, the United States needed to put into effect a free and independent competitive airway system throughout Latin America. Finally, the United States needed to arrange for long-term investments in improvements in utilities, communications, and power resources.²⁴ Dennis Chavez wanted to make Latin America the United States strongest ally and trading partner.

From 1936 to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Dennis Chavez espoused that the United States should limit ties with Europe and focus most of its energy and money on

²² Ibid., 77

²³ Ibid., 78

²⁴ U.S., Department of State, Publication 1983, *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-194*, 351-352.

developing its Latin America interests. Dennis Chavez's main approach to World War II was rhetoric and did not result in any new legislation nor did it in any way change the course of the violence in Europe. Also, while recognizing the shared histories between the United States and Latin America, Chavez failed to recognize the strength of the bond between the United States and Europe. To Dennis Chavez, the European bond did not fit into his philosophy of Inter-American Solidarity.

When it came to war and foreign policy there were two distinct groups of isolationists that emerged in the United States during the 1930s. Isolationism found expression in American politics for multiple reasons with most centered on the impact WWI had had on America and the world. There were primarily two distinct groups in Congress that represented the core of the isolationists. One group, in which Senators Hiram Johnson and William E. Borah were the leaders, firmly opposed the notion of collective security, insisting that the end product would always be war. They argued that the government of the United States should focus on American democracy at home with some consideration given to continental defense—essentially they were nationalists. Senators Gerald Nye, Bennett Champ Clark and Arthur H. Vandenberg led the second Congressional group. They agreed on the impracticality of American participation in international political cooperation. This group considered it essential that the Congress design neutrality laws to keep America from being drawn into war.

Both of these groups shared a disillusionment concerning American participation in World War I. Both groups believed that the American participation had been based on an erroneous decision encouraged by huge private loans by American firms to Britain and France, armament companies who stood to profit from a bigger war, British propaganda,

and the belief by President Wilson that the war could be used to create a world government.

There was a third group, though less significant, who supported isolationism in the 1930s. This group of isolationists is referred to as either “Continental Americanist” or “Continentalist,” and its members were among the progressive and liberal quarters of Congress. Many of these individuals were the most enthusiastic supporters of the New Deal domestic program. While they supported Roosevelt domestically, they were extremely critical of his foreign policy. They advocated for economic and social support for all the American republics. The main purpose of this group was to initiate vast improvements across the broad American civilization. They turned to the efficient, humanistic use of national resources and technical skills as a means for creating a civilization on this continent more just, stable and peaceful than anything Europe could offer. Continentalist believed that the United States had a responsibility to keep democracy alive and flourishing in the Western Hemisphere—both North and South America. Chavez belonged to this group.

During the years leading up to World War II, Dennis Chavez used the rhetoric of the Continentalist group to advocate for peace instead of war. Instead of embarking on policies that might draw the United States into war, Chavez espoused that the United States should stay out of European affairs and support the Good Neighbor Policy. His ability to speak Spanish and his cultural background made him a natural megaphone for the Good Neighbor Policy. On numerous occasions Dennis Chavez voted against political actions that entangled the United States in European affairs. With confidence, he put

forth the idea that the solution to keeping America out of war was the investment in and the strengthening of ties with Latin America.

Dennis Chavez was reaffirmed in his position by many of his constituents in New Mexico. On many occasions he received petitions and letters requesting him to keep America out of World War II. Some of these letters begged him not to repeal the embargo and to not approve the Lend Lease bill in 1941.²⁵ Dennis Chavez replied to one letter-writer, Mr. H.B. May that:

After long and serious consideration, solely from the standpoint of the welfare of our beloved country, I arrived at my decision to vote against the repeal of the arms embargo. I want America to remain at peace. And though I don't believe that the repeal of the arms embargo will itself bring war I am convinced in conscience that by not taking sides in the horrible conflict now raging in Europe our own participation in the future will be better avoided...History someday will tell us who is right on this question. I earnestly pray that whatever we do, Divine Providence will give us peace.²⁶

He repeated similar words numerous times in the replies to his constituents who asked him to not repeal the embargo.

Dennis Chavez's words were transformed into action during the debates on neutrality late in 1939. Senator Chavez addressed the Senate on two occasions, during which he advocated complete neutrality in the conflict of Europe. Following one of his addresses, Senators La Follette, Nye, Johnson and Senator Borah walked over and

²⁵ Petitions to Dennis Chavez, 1939, box 5, file 34, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁶ Dennis Chavez to H.B. May, November 4, 1939, box 5, file 34, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

congratulated him. Ten days before he died Senator Borah, the “Great Orator,” told Chavez that his speech on Neutrality was the best he had heard.²⁷

During a radio address, Dennis Chavez further espoused his beliefs as a Continentalist. He clearly advocated that the solution for American peace was south of the Rio Grande. He urged the American people to cultivate closer relations with Latin America and eschew any Anglo-American front against Fascism and Communism. On this note, Chavez often quarreled with the Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, who advocated stronger ties with Britain. Dennis Chavez goaded Secretary Ickes by pointing out that England and France were “bloated with the greatest Colonial Empires in the world...yet they welsh on their just debt to the American people.”²⁸ No doubt he was making reference to the war debts during the First World War. Germany, France and Britain all owed the United States significant amounts of money in the form of War Debts. Dennis Chavez looked at their constant efforts to convince the United States to forgive this debt as defaulting on their responsibility to pay.

Aside from his concern about the Europeans renegeing on their promises to pay the United States their war debts, Dennis Chavez argued that we should not become entangled in relations with Europe because he believed that the root of the world’s problems in the 20th Century had their origins in Europe. He espoused that Europe was home to everything that was opposed to America’s values and beliefs, like Communism and Fascism. He asked the Senate, “Is this the choice we must make? Must we protect the

²⁷ “Senator Dennis Chavez His Record and His Merits,” n.d. , Anonymous, box 69, file 12, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁸ Dennis Chavez, Speech over the NBC System, March 3, 1938, *The Answer To Those Who Don’t Like Isolation—A Government Radio Station to Further Pan-American Relations*, box 69, file 57, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

African and Asiatic Empires of France and England? Must we tilt the scale and make one great Soviet of all Europe, or must we cast our lot with the Fascist dictatorships?”²⁹

Chavez did not just limit his criticism of Britain and France to the events in Europe. For instance, in 1941, he stated that Great Britain had caused more friction in Latin America than any other European power. Chavez cited the amount of land owned by British subjects in Peru, Paraguay, and Chile as evidence of this friction. One of these areas was the large chunk of land then known as British Honduras in Central America. Chavez argued that this territory had been a source of tension between Guatemala and the British Crown for over eighty years. Dennis Chavez even berated President Roosevelt over this territorial dispute when Roosevelt initiated his Destroyers for Bases program. He stated in the Senate, “When the matter of trading ships for territory came up, Mr. President, was any voice raised to suggest that British Honduras, that even Belize, be given to the United States, that we might turn it over to our Latin American neighbor, and thus gain not merely her undying gratitude, but the good will of every other Latin American nation in the continent?”³⁰ He furthered this argument by citing the Falklands, which Argentina claimed, but Britain held on to as the foundation for another dispute. Chavez said, “We profess a great interest in the advancement of Inter-American relations. We could have very easily said to the British, when we were trading boats for land, ‘Here are some islands which really aren’t of much value, strategically or otherwise, but which we think ought to go to Argentina. She has a gold claim to them; why don’t you

²⁹ Dennis Chavez, Speech over the NBC System, March 3, 1938, *The Answer To Those Who Don’t Like Isolation—A Government Radio Station to Further Pan-American Relations*.

³⁰ Dennis Chavez, Speech on Lend Lease Bill, 1941, box 69, file 57, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

concede it?”³¹ Chavez further criticized Roosevelt over the choice to align the United States with Europe and stated it was “contrary to established policy,” expressed throughout United States history. Chavez cited as evidence the abrogation of the 1778 alliance made with France in 1798 by Congress, and the Hay-Pauncefote treaty of 1901 abrogating the original Clayton-Bulwer treaty moving England out of the picture with the Panama Canal.³²

Chavez simplified his argument down to a choice—a choice between investment in the Americas, or war in Europe. He argued that, “America is faced with the crucial choice—Pan-Americanism or War!”³³ Involvement in Europe, he argued, meant a long protracted struggle with the totalitarian powers for imperialistic mastery of the world. If that choice was made, Chavez believed that it would prove costly—in both lives and treasure. Chavez alleged that the peace, welfare, and fate of the United States would most certainly be placed in jeopardy if America became involved in another World War.³⁴ America, he espoused, became a great nation because of its policy of non-interference in European affairs, and strict confinement of foreign interests in the Western Hemisphere.³⁵

Chavez did not just sit behind the podium and criticize, warn, and petition, he also spoke of a vision of what the United States should do to limit interaction with Europe by

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Peace Lies South*, Article by Dennis Chavez, Published in The Santa Fean, November 1940, box 71, file 23, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico. This article was not written by Dennis Chavez, but instead was compiled from several addresses before Congress and the radio by Frank Burnett, Jr. of Santa Fe. He actually wrote this and submitted it without prior approval. This is evidenced in a letter written by Mr. Burnett to Senator Chavez on September 30th 1940. Also in this letter Mr. Burnett offered to work as Senator Chavez’s “publicity man” in his spare time. Dennis Chavez often interchanged Pan-Americanism and Inter-American relations as one in the same.

³⁴ Speech of Senator Dennis Chavez, *Pan-Americanism vs European Meddling*, Over the National Broadcasting Company, May 11, 1940, box 69, file 47, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

³⁵ Speech of Senator Dennis Chavez, Over the National Broadcasting Company, May 11, 1940, 27.

promoting investment in Latin America. Chavez insisted that the United States should promote at all costs, commercial, cultural, and political relations with Latin America. The plan for Latin America, he envisioned, should include the development of close cultural ties, the facilitation of travel and the creation of a powerful economic coalition. The exchange of students should begin as soon as possible. Chairs for teaching of Latin American history should be created and Latin American history and culture should be required courses in United States secondary schools. To facilitate travel, airways and steamships should be subsidized.³⁶ The Pan-American Highway and interlinking roads should be constructed. Cable and radio facilities should be improved and new ones should be built.³⁷

To make his vision a reality, Dennis Chavez proposed a six-point formula to, in his words, “Profit out of Peace” instead of “Profit out of War.”³⁸ First, he urged, the United States to develop a national defense system, “at peace-time prices for labor and materials,” to such a point that no nation or combination of nations would dare attack the United States. Second, he proposed that the United States cultivate economic relations with Latin America, if necessary by subsidizing manufacturing and shipping. Third, Chavez felt that the facilities at the Panama Canal should be enlarged and fortified. Fourth, the United States should provide funds for the construction of a Nicaraguan Canal and possibly the *Mexican-Tehuantepec* Canal. Fifth, Chavez argued that money and materials should be set aside for the building of additional trans-continental highways through Latin America comparable to the Pan-American Highway. Sixth, under suitable guarantees, Chavez urged the United States to arrange for long term investments in Latin

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Dennis Chavez, *Peace Lies South*.

America, improvements of a permanent nature, such as utilities, including transportation facilities, communications, and water-power resources.³⁹ Dennis Chavez proposed that such a project would cost approximately \$10,000,000,000.⁴⁰

Dennis Chavez's belief that stronger relation with Latin America would ensure peace for America separated him from the other Isolationists like Borah and Nye who advocated total isolationism. Chavez stated, "It is perfectly true that we cannot live in economic isolation from the rest of the world and maintain prosperity...modern conditions force all nations into closer ties."⁴¹ With the usual anti-European rhetoric, Chavez often asserted, that he wanted political isolation from "the border disputes and blood feuds of Europe" and a renewed engagement in Pan-Americanism. To Dennis Chavez, the answer to the isolation problem was investment in Latin America. Based on what he witnessed during World War I, Dennis Chavez argued that war in Europe led to America being cut off from traditional European markets forcing trade to be diverted to neutral markets. Because of this, Chavez argued, those markets should be in Latin America.⁴² He was convinced that if the United States devoted itself to the Western Hemisphere the war in Europe could not be brought to American shores. The combined economic and militaristic might of the Americas, he argued, would virtually make it impossible to attack and render inconsequential who dominated the rest of the world.

As Dennis Chavez examined the history of our foreign relations with Latin America, he saw countless black pages that needed to be overcome in order for his plan to work. He knew that the pages of history revealed events that totally eclipsed "the pious

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Speech of Senator Dennis Chavez, *Pan-Americanism vs European Meddling*.

⁴² Ibid.

but hypocritical platitudes of our statesmen who, while boasting of friendship and non-aggression, set out methodically and successfully to impose our might on our American neighbors.”⁴³ In a speech delivered in 1940, Chavez spoke of how the United States intervened time and time again in the economic and political affairs of Central and South American nations, referencing the United States actions in the Panama Canal, Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Santo Domingo. These actions, he argued, earned the United States the hatred and distrust of Latin Americans—acquiring for the United States the names of “Yankee Imperialists,” and the “Colossus of the North.” Chavez also remarked that Americans typically saw Latin America as nothing but vast expanses of jungle and desert inhabited by savages in desperate need of American guidance and technology. He proclaimed that, “We crammed sewers and public utilities down the throats of our neighbor, but in so doing we earned for ourselves their hatred rather than their friendship.”⁴⁴ This is why, he argued, in spite of six years of the Good Neighbor Policy, little or no headway had been made—Latin American countries welcomed the new policy but were unable to forget the sins of the past. However, since its inception, Chavez noted, Latin American countries had the opportunity to test the new spirit of friendship and were ready by 1938 to be convinced that the United States valued their friendship, if and only if the United States was ready to make good on its claims.⁴⁵

Unfortunately Chavez feared it was too late for the United States to make good on her promises. As Chavez looked deeper into Latin America he found that Germany and Italy were also courting Latin American interests, and in many respects were ahead of the United States. Chavez used this observation as a rhetorical device to add validity to his

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

claims towards Pan-Americanism. For instance, he pointed out that there were more Germans in every South American country than there were Americans, with the exception of Cuba and Mexico. He also cited how German trade with Latin American countries had increased year after year—even the German Lufthansa network had greater reach and connections than Pan-American Airlines. Furthermore, he noted, Germany also had eleven, 100,000 watt, short-wave broadcasting stations, with fifteen angle directional beams, giving them a dominant position in radio broadcasting in Latin America.⁴⁶

Using Brazil as an example, Chavez illustrated just how far the Axis Powers had already established a strong foothold in Latin America. Every day, he declared, radio broadcasts proclaimed the glory of Hitler and Mussolini and derided the slow movement of democracy. Also, Dennis Chavez pointed out, there were close to 200,000 Japanese immigrants buying and settling millions of acres of land and producing five million bales of cotton a year. Japanese scientists, archaeologists, and medical authorities also made regular lecture tours in Brazil. Germany had half a million residents in Brazil with a substantial portion of their youth belonging to the Hitler youth.⁴⁷ Chavez also warned that Fascism was not just limited to Brazil in South America. Its antecedents were in fact spreading throughout Latin America. He cited how Germany had been selling munitions to every nation in South America and smuggling arms into Mexico. The Argentine army was largely German-trained as were those of Chile and Bolivia. Mussolini had sold both Chile and Brazil warships in exchange for nitrates and other resources.⁴⁸ For Chavez, the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Dennis Chavez, *Shadows Over Latin America*, Undated, box 69, folder 57, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁴⁸ Chavez, Dennis, *Shadows Over Latin America*.

Axis Powers having this level of involvement in Latin America was disturbing and a major obstacle to achieving his goals of Western Hemisphere solidarity.

As Chavez pointed out the growing influence of Germany, Italy and Japan in Latin America, he became impatient towards the inaction of the United States government. He stated, “The government at Washington is cognizant of fascist activities in Latin-America, and it is my own personal feeling that both the President and the Secretary of State would like to take a firm hand with respect to Latin-America, but hesitate because of uncertainty concerning sentiment in the nation. [United States]”⁴⁹ He knew that the United States needed to play catch up and increase their efforts to counteract the influence the Axis Powers were creating in Latin America. He called for swift and focused action to be taken by the United States government.

As part of that call for action, Dennis Chavez recognized that the United States should use radio as a way to link Latin America closer to the United States and combat the propaganda of the Axis Powers. Therefore, he advocated that the United States develop a powerful government short-wave broadcasting station, in addition to the General Electric and the World Wide Radio stations at Boston, and the then present efforts of the National Broadcasting Company. He viewed the efforts of these stations as ineffective and inadequate. With an expanded radio station, he ascertained, the United States could promote the Pan-American ideal. Through the radio, Dennis Chavez believed the United States could acquaint Latin Americans with the sincerity of the Good Neighbor Policy.⁵⁰ It was with this in mind that Senator Chavez and Senator McAdoo introduced Senate Bill 3342 in 1938 to create “the United States Broadcasting Station” in

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

San Diego, California. The sole purpose of this short waved radio station was to broadcast to South America in an effort to overcome the broadcasting of Axis propaganda.⁵¹

Broadcasting to Latin and South America was only part of the solution. Dennis Chavez also believed that the United States needed to demonstrate the sincerity of the Good Neighbor Policy by meeting even the smallest South American country on the basis of equality.⁵² As a result of this ideal, Dennis Chavez constantly supported the Pan-American conferences and their goals.⁵³ When the United States made agreements with Latin American countries to maintain neutrality, and established a neutral zone at the Panama conference in 1939, Dennis Chavez was in full support. Also, he was in full agreement when the United States agreed to not act within Latin America without consulting the other American nations first. With these agreements, however, Dennis Chavez saw a risk in further alienating the Latin American republics if the United States reneged on their promises. Dennis Chavez argued that if we went back on our word, Latin American countries would once again regard the United States as the “Colossus of the North” and would be skeptical of any goodwill or aid.⁵⁴

Unfortunately for Chavez, Roosevelt took a completely different approach to the European conflict. While Chavez’s rhetoric was geared towards keeping the United States out of European affair altogether, Roosevelt’s rhetoric was geared towards supporting Britain and France in their opposition to Hitler. There is no doubt that

⁵¹ Collection of news articles given to Chavez from Hagerman, *NM Messenger*, March 3 1938, Portales, *NM Tribune*, March 4 1938, *Lubbock Texas Avalanche Journal*, March 4, 1938, *Clovis NM Curry County Times*, March 4, 1938, Box 1, Folder 44, Item 91, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of Libraries, University of New Mexico.

⁵² Collection of news articles given to Chavez from Hagerman.

⁵³ Collection of news articles given to Chavez from Hagerman.

⁵⁴ Dennis Chavez, *Speech on the Lend Lease Bill*.

Roosevelt aligned himself in direct opposition to Hitler and his allies. He made no secret of this fact. However, Roosevelt was bound by the Neutrality Laws and popular opinion. He had to find ways to give the Allies the support they needed, and work to convince the American people that it was in their best interest that dictators like Hitler be stopped.

As the war raged in Europe and Asia, FDR knew that the United States' involvement in the their conflicts was vastly unpopular, and in the face of the Neutrality Laws, a legal issue as well. He knew he had to work to convince the American people that involvement was in the best interest of peace and prosperity. During his famous Quarantine Speech in October 1937, FDR stated that the, "peace -loving nations must make a concerted effort in opposition to those violations of treaties and those ignorings of humane instincts which today are creating a state of international anarchy and instability from which there is no escape through mere isolation or neutrality."⁵⁵ During this speech he also reminded the people that the world was interdependent and held together by international laws and treaties. He argued that it was "impossible for any nation completely to isolate itself from economic and political upheavals in the rest of the world, especially when such upheavals appear to be spreading and not declining. There can be no stability or peace either within nations or between nations except under laws and moral standards adhered to by all. International anarchy destroys every foundation for peace. It jeopardized either the immediate or the future security of every nation, large or small. It is, therefore, a matter of vital interest and concern to the people of the United

⁵⁵ Guarrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, 137.

States that the sanctity of international treaties and the maintenance of international morality be restored.⁵⁶

Roosevelt understood that he must convince the American people that the United States involvement in the war was a necessity. Roosevelt often used the events abroad to win over the American people for several pro-allied actions to include Lend Lease, which was a creative way of getting around directly loaning American money to Britain.⁵⁷ Under Lend Lease, the United States would give Britain the guns, ships and tanks they needed to fight the Nazis, only if they returned the items that the United States loaned them. Of course, one does not return military equipment used in war in the same condition it was loaned. So in reality it was the United States giving Britain the necessary tools to fight the war.

By May of 1941 Roosevelt had come to the conclusion that the United States would indeed have to join the fight, but was reluctant to strike first. FDR wanted to be pushed into the war, rather than take the country into war.⁵⁸ FDR decided to help the Allies control the Atlantic. The Germans were sinking merchant ships faster than Britain and America could replace them. FDR knew that that the United States would have to increase its shipbuilding capacity, and at the same time expand patrolling to assure the delivery of supplies, essentially putting the United States in a non-neutral position. Even

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Robert Dallek, *Franklin D Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), 254.

⁵⁸ Dallek, 265.

when an American freighter, the Robin Moor, was sunk on June 11, 1941, FDR was still reluctant to join the fight.⁵⁹

While Roosevelt offered rhetorical defiance to Berlin, and commercial aid to the Allies, for he was reticent to do anything that would force the war issue with the public or actively alter Hitler's plans for Europe. Roosevelt aligned himself and the United States with the Allied cause without declaring war. Roosevelt understood that neutrality would not be an option in the future. He knew that for the stability of the world, Hitler must be stopped. FDR constantly had to work around public sentiment and the established Neutrality Laws to defy Hitler and his war machine. Even as Roosevelt waited for the right moment, the foreign policy of the United States was still focused on isolationism. Ironically it was the developments in the Far East that eventually pushed the United States into war with the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

As we well know, isolationism in all its various forms did not work. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 shocked the nation and brought it into World War II. The many debates about where the United States should spend its time and money came to an abrupt end. Once the United States chose to join the fight against the Axis powers, Dennis Chavez supported the war effort. He did so by getting involved in limited negotiations with Latin American countries for resources needed for the war.

Just as the United States was jolted, so too were many of the republics in Latin America, for they feared they were vulnerable to attack. The only guard against such an

⁵⁹ Ibid., 268.

attack was cooperation and solidarity with the United States and her allies.⁶⁰ By December 12, 1941, nine Latin American republics declared war on Japan, and January 1, 1942, many signed on to the United Nations Declaration. In time all Latin American nations aligned themselves with the United States. While it took Argentina until 1945 to fully align with the United States, nevertheless they gave in to the pressure from other Latin American republics and the United States. The complex and contentious relations with Argentina during this time spilled over into the Cold War years and created a controversial situation for Dennis Chavez—a subject that will be dealt with later in this work. What is important during World War II is that Latin American republics proved to be an important ally to the United States during the war, contributing significantly to an Allied victory.

Latin American support during the war manifested itself in many ways. Some, as in the case of Brazil and Mexico, provided direct military support by either dispatching troops, providing bases, or participating in international naval patrols. Also, many countries cooperated with the FBI to thwart Italian and German subversive activity in South America. Latin American countries also received some Lend Lease aid, however, it only represented 1 percent of the total given out to the whole world. Lend Lease to Latin America was limited solely to military items, while economic aid was funneled through the Export-Import Bank.⁶¹

More important than their military aid was Latin America's contribution in the form of vast quantities of strategic raw materials. Economic agreements facilitated the supply of urgently needed materials for the Allied war effort. During the war years, Latin

⁶⁰ Frederico Gil, *Latin American—United States Relations*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc, 1971), 180.

⁶¹ Gil, *Latin American—United States Relations*, 182.

American countries sent more than 50 percent of their exports to the United States and in turn bought 60 percent of their goods from the United States.⁶² The support given by Latin America was the ultimate result of the carefully crafted and cultivated Good Neighbor Policy.

Like most of those in favor of neutrality, Dennis Chavez supported the war wholeheartedly once Japan had attacked Pear Harbor. Dennis Chavez was both disgusted and disturbed by Japan's actions. During a Christmas address in 1941, he stated:

I have been a disturbed witness to all forms of human intolerance; to a form of conduct which has been so aptly described as 'man's inhumanity to man.' In my studied opinion, it is absolutely impossible to think of a condition more contrary, or more categorically opposed to the very essence, the veritable marrow, of our form of government, than intolerance, be it racial, religious, political, social or economic. In other terms, I cannot reconcile myself to the possibility of a really solid American lifting a finger, raising a hand, penning a word, or voicing a thought in conscious support of the hideous forces of intolerance, the poisonous fangs of which our fathers came here to escape....The Greatness of your America and mine has stemmed from the infinite variety of its background. Its greatness in the future will depend upon our willingness and determination to live together in harmony, in peace and in understanding.⁶³

When it came time to prepare for war Dennis Chavez did not hesitate to support the war effort. As a member of the Military Appropriations Committee, he voted to build

⁶² Ibid., 183.

⁶³ Dennis Chavez, *Christmas Address*, n.d., box 69, folder 41, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

new airplanes, tanks and other weapons. For example, in 1941 he fought to support the National Defense program fostered by Roosevelt. Chavez prophesied, “I maintain that our national defense in the future will be...the airplanes of the future. I am for anything that may be done for the making of better pilots and for the bringing about of technical improvements in this field.” During the war he also pushed Congress to raise pay for nurses because the pay in the private sector was much higher than what was offered in the Army and Navy. He knew that the Army and Navy would need good nurses and doctors to win the war. His efforts resulted in a spurt in the enlistment of nurses.⁶⁴

However, Dennis Chavez’s greatest contribution to the war effort was his participation with Latin American politicians and businessmen to procure certain resources for the war. During World War II, Latin Americans contributed heavily to the cause of the United States. Many Latin American countries contributed necessary natural resources such as, crude oil from Venezuela, copper and nitrates from Chile, tin from Bolivia, quartz crystals used in radar and manganese from Brazil, cadmium and mercury from Mexico and many other lesser-known contributions. These contributions no doubt helped the United States and Allies win the war.

Chavez participated in the transmission of resources with Carl E. Lucke of the Pan American Distributors, Ltd. This company had several branch offices throughout Central and South America and was responsible for facilitating trade within the hemisphere. Specifically, Chavez was involved in a weapons deal with Bolivia and the Pan American Distributors. In a memorandum dated June 24, 1941, Lucke outlined the purchase of arms from the Bolivian government, which were to be sold to the Russians

⁶⁴ Military Preparedness Memo, box 7, folder 13, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

who were in dire need of arms. Among the items to be purchased were, 15,000 Mauser type, Model 1928, 7.65 caliber rifles, 50 heavy duty Vicker machine guns, 50, Breno light machine guns, 200 Schmeisser sub-caliber machine guns, 20 million cartridges of 7.65 caliber ammunition, 5 million 9mm rounds, 75 cannons, 50 Stokes-Brandt trench mortars, 2500 aerial demolition bombs, 1000 fragmentation bombs, 1000 liquid fire bombs and 1000 incendiary bombs.⁶⁵ During this transaction, Lucke sought Chavez's help in contacting Joseph Tumulty about the Bolivian arms. In a letter to Chavez, Lucke stated that Tumulty had a Russian contact who was very interested in the Bolivian materials and needed his help in facilitating the deal.⁶⁶ During another deal with Lucke, in September of 1941, Chavez contacted the Peruvian government about the purchase of airplanes from Canada. In this case, Chavez was to inform the Peruvians that the Free French would buy them immediately and it was to be a cash only transaction.⁶⁷

Similarly, Dennis Chavez found himself serving in the role of facilitating production of materials and equipment necessary for the war effort. For instance, in 1942 a company by the name of *Cemento De Mixcoac* applied for priority status with the Mexican Government for a new rotary cement kiln in *San Pedro de los Pinos*. *Cemneto De Mixcoac* borrowed, what they called, a considerable amount of money to build this cement factory, and the Office of Production Management was impeding its construction by limiting the flow of supplies. They wanted this priority status so they could finish the project. In September of 1941, T. H. Lockett stated that the United States Cement Industry bulletin claimed they were only capable of producing 79.9 percent of their

⁶⁵ Memorandum Covering Mr. Lucke's Trip to Bolivia, June 24, 1941, box 7, folder 16, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁶⁶ Memorandum Regarding Russian Contact, September 3, 1941, box 7, folder 16, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁶⁷ Memorandum Regarding Russian Contact, September 3, 1941.

capacity in July of 1941.⁶⁸ The problem with getting this kiln built was the lack of steel being allocated to the company.

Dennis Chavez was approached by T. H. Harold for help with the rapid settlement of the difficulties in obtaining the steel. Mr. Harold stated in a letter to Chavez that he has “been in very close touch with the cement situation here [Mexico] for the past five months.”⁶⁹ Chavez went on to say he understood that the manufacturers are doing everything in their power to fill the demand for cement—even running obsolete equipment to its full capacity. Mr. Harold used Dennis Chavez’s desire to build a paved road from El Paso to Mexico City and the construction of the Pan American highway as leverage for the release of more steel. Mr. Harold stated “The cement companies point out however that with the present production capacity there is no possibility of producing any such quantity of cement without greatly augmenting manufacturing capacity.”⁷⁰

Dennis Chavez responded to Harold’s letter by writing Donald M. Nelson, Director of the Division of Purchases at the Office for Emergency Management in Washington D.C. on October 23, 1941. Dennis asked the director to check into the status of *Cemento De Mixcoac*. In this letter he clearly stated he wanted the company to receive priority status. He stated, “The construction of defense highways and other defense projects in Mexico require considerable quantities of cement, and I understand that under their present production capacity it is impossible for the cement companies in Mexico to

⁶⁸ K. Bannister (Cemento Mixcoac Directing Manager) to Mr Trimble, 1941, box 7, folder 25, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁶⁹ T.H Harold to Dennis Chavez, Sept 24, 1941, box 7, folder 25, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁷⁰ T.H Harold to Dennis Chavez, Sept 24, 1941.

furnish the cement that is needed.”⁷¹ Because of this he states that the Kiln project of *Cemento De Mixcoac* is a very important one. The Office of Production Management replied to Dennis Chavez on November 7th, 1941 that “the analysts of the Industrial Equipment Branch is actively reviewing the request and...definite action will be taken upon it within the next few days.”⁷²

There is no evidence that Dennis Chavez was successful in getting the company’s priority changed, however, this incident reveals that Dennis Chavez was looked to as an advocate for Latin American companies and countries alike.

As shown in this chapter, as the troubles of the Great Depression gave away to the pressures of World War II many Americans were faced with a choice to advocate neutrality and isolationism or involvement in another European war. Many Americans, still affected by the experiences of World War I, advocated neutrality and isolationism, which resulted in the Neutrality Laws and limitations on American foreign policy. As a part of this debate, Dennis Chavez threw his lot in with the Continentalists, who advocated investment in the Western Hemisphere as a means of pseudo isolation, and was a strong advocate for the development of Latin America under the auspices of the Good Neighbor Policy. He developed a six point plan for peace that primarily relied on investment both politically and monetarily in Latin America. In some cases he directly spoke out about the United States future allies in World War II as greedy imperialists with vast possessions worldwide. Once the attack on Pearl Harbor took place however, Dennis Chavez, like most isolationists, was forced to change his mindset from isolation

⁷¹ Dennis Chavez to Mr Nelson, Oct 23, 1941, box 7, folder 25, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁷² F.G. McClintock to Dennis Chavez, November 7, 1941, box 7, folder 25, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

to war. Just as Dennis Chavez saw the roots for peace in Latin America, so too did he see the roots for ultimate success in the war effort. Once engaged, Dennis Chavez acted as a liaison between Latin America and the United States for the procurement of vital natural resources and military equipment. Little did he know that the purchase of large amounts of resources at below market prices would have a profound negative effect on the countries of Latin America in the future—a subject that will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Post World War II, Latin America and Dennis Chavez

After World War II, Dennis Chavez urged the United States to keep up the trade and use of resources that had begun in Latin America during the war. In this Chapter we will examine the Cold War threat of Communist expansion into the economically troubled republics of Latin America, instead of Axis expansion. During this time period, Dennis Chavez maintained his view towards Latin America—that the United States must maintain hegemony through economic and militaristic means. He espoused that the United States should continue to invest in Latin America economically as well as militaristically to avoid the rise of Communist regimes. It is hard to say if Dennis Chavez viewed Communist infiltration as a serious threat or as a means to induce further investment by the United States. There is evidence to support both sides, however, there is a certain quality to his rhetoric that indicates that the threat was viewed as a means to gain United States dollars. Prime examples of his rhetoric can be found in his calls for support of Mexican oil and Bolivian tin. In each case he claimed that a lack of investment would lay the grounds for Communist revolution. Also, an example of his postwar views toward activities in Latin America can be found with his push for the completion of the Pan-American Highway, especially the Nicaraguan section. Here again he espoused the belief that a failure to complete this highway would leave Latin America weak and vulnerable in the event of a Soviet attack.

During the immediate Post-War period, his unwavering call for support of Latin America was often controversial, especially his rhetoric against the Marshall Plan and other European reconstruction efforts. The Marshall Plan was one of the most significant

foreign policy decisions of the 20th Century without which Europe could have never recovered as fast as she did. Again, Dennis Chavez was misguided in his rhetoric and statements, but his ardor for multi-faceted relations with Latin America continued to define his overall philosophy.

The world of foreign relations changed significantly after World War II. Victory over the Axis Powers relieved statesmen of the pressure of war, only to be replaced by the fear of the spread of Communism. This was a new foreign relations environment, and it called for a much different approach than what was used before. Like most, Dennis Chavez no longer supported isolationism and embraced the new state of foreign affairs. It is during this period that we see Dennis Chavez's adoption of the Good Neighbor Policy and Inter-American Solidarity principles take true form. Chavez used the threat of Communism as a reason to continue and strengthen solidarity with Latin America. However, Chavez initially stated that, "I am in full accord with the foreign policy program of Secretary of State Byrnes, which is fully supported by President Truman," but then he changed his rhetoric and criticized the implementation of the Marshall Plan.⁷³ In some respect Dennis Chavez still wanted the United States to remain isolated in the Western Hemisphere. Like most, he changed his mind and believed that the United States was and should be the preeminent power in the world in direct opposition to Russia and viewed complacency as "suicidal."⁷⁴

Dennis Chavez, however, had a different vision than most policy makers on how to stand in opposition to Russia. First, he still believed that stability must be maintained

⁷³ Dennis Chavez, Speech on Post World War II, n.d., box 71, folder 29, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁷⁴ Dennis Chavez, "We Made the Mistake Once of Underestimating Our Foe. Now, To Do So, is Suicidal," *New Mexico's Role in Hemispheric Defense*, Inter-American SANTA FEAN, February 3, 1942, box 71, folder 40, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

in Latin America to prevent Communist incursion into the Western Hemisphere. Along with that belief came his strong opposition to the Marshal Plan, and the reliance on oil from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern States. His arguments were in stark contrast to the mainstream ideas of the time—even those of President Truman and Secretary Byrnes. Dennis Chavez simply maintained that the primary avenue for peace was a secure and stable Western Hemisphere, even when most policy makers were advocating increased relations in Europe—a notion that frightened Chavez, who on occasion espoused that, to engage in the affairs of the Europe would once again lead to world instability and war.

During a trip to Mexico City in 1946, Chavez wrote on a note pad from Hotel Geneve in Mexico, “The spirit of Franklin Delano Roosevelt still exists in the world—the basic philosophy of good will must prevail. The Good Neighbor Policy must and shall continue. The peace of the world must be preserved—and we of the parliamentary bodies of the world must do all we can to preserve that peace”⁷⁵ In a sense, Dennis Chavez was holding on to the principles of the Good Neighbor Policy in an increasingly changing foreign relations world. However, he saw that the end of World War II brought a serious deterioration in United States-Latin American relations, and argued that this created a perfect condition for the seeds of Communism to take root. The United States, he argued, had once championed the Good Neighbor Policy, but now shifted its focus from Latin America to Europe and Asia. This shift caused many Latin Americans to feel that the United States took them for granted after devoting years to building an effective inter-American system.

⁷⁵ Dennis Chavez, Speech Before the Mexican Congress, December 3, 1946, box 72, folder 26, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

One of the primary examples of this, he stated, was the economic impact World War II had had on Latin America. He highlighted how the sudden termination of the wartime demand for raw materials and the awareness of profound socioeconomic and political changes made Latin American governments anxious, and yet it appeared the United States government did little to help—instead, most of the aid went to Europe and Asia. During World War II, Latin American Nations contributed heavily to the Allied cause by providing necessary natural resources such as, crude oil, copper, nitrates, quartz crystals, manganese, cadmium, and mercury. These contributions undoubtedly helped the United States defeat the Axis powers, however, in some cases, heavy investments in the production of these materials and access to foreign markets led many Latin American countries to rely too heavily on a few commodities to support their national economy, which had adverse affects when demand for that commodity declined.

That is exactly what happened in the years after World War II. As demand fell, so too did the economies of many Latin American republics. “By the middle of the 1950’s the post war export boom had ended, imperiling both the general economic model that had been adopted by Latin American governments and the political alignments that kept them in power.”⁷⁶ With the viability of their economies in serious doubt, many countries feared they would fall into poverty and instability. This environment, Dennis Chavez asserted, was a fertile field for the seeds of Communism, and seriously threatened the security of the United States.⁷⁷

During the war, Dennis Chavez promoted development in Latin America to fulfill many of the United States’ material and labor needs. Much to his dismay, the very thing

⁷⁶ Tulio Halperín Donghi, *The Contemporary History of Latin America*, Edited and Translated by John Charles Chasteen, London: Duke University Press, 1993, 250

⁷⁷ Chavez, Speech Before the Mexican Congress, December 3, 1946.

he promoted had a profound negative impact on many Latin American countries and created an environment that was ripe for Communist infiltration. Dennis Chavez, therefore, regularly made arguments for hemispheric solidarity to ward against this threat. He once quoted Dean Acheson's statement that "A principle which is as fundamental as it is disregarded, is that in the organizational maintenance of power, relations with states which are closest geographically and in interest and purpose are the most important."⁷⁸ Dennis Chavez used this quote to add credibility to his belief that the United States needed to maintain peace within its own hemisphere. Below the Rio Grande, he saw an enormous supply of raw materials and manpower that was relatively easy to get to and protect. The only obstacle Dennis Chavez identified was that Latin Americans were reluctant to aid the United States further for they blamed the United States for their economic situation, and felt betrayed when the United States failed to create a plan for Latin America similar to the Marshall Plan.

To correct this potentially dangerous situation, Dennis Chavez argued that the United States should again invest more in Latin America than in Europe. In fact, he saw massive investments in Latin America as unquestionable. Because of this position he often found himself in opposition to the vast amounts of money being spent to rebuild Europe. Dennis Chavez saw the rebuilding of Europe under the Marshall Plan as potentially enticing for Russia to take the aid and incorporate it into their already expanding empire. These beliefs put him in a position opposite to the mainstream belief that a strong Western Europe was needed to check the expansion of Communism. Instead of a strong Western Europe to check Russian expansion, Dennis Chavez promoted

⁷⁸ Chavez, Dennis, Speech at the Albuquerque Business and Professional Women's Club Dinner, February 27, 1958, box 76, folder 22, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Western Hemispheric solidarity as the sure way to defend the United States and ensure that she was able to stand in opposition to Russia. He argued that Latin America's proximity to the United States, with their abundant natural resources, and democratic disposition were the key to building a strong alliance against any potential Russian aggression. To him, the access to critical resources and materials were necessary to, in his own words, "keep the industrial economy of war in motion."⁷⁹ As a consequence, he believed the United States should focus its energy on that region, instead of Europe.

But Chavez's beliefs were counter to President Harry S. Truman, who believed that the United States should invest in the future of Europe to prevent the spread of Communism. After World War II, Truman became convinced that Stalin intended to extend Communist influence throughout Europe, especially Eastern Europe. By early 1947, the president had a new foreign policy standing boldly in opposition to Communism. It was called the Truman Doctrine, later known as containment, and was focused on blocking Communist expansion anywhere in the world. Under Truman, the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were the major manifestations of this doctrine and committed the United States to a role of world leadership it now was obligated to assume. Implemented in 1947 and 1948, the Marshall Plan was a massive American-financed reconstruction program for war-torn Europe. At the time, NATO was a military alliance established in 1949 to provide a common defense against potential Soviet and later Communist Chinese military aggression, and it was the first peacetime military alliance the United States had ever joined. Truman was consumed

⁷⁹ Chavez, Dennis, Speech at the Albuquerque Business and Professional Women's Club Dinner, February 27, 1958.

by developments in Europe and Asia, leaving Latin America by the wayside. Even so, as priorities go, Europe and Asia were faced with the most challenges to world peace, and Latin America, although in economic trouble, was in no way close to the same level of turmoil. Truman saw this, and devoted the United States to the development and security of Europe.⁸⁰

Focusing all of the United States money and attention on Europe and neglecting Latin America, Chavez believed, was a tacit reversal of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy.⁸¹ He argued, after the war, Latin American countries needed the United States assistance to raise their standards of living—in many ways this was a precursor to the Alliance for Progress mentality towards Latin America. Chavez believed, the manner in which the State Department dropped its Latin American friends would lead an outsider to believe that the countries of the Western Hemisphere were victims of a diabolical plot to destroy the Inter-American system. He went on to say that “[t]he Good Neighbor Policy was found in principle and was sound in results. It paid dividends in sympathy, in essential raw materials, in man power when we were fighting the Axis, and now that we are engaged in a cold war, it might be well for us to stop and evaluate the consequences if that friendship is destroyed.”⁸²

To shore up this friendship and create a basic level of security, Dennis Chavez advocated a policy of Western Hemisphere solidarity based on the *Declaration of Principles of Inter-American Solidarity And Cooperation* of 1936. In 1948, the United

⁸⁰ Harold S. Truman, Springfield, NJ: Enslow, 1997. Truman, Harry S. *The Autobiography of Harry S Truman*. Edited by Robert H. Ferrell. Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1980.

⁸¹ Farrell, 10.

⁸² Ibid.

States and other American republics came together to address solidarity and relations at the Bogotá Conference. During the Bogotá Conference the Union of American Republics was replaced with the Organization of American States. All twenty-one states were represented at the conference, which lasted six weeks during the months of March and April of 1948. This conference produced two treaties of fundamental significance in Western Hemispheric solidarity. The first agreement was the charter of the Organization of American States. The second treaty was the Treaty on Pacific Settlement, which was later known as the Pact of Bogotá. This treaty coordinated and unified all the prior Inter-American treaties and declarations for the peaceful settlement of disputes among member states.

Even though Secretary Marshall had promised that the United States would produce an economic agreement for Latin America at Bogotá a year before the conference, the conference failed to produce any significant economic agreements. Latin Americans did not just want a simple one-time handout or trade barrier manipulation—it desired a massive plan similar to the Marshall Plan in Europe. Latin Americans felt betrayed by the United States after the war. They had supplied massive amounts of resources for the Allied war effort and they pleaded for a program that would ensure economic stability similar to the Marshall plan. They argued that a stable economy in Latin America would dramatically extend the market for United States exports, raise the standard of living, and ultimately contribute to European recovery. They had a sense of entitlement that would never be filled. No economic program the size of the Marshall Plan would ever materialize. Most likely, economic consensus failed to materialize because the Bogotá Conference was disrupted by massive riots in the Columbian capital, which

nearly caused the conference to be terminated—the aftermath of which gave stark testimony to the unrest in Latin America during this time.

Further unrest was present throughout Latin America. There was revolution in Costa Rica, rumors of the same in Chile and Ecuador—all warning signs, according to Dennis Chavez, of more trouble to come. Using these developments as a platform for a shift in foreign policy, he stated, “So long as people are ill-fed; ill-housed; ill-clad; and so long as there is misery, poverty, suffering and ignorance in the world, Communist propaganda, however false, will have appeal. The mobs in Bogotá that burned and robbed and killed were people who were cold and hungry.”⁸³ He goes on to note how Latin America played a significant role during World War II and if Latin American ties were developed further this connection could be used in defense against Communism. To Dennis Chavez this was a natural move because Latin America and the United States shared tradition, heritage and geography.⁸⁴

After the Bogotá Conference, Dennis Chavez began to lobby the United States Senate to increase the resources, manpower and political strength of Latin America. Just as Latin American countries had opened their borders and resources during World War II, he felt the United States should strengthen the bonds between Latin America and shore up hemispheric solidarity before it was too late.⁸⁵ In a speech given on NBC, he noted that even Walter Lippmann wrote that “The conference showed, so I venture to think, that the United States and the Latin American republics, despite all their traditional bonds, do not constitute a viable community in the modern world, and that their problems are

⁸³ Dennis Chavez, *The Bogota Conference Must Succeed*, April 19, 1948, box 72, folder 58, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁸⁴ Chavez, *The Bogota Conference Must Succeed*, April 19, 1948.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

becoming progressively more insoluble within the confines of the Western Hemisphere.”⁸⁶ Chavez saw economic disaster in the future for Latin America and feared the instability would ultimately lead to Communism taking a foothold in Latin America, ultimately putting the United States’ security at risk.

Not only did Dennis Chavez fear that Communism could take hold in an economically poor Latin America, he was also afraid that a lack of development of their natural resources could also hinder the United States’ ability to stave off Communism throughout the world. While Congress was debating the European Recovery Program in 1948, Dennis Chavez argued the United States should develop Latin American resources, especially their oil resources. During the peak recovery days of Europe there was a shortage of oil necessary for the rebuilding effort. Dennis Chavez chimed in and stated “Other countries of this continent could aid materially, not only helping us furnish supplies, including oil, to carry out the European Recovery Program, but could also aid materially in breaking the fuel shortage—all in keeping with the philosophy of the European recovery program and also with our boasted Good Neighbor Policy, if we mean it.”⁸⁷

Specifically, Chavez wanted the United States to invest in the oil reserves in Mexico, instead of relying on Saudi Arabian oil. He emphatically espoused that neglecting the development of the Mexican oil industry was a matter of national security.⁸⁸ Chavez stated in 1948, “The oil of Mexico, the oil of Columbia, the oil of

⁸⁶ Walter Lippman, *Today and Tomorrow, Bogota and After*, box 72, folder 58, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁸⁷ Senator Dennis Chavez of New Mexico, Speaking on Mexican Oil, March 10, 1948, *Congressional Record*, 80th Cong., March 10, 1948, Vol. 45, 2549.

⁸⁸ Senator Dennis Chavez of New Mexico, Speaking on Mexican Oil, March 10, 1948, 2550.

Venezuela, are more important to us than the oil of Saudi Arabia.”⁸⁹ To him the oil in Mexico was relatively safe and easy to obtain during both war and peace, and the Russians were more likely to attack Saudi Arabia, due to proximity, than Mexico.⁹⁰ Because of this, Chavez argued to ensure that the United States developed the reserves in Mexico, despite the complicated history surrounding Mexico and the expropriation of United States oil company’s property in 1938. To overcome this obstacle, Dennis Chavez expected the American oil companies to settle for a reimbursement significantly less than what was actually expropriated.

In 1949 Mexican oil production averaged 1,000,000 billion barrels (BBLs) per day. Even with this production, the refining capacity of Mexico was deemed inadequate to the point that they were forced to import lubricating oil and high-octane gasoline. At this time, the potential oil resources of Mexico were conservatively estimated at 4,525,000,000 BBLs per day, and was considered the largest single source of petroleum in the Western Hemisphere, outside of the United States.⁹¹ With these facts at his disposal, Dennis Chavez highlighted the importance of providing Mexico with money to improve and increase its refining capabilities. He argued that, in the case of a war, Central and South America become valuable allies with Mexico City becoming a valuable strategic and economic center.⁹²

By the fall of 1949 the United States State Department and Mexico were heavily involved in negotiations over a potential loan to develop Mexico’s oil resources. During the negotiations Mexico claimed it needed \$800,000,000 to properly build its

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2551.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2553.

⁹¹ Nicholas De Rachat to Dennis Chavez, Confidential Letter, August 23, 1949, box 73, folder 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁹² Nicholas De Rachat to Dennis Chavez, Confidential Letter, August 23, 1949.

infrastructure. Already having given up \$17,000,000 the United States negotiators asked for proof that the loan would be financially sound. Insulted by this the Mexican negotiators left the table. Due to the breakdown in negotiations, many claimed that this would give Communism a foothold in Mexico. Dennis Chavez was one of those who believed this and claimed that the Communists would most likely try to take advantage of the stalled talks for political gain. He specifically asked President Truman to take action to deprive the Communists of this possibility—especially at the upcoming Continental Congress for Peace in Mexico City.⁹³

Dennis Chavez saw danger in the stalled loan talks and emphatically spoke out against the American oil industry and the United States government's unwillingness to compromise and reconcile the past with Mexico. In a speech delivered August 30th, 1949 Dennis Chavez noted that the United States was pouring tons of money into Europe and ignoring Mexico who imported \$5,000,000,000 a year of American goods. He blamed the stalled negotiations on "Big American Oil" interests. He was outraged that "Big Oil" was influencing the negotiations because of the expropriation of their property in 1938. Chavez highlighted to the Senate how the Mexican Oil industry, under Senator Bermudez had increased oil production to sixty million barrels a year in 1948 since Mexico seized United States oil properties in 1938. By stalling talks, Dennis Chavez believed that the American Oil companies were putting their own self-interest above national security. He believed that having oil resources close to home instead of in Saudi Arabia made better

⁹³ New York Herald and Tribune, 9/2/1949, "Truman Heeds Threat of Reds Rally in Mexico, box 73, folder 4, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

sense in terms of security.⁹⁴ In this regard Dennis Chavez failed to see the precedent that ignoring the expropriation of American property would set.

Dennis Chavez, in his criticism of the United States oil companies demand for proper compensation before the United States extended a loan, essentially ignored the history surrounding the entire situation. The expropriation of American assets by the Mexican government set a precedent that it was okay to seize American property and negotiate a less than fair price to settle the dispute. In a sense, it set the stage for Castro and Cuba to expropriate American property later in the century. Also, Dennis Chavez failed to acknowledge that the condition of the Mexican oil industry in 1949 was a direct result of the expropriation and a lack of funding to maintain and upgrade their infrastructure. Still, Dennis Chavez wholeheartedly believed that investing in the Mexican oil industry was essential to the security and stability of the United States.

Chavez was able to look past the expropriation issue because he specifically believed that, “Mexico [was] the key to Latin America. Every Latin American country watches carefully how we treat our closest neighbor. They remembered how we welcomed raw materials, Mexican labor and Mexican troops in time of war, but how callously we thus far have neglected her since the fighting is over.”⁹⁵ The Mexican oil case was being used as a test of United States friendship and sincerity. By granting the loan, Chavez asserted, the United States would prove its sincerity to continue to treat Latin Americans as neighbors.

Senator Chavez flew into Mexico City on October 8, 1949 and met with President Aleman and Senator Bermudez. The report stated that Dennis Chavez was optimistic that

⁹⁴ *Chavez Stresses Importance of U.S. Oil Loan to Mexico*, The El Paso Times, August 31, 1949, box 73, folder 6, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

⁹⁵ *Chavez Stresses Importance of U.S. Oil Loan to Mexico*, The El Paso Times, August 31, 1949.

Mexico would get the oil loan it needed.⁹⁶ Loan talks did eventually resume after their meeting and the loan was approved shortly thereafter.

Another example of Dennis Chavez's activities in Latin America during the post war years can be found in a very small incident involving Bolivian tin in 1952. Dennis Chavez took a stance against an agreement between Great Britain and the United States for the exchange of 1.4 million tons of steel in exchange for 20,000 long tons of tin in equal quarterly installments during 1952. Chavez believed this was an example of the potential harm that was being done in Latin America. With this agreement, the United States was to refrain from bidding on tin on the London market and was to be the sole importer of British tin. This meant that if Bolivian tin was to be purchased by the United States, it must be bought at the agreed upon \$1.18 per pound or the United States had to pay additional amounts to Great Britain. This deal, in Dennis Chavez's mind, would ruin Bolivia, whose tin industry made up 70 percent of the economy.

Like most Latin American countries, Bolivia was already experiencing tough economic times and there were rumors of communist agitation. Dennis Chavez insisted that the duty of the United States was to protect the future of Bolivia and guard against the collapse of its economy. Throughout the decades before World War II, Bolivia never produced more than 25,000 tons of tin per year. To support the Allied cause during World War II, Bolivians raised their production to 42,000 tons per year from a low of 36,000 tons in 1945.⁹⁷ Bolivia was representative of similar situations throughout Latin

⁹⁶ Alfonso Serrano Illescas, "Excelsior" –Mexico City-Sunday October 9th, 1949, box 73, folder 6, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico. Written in Spanish and translated into English.

⁹⁷ Alfonso Serrano Illescas, "Excelsior" –Mexico City-Sunday October 9th, 1949, Bolivians raised tin production to 42,000 tons per year in 1941, 36,000 in 1942, 41,000 in 1943, 39,000 in 1944, and 42,500 in 1945.

America, and Dennis Chavez asserted, by entering this deal with Britain the United States was straining hemispheric solidarity. To him the United States was saying “the Latin America [c]ountries served their purpose (for instance, namely, furnishing materials and support during the war) they could now be safely cast adrift without thought for the morrow.”⁹⁸ Dennis Chavez was upset at Truman’s policy with Britain and felt it weakened the United States in the eyes of Latin America and the world.

Dennis Chavez began speaking out about how such agreements as the one with Britain were drawing criticism from many Latin American republics. He pointed that the United States was being called imperialistic and heartless, and the very structure of Inter-American cooperation, which the United States labored to create through the Good Neighbor policy, was beginning to disintegrate. Dennis Chavez was also frustrated because at the time of the agreement in 1952, the United States was at war with North Korea, and in need of tin, and yet it was boycotting Bolivian tin in favor of British tin. In his mind the United States was losing world prestige and key alliances⁹⁹. In the end, Dennis Chavez got nowhere with his criticism of this deal, and failed to make any significant changes in policy. However, he did not let this deter him from focusing on Western Hemisphere solidarity.

Part of his proposed solution to shore up Western Hemispheric solidarity was education in Latin America. Dennis Chavez believed that if the people of Latin America could receive even the most rudimentary education, Communism would not be able to take hold. He stated “For democracy to survive against dictatorship or totalitarianism, we must have our citizens of the world educated. An educated public is the strongest weapon

⁹⁸ Alfonso Serrano Illescas, 37.

⁹⁹ Dennis Chavez, *What Happened to the Good Neighbor Policy?*, April 4, 1952, box 74, file 26, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

against inhuman and selfish individuals who want to impose their warped will on others. No military weapon—however devastating its power might be—can destroy the democratic foundation of freedom-loving spirit of an educated person.”¹⁰⁰ No doubt he was talking about nuclear weapons. Dennis Chavez asserted that every person in the western hemisphere deserved an elementary education at the very least. He argued that teachers and administrators should have the tools and money to properly educate their students, and the United States was in the best position to fulfill this need.¹⁰¹

At the Inter-American Seminar on Elementary Education at the Inter-American Conference at Montevideo, Dennis Chavez was asked to be a keynote speaker. During his address, he highlighted the importance of elementary education to the security of the Western Hemisphere. He claimed that democracy was being tested by the propaganda of the enemy. The Montevideo Conference on Primary Education was an outgrowth of meetings held in Rio de Janeiro and was the first time international experts met to study and attempt to remedy the Inter-American educational system that led to the existence of a high illiterate rate in all of the Americas. Educating the people, in Chavez’s mind, was one way of hindering the spread of Communism.

Dennis Chavez did not just view economics and education as the only solution to stabilizing Latin America during the Post War Period—he had a small hand in military developments as well. One program that Dennis Chavez supported was the Mutual Security Program. The Mutual Security Act was initiated in 1951 to train Latin American military commanders in an effort to provide security for the Western Hemisphere from foreign powers—especially Russia. Under the act the United States negotiated military

¹⁰⁰ Dennis Chavez, Speech Just Before the Inter-American conference in Montevideo, Uruguay, 1949, box 73, file 16, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹⁰¹ Chavez, Speech Just Before the Inter-American conference in Montevideo, Uruguay, 1949.

agreements with twelve Latin American nations. By the end of 1959 the United States spent \$317 million on equipment, materials, training and other assistance¹⁰² As part of this program, many Latin American countries sent military officers to the United States General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Visitor training began with Public Law 710, in June of 1938 and was started again in 1954 as a direct outgrowth of the Mutual Security Act. This was regarded as one of the better “Good Neighbor” programs and was done to “establish a closer liaison between the western hemisphere military personages and establish a more harmonious future relationship.”¹⁰³

Dennis Chavez being concerned with the security of the western hemisphere against Communism, both ideologically and militarily, supported the Mutual Security Program, especially when it involved the development of a missile tracking system in the Caribbean region. In 1957 the United States established missile tracking stations in the Caribbean and Latin America. Dennis Chavez often requested specifics from General F. Twining on the present role of the Caribbean in military matters, what each country did during World War II and Korea, and what they could be expected to contribute to future conflicts. He wanted to know who the United States negotiated assistance with and their contacts.¹⁰⁴ His primary focus was to make sure that those countries that supported the Allies and NATO the most received the bulk of United States aid and support in the future. By the end of 1955, under the Mutual Security Program, the United States invested billions of dollars in direct aid and an untold amount in training and

¹⁰² Frederico Gil, *Latin American—United States Relations*, 215.

¹⁰³ Dennis Chavez, *General Staff Training*, box 42, folder 31, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹⁰⁴ Dennis Chavez to General Twining, July 15, 1957, box 42, folder 31, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

development in Latin America in an effort to shore them up against Communist infiltration.

Finally, one of Dennis Chavez's most significant projects for Latin American stability in the Post War Era was the completion of the Pan-American Highway. He saw this project as integral to the defense of the western hemisphere against Communism, as well as an avenue to stabilizing and supporting the economies of Latin America. He originally supported this effort from the inception of the project in 1933. When the project was put aside to fight World War II he was quick to remind other senators and legislators of the importance of such a project. Dennis Chavez stated "I take special interest in Latin-American affairs, perhaps because I am of Spanish ancestry, but principally because I believe that a strong union of western hemisphere nations is the surest means of promoting international peace today. If our countries are strong industrially, economically, and politically, we can assure peace for the world because none will dare attack us."¹⁰⁵

Dennis Chavez reminisced "One of my earliest dreams has been, and remains, the completion of an all-weather highway from the United States to the southern end of South America. I expect to see it a reality."¹⁰⁶ When he first came to Congress there was no such thing as the Good Neighbor Policy. He was convinced that the Big Stick Policy and Dollar Diplomacy were not effective, if not a menace, to understanding Inter-American solidarity. When Roosevelt and Hull began the Good Neighbor Policy, Dennis

¹⁰⁵ Dennis Chavez, *Good Highways –Promoters of Good Will*, Speech delivered before the American Road Builders Association, February 9, 1949, box 73, folder 4, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹⁰⁶ Dennis Chavez, Speech before the American Road Builders Association Conference and 47th annual meeting, Cincinnati, Oh, March 6-9, 1950, box 73, folder 16, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Chavez welcomed it and encouraged it every way he could¹⁰⁷. Chavez espoused that the construction of the Pan-American Highway was one of the surest ways to create understanding and goodwill in Latin America. Also, he remarked that along with these roads a network of radio, telegraphs and telephones would complete the union.¹⁰⁸ He believed that the highway would bring prosperity, encourage industrialization, and bring about elevated standards in living and assure political and economic security.¹⁰⁹

The Pan American Highway was in no way solely a project funded by the United States. In 1949, it extended 3,200 miles and ran from Laredo, Texas, through Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, to the Panama Canal. The cooperative agreement between the United States and the Latin American countries provided for them a two-thirds contribution from the United States, and required a one-third contribution from the Latin American republics.

Dennis Chavez not only viewed the highway as good for prosperity, he also viewed the highway system as important to the defense of the western hemisphere. Primarily he believed that the highway system would further relations between the United States and the Good Neighbors to the south. One of the most important factors in his support was the free exchange of persons. It was this freedom of movement that he believed would do more than any other single thing to promote understanding and good will and friendship. He regularly made trips to inspect the progress of the highway, to meet with foreign dignitaries and private businessmen to ensure that the road would be completed.

¹⁰⁷ Chavez, Dennis, Speech before the American Road Builders Association Conference and 47th annual meeting, Cincinnati, Oh, March 6-9, 1950.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

As a direct result of his support for the Inter-American Highway, Dennis Chavez was awarded the *National Decoration of Vasco Nunez de Balboa*, the highest award given by the Panamanian government to foreign persons who had done great work in Panama and Latin America.¹¹⁰ He was awarded this decoration because he was responsible for placing the proposal to continue construction of the Inter-American highway. The bill was passed late in 1950. He was also recognized for his active roll in improving relations with Latin America. In 1950, Dennis Chavez visited Panama to survey the area set aside for the Inter-American Highway. Also mentioned was his support for the establishment of air and sea bases in Latin America in 1941. Finally, he was recognized because in 1943 he headed a Senate Committee that studied Puerto Rico to improve its social and economic conditions.¹¹¹

During his acceptance speech he stated that the completion of the Inter-American highway was his “best contribution which I [Dennis Chavez] have been able to make in all of my public life to Hemispheric Solidarity.”¹¹² When presenting the *National Decoration of the Order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa* to Senator Chavez, Dr. Brin of Panama stated “The Government of Panama, by conferring its highest distinction upon this outstanding citizen of the United States of America, publicly expresses its appreciation of the meritorious work which he has done in the welding together of the various factors which forge friendship and mutual understanding between our two

¹¹⁰ Mr. Schoepel to Dennis Chavez, April 10th, 1951, box 73, file 21, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹¹¹ Press Release on the National Decoration of the order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa Award to Senator Chavez, n.d., box 73, file 21, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹¹² Dennis Chavez, Acceptance Speech for the National Decoration of the Order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa Award, April 4, 1951, box 73, file 21, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

countries. He has contributed generously to this work of effective planning by dedicating his ardent enthusiasm and admirable good-will to this noble cause.”¹¹³ Dr. Brin went on to call Dennis Chavez a fighter for American solidarity, and one who accepted the problems of Latin America as his, and through his work and speeches constantly supported a policy of positive Pan-Americanism. Dennis Chavez was inducted into the order with the rank of *Gran Official* on April 4th, 1951.¹¹⁴

Dennis Chavez was honored and moved by the receipt of this award. Dr. Brin’s words “touched [his] heartstrings.”¹¹⁵ Dennis Chavez stated “Your words, Honorable Dr. Brin, resound the appreciation of sincere, though modest, labor which I have been able to perform during the course of my parliamentary life and tend to consolidate the feeling of sincere understanding and loyal friendship among the nations of the Western Hemisphere, of this continent, which is undoubtedly, destined by God to serve as a haven for Western Civilization.”¹¹⁶ Dennis Chavez also noted that he did not work alone, and that other congressmen voted and pushed for the completion of the Inter-American highway as well. Dennis Chavez went on to say that “to connect Panama with the United States is a work of justice toward our nation which, in an unforgettable moment, permitted ours to utilize, in brotherly spirit, the entrance of the Isthmus in order to unite the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean.”¹¹⁷

Concerning a portion of the highway, Dennis Chavez came into contact with Luis Somoza, President of Nicaragua, throughout the 1950’s. Like many Latin American

¹¹³ Dr. Brin, Speech presenting the Order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa to Dennis Chavez, April 4, 1951, box 73, file 21, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹¹⁴ Dr. Brin, Speech presenting the Order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa to Dennis Chavez, April 4, 1951.

¹¹⁵ Chavez, Acceptance Speech for the National Decoration of the Order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa Award, April 4, 1951.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

republics in the 1950's, Nicaragua was struggling to develop economically and politically. In 1956 a lone gunman killed Anastasio Somoza Garcia, leaving his sons Luis and Anastasio in complete control of the country. Luis had outmaneuvered or killed all important political opponents to his ascendancy to the presidency. He was extremely brutal in his tactics to the point that, "Brave and outspoken men often ended in the dungeon of the Presidential Palace where electrodes of the infamous 'Little Machine' were attached to their genitals for long sessions of torture."¹¹⁸ With his brother, Anastasio in control of the National Guard, Luis Somoza was assured to maintain the status quo in Nicaragua. The United States had no qualms with the situation in Nicaragua at the time. Much of the talk of Somoza and Nicaragua in Foreign Relations of the United States centered around the economic situation in Nicaragua and the multiple purchases of United States weapons by Somoza for his country.

On March 11, 1955 a new law regarding foreign capital investments in Nicaragua became effective. The law was specifically designed to entice foreign capital to Nicaragua to stimulate their economy. One of the main premises of this new law was that foreign capital could "enter and leave the country without restrictions."¹¹⁹ Article 9 of the law allowed for the withdrawal of foreign capital at any time. Article 14 stipulated that businesses established with foreign capital "will receive not less than national treatment under the law and will not be discriminated against with regards to labor legislation, taxation, or administrative measures."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America, 2nd Edition*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 162.

¹¹⁹ Economic Reports, World Trade Information Service, October 1956, box 3, file 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹²⁰ Economic Reports, World Trade Information Service, October 1956.

The Nicaraguan economy was predominately agricultural at this time. The GNP in 1955 was estimated at 1,027 million *Cordobas* (7 *Cordobas* = 1 US Dollar) with agriculture representing 40 percent or 416 *Cordobas* out of 1,027. The rest of the GNP was broken down across manufacturing, commerce and finance, government, mining, construction, transportation and communication, professional and domestic services, and power. Nicaragua's major crops at this time were cotton, coffee, sesame, sugar, rice and beans. Cotton and coffee were by far the most important products from a foreign exchange perspective; exports of these two commodities accounted for 75 percent of all exports.¹²¹

Government assistance for agriculture was concentrated in two agencies—the Nicaraguan Agriculture Service (STAN), a joint project of the United States Technical Assistance, and the National Development Institute. These agencies extended loans for equipment and property. Nicaragua had been traditionally dependent on the United States market for its exports of raw materials and its imports of manufactured goods. Even so, after World War II most of Nicaraguan cotton and coffee was sold to Western Europe and Japan cutting exports to the United States from 70 percent down to 37 percent. Consequently imports from the United States had decreased from 81 percent to 65 percent by 1950.

Still, the oldest and most important force behind economic development in Nicaragua was the United States—specifically the programs such as STAN, which was a joint project of Point IV and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. By June of 1956 the United States government contributed \$1,371,000 to technical assistance programs in

¹²¹ Ibid.

Nicaragua. Also, the United States appropriated through its Bureau of Public Roads \$7.5 million for the construction of the Nicaraguan stretch of the Inter-American Highway. In addition to this the United States had also appropriated another \$7.5 million and budgeted another \$4 million for the construction of the Rama Road from Managua to the Atlantic, which was being done entirely by United States dollars.

Nicaragua was one of the largest Central American countries occupying 57,000 square miles with a population of 1,203,113 people in 1957. It had a centralized republican form of government, with an elected president and a bicameral legislative branch. In 1950 a new constitution was enacted that allowed for “proportional representation in both elective and appointive positions”¹²² In 1956 there were two legal political parties consisting of The National Liberals and the Conservatives both competing for the presidential seat in February of 1957.¹²³ Shortly after the assassination of Anastasio Somoza Garcia in 1956, his son Luis Somoza had consolidated power and held elections in 1957.

The presidential election on February 3, 1957 resulted in the predicted election of Luis Somoza essentially assuring that Nicaraguan economic policies would not change. However, the coffee crop was damaged by un-seasonal rains and together with lagging sales in the cotton industry there was cause for concern with regards to exchange earnings and balance of payments. Most reports that came out during this time revealed that crops still under cultivation were still in excellent condition offsetting the losses projected in

¹²² Basic Data on the Economy of Nicaragua, in World Trade Information Service, October 1956, box 43, folder 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹²³ Basic Data on the Economy of Nicaragua, in World Trade Information Service, October 1956.

cotton and coffee. Retail activity was down, new loans being taken out were down, and vegetable oil exports decreased because of increased competition from El Salvador.¹²⁴

It is at this time that Dennis Chavez became involved with the development of Nicaragua's economy. He initially began his support for Nicaragua with his efforts towards the completion of the Pan American Highway, but soon became involved in specific projects to improve the economic situation in Nicaragua. For instance, on April 29th 1957 he wrote a letter to the Assistant Director of Operations for the Western Hemisphere Division of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBCRD), *Frederico Consolo*, inquiring about financial assistance for the cotton seed oil mill project in Nicaragua. He was ultimately referred to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) because the IBCRD required a governmental guarantee, where as the IFC did not.¹²⁵ Dennis Chavez was ultimately successful in securing financing for this project.

Dennis Chavez's interest in the economic situation in Nicaragua eventually gained him the attention and respect of President Luis Somoza, and they regularly corresponded. Their first communiqué was on May 2, 1957. Dennis Chavez wrote to thank Somoza for the courtesies that were extended to his assistant Charles Davis, and two American businessmen Manuel Caballero and Frank Jerome. By all indications in this letter, it seemed that Caballero and Jerome were seeking to invest in Nicaragua. Dennis Chavez wrote "Both Mr. Caballero and Mr. Jerome are financially responsible

¹²⁴ Economic Summary for Nicaragua, February 1957, box 43, file 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹²⁵ Frederico Consolo to Dennis Chavez, May 6th, 1957, box 43, file 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

and highly respected in their community. I feel that their visit to Nicaragua will prove productive, not only to them, but also to your country.”¹²⁶

On June 11, 1957 Dennis Chavez wrote to Somoza congratulating him on his method of handling a dispute between Rosendo Arguello Jr. and Frank Jerome over commitments made and not honored by Arguello in regards to scrap iron. The letter indicated that Arguello made some rash commitments he could not honor. Major Garcia of Nicaragua was forced to make himself personally responsible for these debts to keep foreign investment coming into the country. Dennis Chavez wrote to Somoza to get him to pursue the issue and “stop Arguello from making other commitments to any other purchasers of scrap iron in other countries. By this, I infer that my constituents do not care who he sells the scrap iron to, but we do not want him to get himself in a bind where he has taken money or monies to further increase his present obligations.”¹²⁷ In this same letter he indicated that Mr. Jerome would be submitting a proposal on the cotton seed oil mill and would be in Nicaragua in the next 30 days.¹²⁸

The dispute between Arguello and Jerome popped up again when an agreement between Jerome and *Promotora Industrial Nicaraguense* occurred. Jerome was to receive six dollars per ton on all of *Promotora Industrial Nicaraguense* steel shipped from Managua. In October of 1957, 3,000 tons of steel was shipped from Nicaragua without the payment being made to Jerome. Instead the money was paid to Garcia, Merlin Teskey (who had supposedly replaced Mr. Jerome in the deal without any consultation), and Mr.

¹²⁶ Dennis Chavez to Somosa, May 2, 1957, box 43, file 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹²⁷ Dennis Chavez to Somosa, May 2, 1957.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Arguello. Mr Teskey received approximately \$44,000, Arguello received \$23,000, and Major Garcia received \$29,000.

Being that Senator Chavez introduced Jerome to Somoza, he took a personal interest in seeing that this dispute was handled fairly. Dennis Chavez wrote to Somoza, “if the Government of Nicaragua is not going to intervene and see to it that without delay restitution is made to the American investor, to whom guarantees have been made by responsible Nicaraguan citizens and assurances given by the Nicaraguan government, I could no longer in good conscience recommend to any American investor that he make any new investments in Nicaragua.”¹²⁹ Chavez demanded that the \$18,000.00 be paid to Jerome as soon as possible, a meeting arranged between Arguello and Jerome, plus the government of Nicaragua should enter into negotiations with Jerome to replace *Promotora Industrial Nicarguense* and associates for the purchase of scrap steel. Dennis Chavez was very deeply disturbed by this matter and hoped that Somoza would rectify it to the best of his ability.¹³⁰ By December 4, 1957 the matter was not resolved and Dennis Chavez was set to call Somoza at six o’clock in the evening that day.¹³¹

On December 19, 1957, Dennis Chavez communicated to Somoza that Arguello was willing to work with Jerome to satisfy the debt. However, Jerome refused to work with Arguello due to his past experience with him. Instead he wanted to work out a deal with the government of Nicaragua.¹³² Unfortunately, other senators had begun to question Dennis Chavez on this matter causing significant embarrassment. Apparently Senator

¹²⁹ Dennis Chavez to Somoza, 1957, box 43, folder 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹³⁰ Dennis Chavez to Somoza, 1957.

¹³¹ Dennis Chavez to Somoza, December 4, 1957, box 43, folder 11 Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹³² Dennis Chavez to Somoza, December 19, 1957, box 43, folder 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Javits from New York, Senator Yarborough of Texas, and Senator Kuchel of California all wanted to know the status of the situation.¹³³ Chavez recommended that Somoza meet with the parties to work out a deal. Chavez reminded Somoza that it was “extremely important to your country that the stability of commercial transactions between the citizens of the United States and your country be maintained at all times...the political ramifications to your country could be serious should some Senator or Congressman want to insert a statement concerning this transaction in the Congressional Record.”¹³⁴

Somoza replied to Chavez on January 10th, 1958 with a denial of governmental responsibility. He acted with surprise that Mr. Jerome considered that his business transaction with *Promotora Industrial Nicaraguense* had anything to do with the government of Nicaragua. He wrote, “This unreasonable belief is to be lamented moreover thru the un-just opinion that could arise among the distinguished and appreciated Senators mentioned in your letter.”¹³⁵ He also expressed that Mr. Jerome should have been more careful with whom he did business. He should have obtained better information on the people he conducted his business with beforehand. He hoped that all who knew about this matter would be correctly informed that neither the government of Nicaragua nor Somoza himself had anything to do with the transaction. Even so, Somoza informed Chavez that if Jerome came to Nicaragua he would be treated very well and be given the correct procedure to ensure that his rights are upheld.¹³⁶ Mr.

¹³³ Letter to Somoza from Chavez, December 31, 1957, box 43, folder 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹³⁴ Letter to Somoza from Chavez, December 31, 1957.

¹³⁵ Somoza to Chavez, January 10, 1958, box 43, folder 11, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹³⁶ Letter to Chavez From Somoza, January 10, 1958.

Jerome did not make it to Nicaragua because of an illness he contracted while in Mexico City. He did meet with Arguello beforehand, but without any results.

Somoza was a brutal dictator that ruled by force, corruption, and the limitation of civil liberties. For instance, during the election of 1957 the Conservative Party refused to participate in the election in protest. Somoza created a fake party called the National Conservative Party to give the election a democratic façade. Luis Somoza of course won the election in 1957 with very little effort. Even with this façade, the United States regarded Somoza and Nicaragua among one of its allies. Somoza was a key player in the creation of the Central American Common Market, and a strong supporter of the Alliance for progress. He also allowed the CIA supported Cuban rebels to launch the Bay of Pigs Invasion from *Puerto Cabezas* on the Nicaraguan Coast.

Despite the corruption, Chavez's interaction with Somoza is an example of his intentional rapport with leaders in Latin America and his interest to ensure that United States interests were secure and American investors treated fairly. By his letters to Somoza it is obvious that Dennis Chavez regarded Somoza as a friend and associate. Chavez wrote to Somoza in this matter and others because he knew that Somoza would listen. So, what began as interest in the Nicaraguan stretch of the Pan-American Highway, soon led Chavez to involvement in the economic affairs of the country and friendship with its leader.

As the world moved past the destruction and chaos of World War II, the United States was once again at the top of its economic and military strength. The United States had demonstrated that it had the technology and will to win at all costs. A large part of that success was due to the support given by many Latin American countries, which often

sold natural resources at below market costs in the hopes of reaping the rewards after the war. Their reward never came as expected. Many of the Latin America republics saw their economies crumble after the demand for their goods fell after the war. Dennis Chavez saw the state of Latin America as a potential breeding ground for Communism. To combat this development he pushed for further investment in Latin America both economically and militarily. In doing so, he often put himself in opposition to the goals of the Marshall Plan for Europe, which he saw as foolhardy and risky. He angrily stated that “Our obligation to Europe is far less than to our Central American neighbors. These countries stood steadily by us during the war for a United Western Hemisphere.”¹³⁷ It seemed that most of his words fell on deaf ears, as Latin America never saw an effort even close to the Marshall Plan until the development of the Alliance for Progress in the 1960s. Dennis Chavez nonetheless was admired and rewarded for his efforts to develop and ease the plight of Latin America.

¹³⁷ Dennis Chavez, Speech before the American Road Builders Association Conference and 47th annual meeting, Cincinnati, Oh, March 6-9, 1950, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Chapter Four **Chavez and Perón**

Dennis Chavez's impact on Latin American foreign relations may have been minimal overall, but in some cases, Dennis Chavez found himself in the company of some of Latin America's most controversial personalities. While Chavez was admired and rewarded for his involvement in Latin America, his actions were also viewed as suspicious and controversial in the case of Argentina. In this chapter, I will explore one of the most controversial and perplexing events for Dennis Chavez in Latin America; his support for Juan D. Perón of Argentina. Why did he support this leader when, "U.S. leaders regarded Perón as an unreconstructed pro-fascist and mounted a determined campaign against him?"¹³⁸

Beginning with the Argentine Revolution in 1943 it became clear that there were fundamental differences between the United States and Argentina. The United States State Department watched as Argentina went through governments like a chameleon changes its color—matching its outer appearance to suit the pressures from within and the pressures from outside eventually settling on Juan D. Perón in 1946. It is well documented that Argentina was a source of irritation to the United States throughout World War II and during the immediate post war period. Juan D. Perón ruled with an iron fist and caused significant friction with the United States and other Latin American countries. Despite the tension that Perón caused, Dennis Chavez espoused closer relations with Argentina, stating that Perón was not as bad as he was made out to be, and thus was

¹³⁸ Mark T. Gilderhus, *The Second Century: U.S.-Latin American relations since 1889*, (Wilmington, DE, Scholarly Resources Inc, 2000), 122

invited several times to visit Perón in Argentina. There are multiple reasons why Dennis Chavez would support Perón when others did not, but the most likely was Perón's support for the middle and lower classes over that of the rich oligarchs, a position often taken by Dennis Chavez himself.

Dennis Chavez truly was at odds with American policy, not just in words, but also in action. He spoke out in support of Argentina when others did not. During a time when Argentina was a thorn in the United States side, Chavez took many trips to visit with the Argentine President, supported them at the Mexico Conference of 1946, and became involved in the appointment of one of Argentina's statesmen. The reasons why he chose to support Perón and Argentina are not clear. I believe Chavez saw Perón as a progressive Hispanic leader that used the power of the labor organizations to push his agenda. In other words, Perón admired him for developing Argentina socially and politically.

Most of the tension between Argentina and the United States centered on broken promises surrounding the severing of ties with Germany during World War II. It is here that Cordell Hull, then Secretary of State, grew suspicious and calculative towards Perón and Argentina. Despite the fact that most Latin American countries supported the Allied cause, Argentina had been linked to covert support of the Bolivian Revolution and accused of conspiring with Axis agents in subversive activities. In the face of overwhelming pressure from the United States and other Latin American republics, the Argentine government eventually broke relations with Germany in an effort to repair what relations it had left in the Americas. Still Argentina's break with Germany was naturally viewed with much skepticism. This skepticism was reinforced when on February 19, 1944, Farrell and Perón led a coup. It is generally accepted that from this

coup that Perón was in essential control of the country—pulling the strings from behind the scenes. Many years after the coup, Perón was “elected” to the presidency and the seats of true power in Argentina. Dennis Chavez ignored the general distrust of Perón and on several occasions supported him in the face of public scrutiny.

The Argentine Revolution of 1943 brought about fundamental differences between the United States and Argentina. President Ramon S. Castillo refused to sever relations with the Axis powers in accordance with the recommendations of the Rio de Janeiro Conference, pushing the United States to become ever more impatient.¹³⁹ By 1943 Castillo was overthrown by a military junta led by Pedro P. Ramirez and Arturo Rawson. At first glance it looked as if the new government would adopt a pro-United Nations policy, due in large part to public statements made by Rawson and Ramirez. For instance, President Ramirez announced that the Argentine government reaffirmed “its traditional policy of friendship and loyal cooperation with the other nations of America in conformity with existing pacts.”¹⁴⁰ Such statements prompted the United States to recognize the Ramirez government on June 11, 1943.

Unfortunately many of the promises espoused by the Ramirez regime never materialized. Ramirez did not break ties with the Axis powers. This was partly due to divisions present in the Ramirez regime. Ramirez and several other moderates were opposed by a group of junior officers who were members of the nationalistic, Pro-Fascist organization called the *Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* (GOU). Juan D. Perón was a prominent member of the GOU and was appointed as the Under-Secretary of War as well as Director of the National Labor Bureau at this time. While in these positions he

¹³⁹ Edward O. Guarrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: The University of New Mexico Press, 1950), 36.

¹⁴⁰ Guarrant, 37.

espoused a pro-Axis position. Perón also often spoke out against the United States and its pressure to affect change in Argentina. He stated that the “international position of Argentina will not be altered by pressure exercised by capital or investments of any foreign country,” no doubt making reference to Cordell Hull’s proposition to provide airplanes, parts, machinery and armaments to restore Argentina to so-called equilibrium with other Latin American countries.¹⁴¹

Things became more complex when a revolution in Bolivia overturned the government of President Penaranda on December 20th 1943 and installed Major Gualberto Villarroel. There were strong indications that German and Argentine agents operating from within Argentina had engineered the revolution.¹⁴² A few days after the Bolivian revolt the Inter-American Emergency Advisory Committee for Political Defense at Montevideo declared that recognition should be withheld from any new American government that was brought about through force during wartime until it could be determined whether the new regime would comply with Inter-American commitments for the defense of the hemisphere.¹⁴³

Unfortunately, evidence accumulated that Argentine officials had been involved in the overthrow of the Bolivian government, straining relations even more. The United States had uncovered detailed knowledge connecting Argentine nationalists with the Bolivian revolution. Also, there were the revelations that came out of the capture of German agent Osmar Hellmuth in Trinidad by British agents. Hellmuth revealed that he was a go-between for members of the German and Argentine governments as the Ramirez regime sought arms and technicians from Germany. With the Hellmuth case,

¹⁴¹ Cordell Hull, *The memoirs of Cordell Hull*, (New York, Macmillan Co., 1948),1387.

¹⁴² Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, 1388.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*,1388-1389.

Argentine officials could no longer deny involvement in Bolivia's revolution. To save face, in 1944, Ramirez and Foreign Minister Gilbert severed relations with Germany and Japan stating, "the Federal Police had uncovered a vast espionage network detrimental to friendly powers; that the Axis governments had been directly responsible for these criminal activities."¹⁴⁴

Shortly after, on February 15, 1944, a group of comparatively junior officers took control of the Foreign Ministry, ousted President Ramirez and installed General Edelmiro Farrell. The coup was the work of a military clique purported to be more pro-Axis than Ramirez. These officers, of whom Juan Perón was one, were upset by Ramirez's break in relations with the Axis and feared he might go further and actually declare war against Germany and Japan.¹⁴⁵

Needless to say the United States viewed this development with a watchful eye and refused to enter into official relations with the Farrell government. As the year progressed toward spring the United States became more and more alarmed by Argentina's outward antagonism toward the United States and other American republics, and their aid and sympathy for the Axis powers. The Farrell regime gave Axis diplomats the run of the country, set free Axis spies detained by Ramirez, gave large official contracts to Axis firms, and supported a string of pro-Axis newspapers.¹⁴⁶

On October 27, 1944 the Argentine government called for a conference of American Foreign Ministers. Argentina had the right to call this conference as a member of the Pan American Union and the Farrell regime knew it would have been impossible for the American nations to have a conference without recognizing the new Argentine

¹⁴⁴ Guerrant, 40.

¹⁴⁵ Hull, 1395.

¹⁴⁶ Guerrant, 43.

leadership. This was a shrewd move by the Farrell regime to gain recognition.¹⁴⁷ The Governing Board of the Pan American Union decided to stall the proposal claiming that there were an insufficient number of replies by the members. Furthermore, there were plans to hold a conference in 1945 to discuss post-war problems, both economic and political, so why have a special session. On January 8th, 1945 Secretary Stettinius announced that the Pan-American Union had indefinitely deferred Argentina's request for a conference and they would not be invited to the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace in Mexico.

As a result of not being invited to the Mexico conference, the Argentine government made some minor concessions in hopes of gaining consideration. For instance, they promised to hold early elections and to reinstate democratically minded professors who had been banned. The Farrell government also suspended pro-Axis dailies such as *Cabildo* and *El Pampero*. Furthermore, they showed some signs that they might declare war on Germany. For instance, "Several days before the Mexico conference convened, the Argentine Foreign Ministry released the text of a note to the German Foreign Office protesting the Nazis' 'threat' to deny safe conduct to several Argentine diplomats in Sweden."¹⁴⁸ This note suggested that Argentina's "patience and good will had been put to a severe strain."¹⁴⁹

Shortly after the release of this document, unfortunately, Perón emphatically restated Argentina's position when he released a general statement to the press. He stated, "You must not demand that we go to war against anybody...A declaration of war against Germany, out of the blue or on grounds palpably insufficient, tardily recognized and

¹⁴⁷ Hull, 46.

¹⁴⁸ Hull, 48-49.

¹⁴⁹ Guerrant, 49.

opportunistic, would alienate our friends in this country and the other American republics and give our foes an opportunity to heap scorn upon us.”¹⁵⁰ Of course Perón did not anticipate the hope offered Argentina at the Mexico City conference. The final resolution of the conference declared that it hoped that Argentina would cooperate with the other American republics in order to be incorporated into the United Nations.¹⁵¹ On March 27, 1945 President Farrell announced that Argentina was in a state of war with Germany and Japan, and that it would adhere to the Final Act of the Mexico City conference.¹⁵² As a result, Argentina was recognized on April 9, 1945 by the United States and other American republics.

Even after being recognized, Perón still found ways to antagonize the United States. For instance, on July 19, 1945 the streets of Buenos Aires were flooded with handbills personally attacking the character of United States Ambassador Braden. One handbill stated that “Cowboy Braden” had turned his eye to Argentina after his success in Cuba and Guatemala. Another declared that Washington and Lincoln would not have sent “Cowboy Braden” to tamper with the governments of Latin America. A third compared Braden to Al Capone! The fourth and final handbill stated that Braden planned to “tame” Argentina in one month.¹⁵³ Braden suspected, and later confirmed, that Perón was behind the handbills in a letter to Secretary of State James Byrnes, dated July 24, 1945. Much to Perón’s chagrin, prominent representatives of the Argentine labor unions sprang to

¹⁵⁰ Guerrant, 49.

¹⁵¹ Report of the Delegation of the United States of America to the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace, Mexico City, Mexico, February 21 to March 8, 1945, Dept of State, Conf. Ser., No 85.

¹⁵² Guerrant, 52.

¹⁵³ U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States : Diplomatic Papers, 1945. The American Republics, Argentina, Volume IX, (Washington, DC:GPO, 1945), 396-397.

Braden's aid. They denounced the dissemination of the leaflets and pushed for further strengthening of economic relations with the United States.¹⁵⁴

As much as Perón felt that he had control in Argentina, by October 1945, Argentina was in political turmoil once again. On the 9th of October a coup led from within the army resulted in Farrell's and Perón's temporary removal from power and their imprisonment. The new military leadership was unable to rally the civilian politicians and core to their cause. Six days after the coup, a group of civilian workers, led by Cipriano Reyes, descended upon the capitol forcing the military led coup to relinquish control. On October 16th, Perón and Farrell were released from prison and restored to power. Although Perón was not restored to any of his offices, it is generally accepted that from this point in time he was essentially in full control of the government.¹⁵⁵

Shortly after the restoration of the Farrell regime a campaign to elect a Constitutional President was launched. Perón immediately announced that he was running, even though he did not represent a political party. To circumvent this, Perón organized three new groups. The largest was called the *Partido Laborista*, which consisted of most of the leaders of the country's trade unions. This party won the majority of both houses at the close of the election.¹⁵⁶ The other two parties that rallied behind Perón were the Renovated Radical Party and the Independent Party. These two helped Perón win the election, however, not on the same scale as the *Partido Laborista*. The campaign was hectic, with the candidates being shot at several times, and resulted in

¹⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States : Diplomatic Papers, 1945. The American Republics, Argentina, Volume IX, 396, 397, 401.

¹⁵⁵ Joseph R Barager, *Why Perón Came to Power*; the background to Perónism in Argentina, (New York: Knopf, 1968), 191.

¹⁵⁶ Barager, *Why Perón Came to Power*, 191.

the election of Perón. On June 4, 1946, Perón was inaugurated as the Constitutional President of Argentina, beginning a long and repressive reign.¹⁵⁷

The news of Perón's eventual election did little to change the United States position on Argentina. Even though Perón had committed grave sins in the light of World War II, the policy of recognition depended upon adherence to prior agreements. On March 7th 1947, just before Perón was elected to the Presidency, Ambassador John Moors Cabot, the *chargé d'affaires* in Argentina, wrote to Secretary Acheson to air possible considerations regarding the inevitable election of Perón. The first consideration outlined that it was not the tradition of the United States to oppose a democratically elected government. Secondly, Cabot stated that, despite the presence of violence and oppression before the election, the "Voting procedure and counting of ballots have unquestionably been the fairest in Argentine history"¹⁵⁸ With that said, Cabot argued that there was no reason to doubt that Perón was the choice of the Argentine people. Based on that, he said that it would not behoove the United States to attempt to remove a government chosen by the Argentines, and that "we must accept [the] verdict of [the] Argentine people and maintain relations with their chosen [government], [as] unsatisfactory to the United States though it may be."¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Cabot acknowledged that Perón's ascendancy to the presidency in no way nullified his connivance with the Nazis in the face of United States pressure. Even so, Cabot asserted that what Perón had done in the past should be only one of the criteria concerning further relations with Argentina. Instead, the United States

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1946, The American Republics, Argentina, Volume XI, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1946), 229.

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1946, The American Republics, Argentina, Volume XI, 230.

should focus on what Perón will be expected to do in the future.¹⁶⁰ He recommended that the United States continue to put pressure on Argentina to live up to its commitments of the Rio and Mexico resolutions. Finally, Cabot recommended that Argentina's compliance and progress towards honoring these commitments should be the sole basis on which United States aid to Argentina be determined.

Secretary Byrnes wrote to all of the diplomatic representatives in the American republics that the United States would not sever relations with Argentina upon the election of Perón.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, if the question of severing diplomatic relations with the Perón regime arose it would be decided in consultation with the other American republics, and that the United States had no intention of acting unilaterally.¹⁶² The United States would, however, still refuse to sign a military treaty with any Argentine government controlled by elements that had conspired with enemies of the United States. In other words, the United States would not be selling arms to the Argentine government because of Perón's link to Nazi Germany.¹⁶³ This was evidence of the general lack of trust that Byrnes had for Perón and other factions within Argentina, for he was not about to strengthen those forces militarily that had openly opposed the United States.

Even though Perón was democratically elected, the United States and many Latin American countries did not trust Perón or his new regime. They believed, in fact, that the Argentine government had not lived up to her obligations even after declaring war on the Axis powers. Because of this the American members of the International Labor Organization would not accept the Argentine delegates at the Mexico Conference in April

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 230.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 234.

¹⁶² Ibid., 235.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

of 1946. Just before the Conference, on April 1, the United States State Department expressed its viewpoint that Argentina had not lived up to her obligations and therefore should not have a seat on any of the committees. Many of the Foreign Ministers agreed with the United States viewpoint with very few exceptions.¹⁶⁴

With the credentials of the Argentine delegates sure to be challenged the State Department laid out some very specific guidelines for its delegates. The Senior United States delegates to the conference were Senator Chavez, and Verne Zimmer of the Division of Labor Standards of the Department of State. Also in attendance for the United States was, David Zellerbach and George Meany of the American Federation of Labor. These delegates were specifically told by the State Department not to raise the question of Argentina's delegates' right to be seated at the conference, and they should only "state that credentials requirements are governed by the terms of the ILO Constitution."¹⁶⁵ Also, the delegates were instructed to stay off any committee that would be required to pass on the Argentine credentials.

As the United States delegates were preparing to leave for the conference, Senator Chavez reiterated that the United States delegates should not raise any question about the Argentine delegation, that he hoped that no one else would raise the question, and the United States delegates should stay out of any discussion of the matter.¹⁶⁶ Mr. George Meany, United States Workers delegate, expressed that he had reservations about the seating of the Argentine labor representatives in the Workers Group. Senator Chavez restated in firm terms that the United States government should not raise any question about the Argentine delegation but indicated that the United States, in fact, should adopt a

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 45-46.

friendly attitude towards Argentina—a complete reversal of the stated policy of the United States State Department. Ironically at the first meeting of the Selection Committee, Senator Chavez raised the Argentine question through a misunderstanding of the procedure, while expressing a very pro-Argentine attitude.¹⁶⁷

The Worker Group at the conference decided to expel the Argentine Workers Delegation from its meetings, and refused to elect any Argentine Workers delegate to any committee at the conference. The Secretary General, Mr. Edward J. Phelan, explained that neither the Selection Committee nor the Conference in Plenary session had the authority to approve or disapprove credentials in absence of a formal protest. The committee therefore unanimously resolved that it had accepted the credentials of all delegations.¹⁶⁸ Mr. Meany replied to that decision with a very strong statement expressing to the Argentine delegates that the action of the Workers Group in expelling them from their meeting and refusing to elect them to committees was not an idle or frivolous gesture. He felt that he had an obligation to the free-trade movement in Argentina, whose members had been imprisoned or expelled from the country. One of the Argentine delegates, Dr. Riguera, attempted to respond to Mr. Meany, but Senator Chavez motioned for the meeting to adjourn—a clear move to prevent further attacks on Argentina.¹⁶⁹ After a heated debate over this incident and the issue of discrimination towards Panamanian laborers around the Canal Zone, Dennis Chavez was replaced at the conference by Bernard Weisman of the United States State Department labor section.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 46.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷⁰ New York Times, “US Halts ILO Debate on Canal Zone Labor,” April 13, 1946.

Dennis Chavez's support for Argentina did not end at the conference. During a speech delivered in Mexico City on December 3, 1946, Dennis Chavez stated that even though Argentina had been bracketed as a "problem nation," they could benefit from a return to the Good Neighbor Policy. It seemed as if Chavez was extending an olive branch to the Argentine Republic, however, the Argentine delegates walked out of the assembly and stated that Chavez's remarks were unsuitable. In the same breath, the Argentine delegates professed that Chavez's statement was "unimportant because 'nothing and nobody' could divert Argentine representatives from the 'democratic ideals that they represent through the free and authentic will of the Argentine people'"¹⁷¹ It appeared that the Argentines were not accepting Chavez's offer of help. Even so, Argentina still welcomed him and other Congressmen in December of 1948, during which, in the words of Pete Jarman, Democrat from Alabama, they had a "good bull session." After this meeting the delegation left Buenos Aires for Montevideo, except for Dennis Chavez who remained a few more weeks.¹⁷² During his stay, Dennis Chavez was received several times by President Perón and had numerous discussions about the state of Argentina.

In a statement made to American correspondents at a conference in Argentina, he espoused that he did not think "things are as bad as intimated in many quarters."¹⁷³ He claims to have come to this conclusion through contact with taxi drivers, waiters, clerks, elevator operators and American businessmen. He asserted that he found no real criticism of the Perón regime, except from oligarchs. Dennis Chavez even espoused that he

¹⁷¹ New York Times, "Argentine Resent Remarks of Chavez," December 5, 1946.

¹⁷² New York Times, "US Group Off for Montevideo," December 9, 1948.

¹⁷³ New York Times, "Chavez Lauds Perón for Social Progress," December 23, 1948.

believed Perón was trying to follow Roosevelt in New Deal social legislation.¹⁷⁴ He even asserted that in the international community, Argentina impressed him by their complete agreement to fight against Communism. Dennis Chavez was also linked to the controversial removal of Miguel Miranda as Argentina's economic czar. During a dinner on December 22, 1948 Miranda was said to be criticizing Juan Perón and his policies to Dennis Chavez, who thought it was an "unconscionable performance."¹⁷⁵ Dennis Chavez eventually discussed this with Ambassador Bruce, who through a private intermediary informed Perón. By January 19th Miranda was forced to resign.

In the years following these incidents Dennis Chavez made numerous trips to Argentina. In 1948, he was invited to Argentina by Ambassador Bruce. During one of the visits he met with President Perón and several leading businessmen. One business venture Dennis Chavez dealt with was the Moore & McCormack Boat Company. This company wanted to make cruise liners that would run to many of the countries in Latin America, including Argentina. Argentina stood to be one of the major destinations for many American tourists, and would benefit economically. Also, on this visit, Dennis Chavez met with Alberto Doderó, a wealthy businessman in Argentina, and owner of the *Compañía Argentina de Navegación Doderó*.¹⁷⁶ This company began regular cruises from Buenos Aires to London in 1949 with the newly christened liner called *Presedente Perón* named after President Perón. The following year *Compañía Argentina de Navegación Doderó* launched the *Eva Perón* and the *17 De Octubre*. Also during that year the company expanded its services to Vigo, Amsterdam and Hamburg. Dennis

¹⁷⁴ New York Times "Chavez Lauds Perón for Social Progress".

¹⁷⁵ Milton Bracker, "Miranda's ouster linked to Chavez," New York Times, March 7, 1949, 8.

¹⁷⁶ James Bruce to Dennis Chavez, January 3, 1948, box 14, file 1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Chavez regularly took vacations in Buenos Aires and Ambassador Bruce regularly made travel arrangements for him.¹⁷⁷ Many of these trips were set up through *Compañía Argentina de Navegación Dodero*, at the suggestion of Ambassador Bruce.¹⁷⁸

During some of these trips, Dennis Chavez was asked to speak to high level government officials in regards to financial dealings. For instance, New York financier, Ambrose Hartnett, made an offer to the Argentine government through Dennis Chavez. Hartnett offered them a credit against German claims of indebtedness in the amount of \$4,959,777.09. This dollar amount was the United States dollar indebtedness of German banks to his American organization.¹⁷⁹ The proposal was taken into consideration by high-level authorities in Argentina, but it was felt that the offer did not take into account the debt owed to Argentina by the German people. Because of this, it was uncertain if Hartnett's offer was in favor of Argentina or Germany.¹⁸⁰ There is no evidence that a deal was ever struck between Hartnett and the Argentine Government.

Dennis Chavez's support and dealings with the Perón government drew a watchful eye from President Truman. In 1949 President Truman asked Ambassador Bruce to brief him on one of Dennis Chavez's visits to Argentina. Bruce described Dennis Chavez's last trip to Argentina in a very superficial way. He described how he regularly met with President Perón and other members of his government. For instance, during the trip in question, he met for five hours with President Perón. The content of that

¹⁷⁷ Dennis Chavez to James Bruce, April 24, 1948, box 14, file 1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico; James Bruce to Dennis Chavez, July 11, 1947, box 14, folder 1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹⁷⁸ James Bruce to Dennis Chavez, May 24, 1948, box 14, file 1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹⁷⁹ Dennis Chavez to James Bruce, November 19, 1948, box 14, folder 1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹⁸⁰ John Ordway, Second Secretary of the Argentine Embassy, to Dennis Chavez, November 24, 1948, box 14, file 1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

meeting is not known, but illustrates the level of involvement Chavez had with a government that was often times frustrated with the American government. Bruce also stated that one of the best assets Dennis Chavez brought with regards to the Latin American people was the fact that he spoke Spanish and his Spanish background. He also tells how Dennis Chavez was immediately accepted in Buenos Aires as one of their own. By all accounts, James Bruce stated that this trip was a success.¹⁸¹

While Dennis Chavez's support for the Argentine government is perplexing and generally inconsistent with the stated policy of the United States Government, there is little evidence that he was involved in anything nefarious.

It is possible that Dennis Chavez was attempting to get close to Perón to help the State Department keep tabs on Perón. With Dennis Chavez's track record of being a strong supporter of Latin American republics, his ability to speak Spanish, and his Spanish heritage, it was likely that Perón would trust him. Taking this viewpoint, Dennis Chavez's actions at the ILO conference, the removal of Miranda, and the numerous speeches of support represent an effort to show Perón that Dennis Chavez was on his side and every meeting with Perón was an information gathering session. However secretive this hypothesis is, it is not supported by any documentary evidence, and must remain a hypothetical.

What is more likely is that Dennis Chavez and Perón shared a common link to the major labor movements of the time. While Perón used labor to ensure and sustain his rise to power, Dennis Chavez was a strong supporter of worker's rights and often championed the little guy in the face of a big government. His support for labor went all the way back

¹⁸¹ James Bruce to President Truman , December 22, 1948, box 14, file 1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

to his boyhood job as a grocery delivery boy in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This first job was with Charles Conroy, owner of the Highland Grocery store on South Arno Street. Chavez would work thirteen hours a day, Monday through Friday, delivering groceries to various households. In 1903, railroad workers went on strike in protest of the Santa Fe Rail Road. During this strike, Dennis Chavez was ordered by his employer to deliver groceries to those who were working as strike breakers. He refused to do so and lost his job for his stand, but made a statement for what he believed in.¹⁸²

After completing his law degree at Georgetown University, Dennis Chavez returned to Albuquerque to set up practice. He became a lawyer working out of the Whiting Building, Dennis Chavez set up a very lucrative practice, becoming “the attorney of choice” for many Albuquerque Hispanos. In 1922, Dennis Chavez defended two railroad workers who had been arrested for “assault by word” and “serious injury”.¹⁸³ He also fought to remove the injunction blocking the strike. Little is known about the outcome of his legal case, but the federal injunction issued during the railroad strike had a profound affect on Chavez. As a Congressman he voted to enact the Norris-La Guardia Anti Injunction Bill which prohibited the federal judiciary from interfering with the right of labor to strike.¹⁸⁴ The act essentially established the full freedom of the worker to form labor unions without employer interference and the right for the federal government to interfere in labor disputes.

Dennis Chavez was also accessible to many labor unions needing his help—even if it was just a phone call to start an investigation. For instance, in December of 1939 the

¹⁸² Roy Lujan, “Dennis Chavez and the Roosevelt Era, 1933-1945,” (PhD dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1987), 32-33.

¹⁸³ Albuquerque Morning Journal, “Worker’s Auto Set on Fire at Santa Fe Shop,” July 30, 1922.

¹⁸⁴ Lujan, “Dennis Chavez and the Roosevelt Era,” 1933-1945, 16.

United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America wrote Dennis Chavez about the “beating down” of wages and working conditions on the F.H.A. projects in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The builders who had won the contracts from the F.H.A. were paying carpenters well below the established wage recognized as fair by the state and federal labor department. They wanted Dennis Chavez to launch an immediate investigation into the matter. Dennis Chavez, who always professed that he was 100 percent on labor’s side, expressed regret of these conditions, and asked for a complete and thorough investigation into the matter. He then forwarded this request to Mr. Stewart McDonald, administrator Federal Housing Administration.

For his work with labor, Dennis Chavez was lauded as a fighter for the common man when the country needed it most. Dennis Chavez was a long time friend and advocate of the small time farmer. He supported the expansion of the Agriculture Adjustment Act and the Farm Labor Tenant Bill. The Labor Tenant Bill was aimed at correcting the displacement of many landless farmers created by the reduction crops dictated by the AAA. It provided long term, low interest loans to tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Dennis Chavez was a joint sponsor of legislation related to this relief effort.¹⁸⁵ He was also a strong supporter of most of the major relief and reform efforts of the New Deal era like the AAA, WPA, PWA, CCC, and the Social Security and Wagner Act.¹⁸⁶ Chavez’s strong ties to labor-oriented issues allowed him to meet Perón on common ground.

¹⁸⁵ Diaz, Rosemary T., “El Senador, Dennis Chavez: New Mexico Native Son, American Senator and Statesman, 1888-1962,” (masters thesis, Arizona State University, 2006), 233.

¹⁸⁶ Diaz, Rosemary T., “El Senador, Dennis Chavez: New Mexico Native Son, American Senator and Statesman, 1888-1962”, 244.

Robert J Alexander, Professor of Economics at Rutgers University, argues that Perón used the labor organization existing in Argentina in 1943 to ultimately boost him into power.¹⁸⁷ Perón was successful in gaining control of the top leadership of the labor movement and using them to create one of the great centers of power in Argentina's social, economic, and political structure. The revolution that ultimately led to his rise to power was motivated more by the army's fear of a pro-Allied government coming to power during WW II, than by social and political discontent. Political discontent was brought on by the dissolving of Congress and the suppression of the *Confederacion General De Trabajo*, or the CGT. Congress was dissolved because it was under the control of radical Socialist parties and the center of democratic pro-Allied agitation. The military regime also suppressed the CGT on the grounds that it was Communist dominated and removed from power the leaders of the country's labor organizations placing military officers in charge.¹⁸⁸ By September of 1943 there were widespread demonstrations of discontent across the country. Even a number of retired Generals and Admirals called for the restoration of a constitutional government. The younger members of the military group that seized power saw that the regime was heading towards becoming a violent dictatorship, and would be short lived if it did not have the support from civilian elements.

The first move of the regime was to attempt to win over the industrial middle class who had been discontent with the landowner-dominated governments of the past. The problem was that the industrial middle class had traditionally supported the *Union Civica Radical*, which ultimately wanted the return of a constitutional government.

¹⁸⁷ Barager, *Why Perón Came to Power*, 186.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Without a constitutional government in place, the industrialists would not consider an alliance with the new regime.

The next move was to turn to the industrial working class who had long been unfriendly towards the landed oligarchy and had often been suppressed by every government since 1916 making this group their golden ticket. Also, many of the military men who helped seize power had contacts within the labor movement, which was this group's only voice. Perón had been named Director of the Department of Labor very soon after the June 4th revolution and had set out expanding its power and activities.¹⁸⁹ Peron immediately placed other military men in control of the unions and charged them to find out what it was the unions wanted and whether an alliance between the regime and labor could be formed. The result was the conversion of the old Department of Labor into a new Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare, which held a cabinet level position for its first chief—Colonel Juan D Perón¹⁹⁰

From his rise to the head of the Department of Labor and the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare in 1943 to 1945, Perón threw most of his effort into expanding the labor movement. Alexander cites that there were approximately 300,000 to 350,000 workers in Argentina. Within a couple of years, Alexander claims that the number of organized laborers in Argentina increased seven fold. Perón was said to have forced employers to recognize and negotiate with their workers' unions. Also, he personally led packinghouse workers, sugar plantation workers, and other labor groups in campaigns against their employers.¹⁹¹ In many cases, Perón became the center of the collective bargaining process. He would insist that collective conflicts be brought to him for

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 188.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 189.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

conciliation and decision, ultimately leading to the notion that Perón was primarily responsible for an increase in a particular workers groups wage increase.

Perón also began an extensive program of enacting labor and social security legislation. For instance, by decree he pushed for a more extensive inspection process for factories to better ensure the safety of the worker. He also enacted a Social Security program, which affected a large majority of the country's wage earning population. He also pushed for an extra months worth of pay for their workers at Christmas time, and a number of legal, paid holidays.¹⁹²

Perón's control of the labor movement in Argentina had resulted in the creation of a powerful political machine that would ultimately spring him from imprisonment and catapult him to the presidency in 1946. Perón continued to use the labor movement to sustain his power and control throughout his presidency. However, he systematically limited their independence and autonomy eventually limiting their power.

Perón's link to organized labor is starkly different from that of Dennis Chavez. Perón saw labor as means to an end, while Chavez looked at labor with reverence and respect. During the years that Dennis Chavez regularly visited Argentina, Perón's progress with social reform through the use of the power of the labor unions, must have seemed quite impressive to Dennis Chavez. Because Dennis Chavez viewed labor with a certain amount of reverence, it is very likely that he viewed Perón's success through labor with a similar reverence. In Dennis Chavez's eyes, both men sought to bring social change to the working class and decrease the gap between the rich and the poor. But as Perón got deeper into his presidency, it must have become painfully clear to Dennis

¹⁹² Ibid., 190.

Chavez, that Perón had only fought for labor for political gain—not out of concern for the worker.

Dennis Chavez's support of Perón was controversial and problematic. In doing so, he seemed to ignore the contentious past between Argentina and the United States. With all the rhetoric and diplomatic maneuvering of Cordell Hull, it seemed implausible and uncharacteristic of Dennis Chavez to ignore direct and indirect suggestions in dealing with Argentina first at the International Labor Conference and in later years. In many respects, Dennis Chavez's support for Perón seems highly suspicious. The link between Perón and Chavez and their support for labor and social programs is weak at best and does little to answer the posed question. There has to be something more that would prompt Dennis Chavez to look past the distrust of Perón and Argentina stemming from the initial Argentine Revolution of 1943 and well into the second half of the 20th Century. Even so, it is the only link that is supported by the available documentary evidence, and therefore must suffice as an answer.

Chapter Five **Puerto Rico**

One of the best examples of Dennis Chavez's involvement in Latin American affairs can be found in his dealings with, and on behalf of Puerto Rico. Chavez viewed American actions towards Puerto Rico as indicative of how the United States would treat other states of Hispanic decent. Because of this, he regularly got involved in economic and political matters pertaining to Puerto Rico including involving his own brother in the legal system. To Dennis Chavez, Puerto Rico was a barometer for how successful the Good Neighbor Policy would be received and implemented because he knew that the other Latin American countries were watching how the United States treated Puerto Rico. He worked his entire career to ensure that the island nation was well treated. In this last chapter we will explore how Dennis Chavez got involved with Puerto Rico especially through the Chavez Commission of 1942, some specific actions taken by him to promote the Puerto Rican economy and political system, and how he worked to promote Puerto Rican statehood.

Chavez was interested in Puerto Rico for two reasons. First and foremost, Puerto Rico was dominated by people of Spanish descent, and because of this, Chavez believed that the Latin American people were watching how the United States treated the Puerto Rican people. Finally, Puerto Rico was the only place that Dennis Chavez could have gone and attempted to make specific domestic policy changes and relate it to the Latin American people. This is because Puerto Rico was a protectorate of United States. During his political life, Dennis Chavez saw Puerto Rico grow from an island possession to a Commonwealth with its own constitution. He witnessed the affects that the Foraker

Act, the Jones Act, World War II, and the quest for statehood had on the Puerto Rican people. Chavez believed that the sincerity of the Good Neighbor Policy should be proven through the adoption of a clearly defined policy towards Puerto Rico.

Since the Spanish American war Puerto Rico had occupied a very unique and largely undefined station in United States history. In 1889, the United States took possession of Puerto Rico as a direct result of winning the Spanish American War. Almost immediately, the United States began to organize Puerto Rico's political structure similar to that of the United States' political system. The first broad spectrum law passed in Puerto Rico was the Foraker Act of 1900, which gave the President of the United States the right to appoint the governor, the cabinet, and all judges. This Act was largely unpopular with the Puerto Rican people for it only gave them the right to elect a lower house of 30 delegates. It also sent the message that the Puerto Rican people were regarded as unfit for full political participation. Also in that same year, free trade was opened up between Puerto Rico and the United States, which in turn caused an influx of United States investment, especially in sugar plantations. With the wealth being concentrated in the hands of a few, the peasant worker had very little choice but to work in the sugar cane fields, thus sowing the seeds of discontent and distrust. This discontent was furthered the next year, when on December 2nd the United States Supreme Court ruled that Puerto Ricans were not United States citizens.

As time went on the Puerto Rican people began to agitate for a definition of their status with the United States, both as citizens and as a territory. Their questions were only partly answered in 1917 with the signing of the Jones Act, which made Puerto Rico a territory and granted United States citizenship to the Puerto Rican people. Voting was

also made compulsory, and proportional representation was established. However, at the same time Puerto Rico continued to be run by appointed governors who had very little knowledge of the Puerto Rican people or their culture. With the onset of World War I, Puerto Rico became less of a focal point in United States interests, outside of the draft. Being United States citizens, Puerto Rican men were thus eligible for the draft. During the war, about 18,000 men were inducted into the service—a fact Dennis Chavez later used as justification for full statehood.

By 1930 Puerto Rico was radically changed economically by the arrival of American capital. Coffee, which was the predominant crop before the arrival of the American influence, had been supplanted by sugar. By 1930, sugar was grown on nearly 50 percent of the island's cultivated land. By 1930, the economic conditions had deteriorated to the point that Puerto Ricans were employed in harsh, low paying sweatshops, if they could find a job at all—60 percent of the population was without employment all together. By 1933, the Roosevelt administration took a larger interest in the Puerto Rican situation. Even though the conditions on the mainland were bad, the conditions in Puerto Rico were much worse. Roosevelt attempted to use measures that resembled the programs employed in the United States, such as the Homeowners Act of 1933, and the WPA, but these programs had a very little impact on the Puerto Rican situation.

Up to this point, Dennis Chavez was largely silent on Puerto Rican issues. In fact the earliest dated documentation found in reference to Puerto Rico and Dennis Chavez was a letter written to him from Filipo L De Hostos in 1933. De Hostos, a lawyer from San Juan who apparently occupied no political significance, wrote Dennis Chavez

thanking him for his support of the Home Owners Act of 1933. This Act was a New Deal program designed to provide the means to purchase affordable housing. In 1933, homes were sent to foreclosure at a rate of 1,000 per day and the average borrower was delinquent two years on his mortgage and three years on his taxes. The United States Government extended non-interest bearing loans to homeowners who met certain criteria, in an effort to keep people in their homes. This was a national program, but had implications in Puerto Rico as well.¹⁹³ Dennis Chavez supported this program much the same way he supported most of the New Deal programs—he simply voted yes on them. In response to his efforts, De Hostos wrote, “You have proved yourself such a good and loyal friend of Puerto Rico and so genuinely interested in its affairs that you would be glad to learn of a Puerto Rican enterprise that is rendering a great service to the community.”¹⁹⁴ This letter was of little significance, but it does point to a single unique situation in which Dennis Chavez was thanked by a Puerto Rican citizen much the same way a New Mexican citizen would thank him for his vote.

Other than the De Hostos letter, the record is largely silent when it comes to Dennis Chavez and Puerto Rico until Bolivar Pagan wrote to him for help with Governor Rexford Tugwell in 1942. Pagan was a distinguished historian, journalist, and politician from Puerto Rico. He was appointed Resident Commissioner to the United States House of Representatives by Governor William B. Leahy in 1939, and served on the Committees on Agriculture, Labor, Territories, Insular Affairs, Military Affairs, and Naval Affairs. Bolivar Pagan, who was a strong proponent of Puerto Ricans electing their

¹⁹³ Rosalind Tough, *Land Economics*, Vol. 27, No 4 (Nov., 1951), pp 324-331, pg 325. (University of Wisconsin Press)

¹⁹⁴ Filipo L De Hostos to Dennis Chavez, 1933, box 1 file 4, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

own governors, introduced a number of bills to achieve that end, but never saw the satisfaction of seeing any of them passed. He also is noted for bringing to the attention of Congress the overall dissatisfaction of Puerto Ricans with Governor Tugwell.¹⁹⁵

On February 24, 1942 Pagan claimed that a letter was sent to Dennis Chavez full of “irresponsible falsehoods” to purposefully mislead the United States Congress to believe that the majority of the people in Puerto Rico supported Governor Tugwell. Pagan claimed in his letter to Chavez that the political situation in Puerto Rico was very abnormal in that splits in the major parties during the last general election had resulted in the formation of a third party called Popular, headed by a “Communist” by the name of Luis Munoz Marin. To everyone’s surprise Marin was elected by ten of the nineteen members of the Insular Senate, and eighteen of the thirty nine members of the House.¹⁹⁶ Pagan believed that this was abnormal because his party, the Coalition, received the majority of the popular vote, which elected the Resident Commissioner, and carried the majority of the municipal government positions. He argued that the Coalition was the party that upheld the American principles of government and way of life through the continuance of maintaining ties with the United States, with the goal of eventually obtaining statehood. In contrast, the Popular Party, headed by Luis Munoz Marin, was a secessionist party based on the Communist principles of public distribution of land. During the election, Pagan cited how the Popular party promised the peasants and poor

¹⁹⁵ Carmen E. Enciso (Carmen Edna), *Hispanic Americans in Congress: 1822-1995*, (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1995), 97-98.

¹⁹⁶ Bolivar Pagan to Dennis Chavez, February 24, 1942, box 8, file1, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

farmers of Puerto Rico a “small farm, with milk cows, oxen, seeds, plows and all farming implements,” essentially attempting to purchase their votes.¹⁹⁷

Pagan believed that Governor Tugwell was disregarding the Coalition’s rights, which represented the democratic majority of the people. He cited how Tugwell had given all the key and minor posts in the Insular Government to members of the Popular Party and was giving into the demands of Luis Munoz Marin. Pagan’s arguments originated from the election of members to the Puerto Rican House in 1940. The Popular Party secured 215,000 votes, and the Coalition received about 222,000 of the votes. The slim victory entitled the Coalition to the position of Resident Commissioner. However, when it came to the seats in the Puerto Rican Legislature the Coalition and the Popular Party won the same number of seats. Pagan felt that Tugwell should have given an equal number of posts to each party to maintain a balance of power. Pagan also might have felt that Tugwell was “bought” by Munoz and the Popular Party with the chancellorship of the University of Puerto Rico, which Tugwell accepted, but resigned two weeks later after heated protests. Pagan also called attention to Tugwell’s inaugural address in which he suggested that Puerto Rico would be a “very nice place for testing new social experiments with monies from the Federal Treasury,” essentially insinuating that Tugwell planned on creating a Socialist society. Pagan also claimed that Tugwell sponsored Puerto Rico’s independence—which Pagan regarded as a “slap at the face” toward the overwhelming majority of Puerto Rico.¹⁹⁸

There is no record of Dennis Chavez ever responding to this letter; however, Pagan’s attacks on Tugwell persisted not just to Dennis Chavez, but to the United States

¹⁹⁷ Bolivar Pagan to Dennis Chavez, February 24, 1942.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Congress. Pagan's attacks ranged from blaming Tugwell for the limited space for shipping to laying the foundation for a "social experiment."¹⁹⁹ Pagan's and others complaints resulted in a number of bills being introduced regarding Puerto Rico between 1942 and 1945. Two of the most notorious results of Pagan's complaints were the creation of two sub-committees to be sent to Puerto Rico to study the economic and social conditions of Puerto Rico. One committee was a House Subcommittee headed by Congressman C. Jasper Bell of Missouri, and the other was a Senate subcommittee headed by Dennis Chavez. In many respects both committees were sent to Puerto Rico under the auspices of examining the socioeconomic condition of the island, but also were to investigate the Tugwell administration.²⁰⁰ Pagan's attacks on Tugwell directly added to the creation of these two committees sent in 1943.

On October 20th 1942, during World War II, Dennis Chavez submitted Senate Resolution 309 to make a full and complete study of the economic and social conditions in Puerto Rico resulting from the interruption of the normal flow of trade between the United States and Puerto Rico as a result of World War II.²⁰¹ Senate Resolution 26 of the 78th Congress, authorized the formation of the United States Sub-Committee of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, which came to be known as the Chavez Commission, and limited it to a total of \$15,000 in expenditures. By February 13th the Chavez Commission was in San Juan, Puerto Rico ready to commence with its assessment of the islands economic and social conditions. The committee was naturally chaired by Dennis Chavez with other members being J. Ellender, Homer T. Bone, Robert

¹⁹⁹ Charles T. Goodsell, *Administration of a revolution; executive reform in Puerto Rico under Governor Tugwell, 1941-1946*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965), 28.

²⁰⁰ Goodsell, *Administration of a revolution; executive reform in Puerto Rico under Governor Tugwell, 1941-1946*, 29.

²⁰¹ U.S Congress, *Congressional Record*. 77th Cong, 2nd Sess, October 20th, 1942, S. Res. 309.

A. Taft, and Ralph O. Brewster. During the investigation the members of the Chavez Commission toured the island and conducted interviews with many members of the business community, school system, and government. One of the first topics to be tackled was shipping to and from the island, one of Pagan's main arguments against Tugwell.

With Puerto Rico being detached from the United States mainland, shipping was the main life-line between the United States and Puerto Rico. All of Puerto Rico's cash crops, which were relied on heavily to create jobs and opportunity, were shipped off the island. Also, at the time of the Commission, over half of Puerto Rico's food, and all of its industrial and agricultural machinery and supplies were imported.²⁰² Because of this reliance, Puerto Rico was hit hard during the peak of submarine warfare in 1942. As a result, the Chavez Commission uncovered that in September 1942 Puerto Rico received a total of 3,000 tons of cargo per month, compared to its normal 100,000 tons of cargo per month. This sharp reduction in cargo space caused protests and panic from all strata of the Puerto Rican population. By December of 1942, almost all food stock had been depleted. The monthly tonnage assigned to Puerto Rico was insufficient to cover monthly consumption, much less to build up reserves.²⁰³ The lack of food supplies snowballed into a situation of catastrophic proportions.

With shipping limited, the economy in Puerto Rico was trapped in a vicious cycle. Merchants could not import or export goods, and therefore could not pay their employees, creating a large unemployment problem. A failure of merchants to pay their wholesalers and bankers resulted in a cash-only business, which essentially destroyed the

²⁰² Report of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, S Res 26, 78th Congress, "A Resolution to Investigate Economic and Social Conditions in Puerto Rico," December 21st, 1943, Government Printing Office, 6.

²⁰³ Report of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, S Res 26, 78th Congress, 1943, 6.

existing credit structure all the way down to the individual consumer. Commerce on the island relied on the credit system that was in place. Removing it naturally created economic hardship on the merchants and individuals.²⁰⁴ The Chavez Commission revealed that most wholesalers had been systematically cutting credit to retailers which in turn cut their ability to pay back credit received prior to this situation, ultimately digressing into the creation of a black market system.²⁰⁵ Also, part of the problem with the credit issue was the fact that most of the small retailers only dealt with the wholesalers, not the banks, which hurt them in the long run.

Aside from the lack of credit, the Chavez Commission also revealed that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) controlled all space for the shipping of foodstuffs, and whatever was left over for other cargo was controlled by the Interior Department in Washington D.C. The Chavez Commission established that the controls in place by the FDA were inefficient and poorly managed. The Chavez Commission cited how the FDA would ship 1,100 tons of oats, but only use eighty tons per month were consumed in Puerto Rico. Yet month after month they received 1,100 tons of oats. This essentially demonstrated how shipments did not conform to the needs of the island.²⁰⁶ Essentially the FDA brought too much of one item and too little of another²⁰⁷ For instance, the island only had 15 percent of the rice they needed in November of 1941.²⁰⁸ According to Dr. Pablo Morales, Director of the School of Tropical Medicine, similar situations were occurring with beans, codfish and other critical foodstuffs, and the people of Puerto Rico

²⁰⁴ Transcript of Public Hearing on Chavez Commission, February 15, 1943, box 8, folder 60, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁰⁵ Transcript of Public Hearing on Chavez Commission, February 15, 1943, Dennis Chavez Papers

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 29.

were facing starvation.²⁰⁹ This in turn created a situation where people were hoarding certain goods and selling them on the profitable black market.²¹⁰ Because of the mismanagement of shipping space and food allocation, economic and social conditions deteriorated to a point of crisis—with merchant stores and warehouses being empty leaving many employees and equipment idle. Even if there was food in the stores, the people generally could not afford to buy it.

Another major problem in Puerto Rico was that its economy relied too heavily on one cash crop—sugar. The largest industry in Puerto Rico had always been sugar production, and it had long dominated the lives of many Puerto Ricans. The history of the sugar industry in Puerto Rico was essentially the history of Puerto Rico itself. Up until 1900, the mills on the island were small and largely inefficient only producing about thirty five tons of cane per day with transportation being the largest obstacle. Only the sugar mills subsidized by the Spanish Crown were able to produce at modern day capacity—and most of those were located near coastal regions with direct access to shipping. The cultivation of sugar was seen as the privilege of the rich—only those who had sufficient money to establish a mill could cultivate cane without the support of the Spanish Crown.

Eventually, improved equipment during the later part of the 19th century reduced the cost of production. However, Puerto Rico lacked the financial capital to invest in new machinery and technology. Improved production methods and larger output by other countries essentially caused Puerto Rico to struggle to compete. For instance, in 1899, 207 mills in Cuba had a capacity fifteen times greater than a similar number of mills in

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

Puerto Rico.²¹¹ Puerto Rico survived enough to expand its mill railroads to small growers who were previously unable to produce cane for shipment because they were simply too far from the mills. As the mill railroads grew, so too did the number of small cane farmers. In 1889 there were seven growers per mill as compared to 278 growers per mill in 1939. This was also aided by the reduction of mills from 345 to forty one.²¹² The advent of large scale production of sugar cane in Puerto Rico allowed them to compete with other large sugar producing regions. Capital accumulated, leading to increased Puerto Rican ownership of sugar properties to the point that there were no foreign owned mills by 1943. Furthermore, more and more Puerto Ricans owned stock in the American-owned sugar companies operating in Puerto Rico.²¹³

If the Chavez Commission were to address any of Puerto Rico's economic and social problems, Dennis Chaves knew he must address the sugar industry. The Chavez Commission revealed that Puerto Rico's sugar industry was comprised of forty sugar mills occupying about 300,000 acres of land, and was operated by about 12,000 owners. The forty mills varied in capacity from those grinding a few tons a day to some of the largest mills in the world. There were sixteen family and individual holdings, five partnerships, seventeen company holdings, and two government run mills. The farms varied equally as much in size. They ranged from a few acres to several thousand acres. In fact, 75 percent of the farms growing cane were ten acres or less.²¹⁴ In 1943, 88 percent of the cane was grown on land owned by Puerto Ricans, and 12 percent was

²¹¹ Ibid., 46.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 47.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 41.

grown on mills owned by residents of the continental United States.²¹⁵ At the time of the Chavez Commission, sugar was the main commodity in Puerto Rico, and had the largest impact on the economic stability of the people.

The Chavez Commission further uncovered that there were more workers employed per square acre of sugar cane than in any other domestic area in Puerto Rico. At this time there was about 135,000 laborers employed in Puerto Rico's sugar industry, 100,000 of which were considered heads of households.²¹⁶ The sugar industry in Puerto Rico was such a significant part of their economy that about 635,000 people were fed and supported by the production of sugar cane—both directly and indirectly. Once the harvest was done, the machinery of the mills was taken down and repaired, and the workers were put to work doing upkeep and incidental work. Testimony given by Mr. James A. Dickey, a representative of the Puerto Rican Sugar Industry, pointed out that “cleaning railways, cleaning equipment, general repair work, and planting and cultivating cane goes on year round” with very little of the workforce being displaced.²¹⁷

In 1943, the sugar industry was still thriving in Puerto Rico due in large part to the Farm Security Administration, under the United States Department of Agriculture, which was established in Puerto Rico on September 1, 1941. The WSA gave assistance to low income farmers not eligible for credit from normal agencies. They loaned them seed, fertilizer, livestock, machinery, and other household equipment. All of the loans were supposed to be repaid over a period of forty years at 3 percent interest. From 1941 to 1943, the Farm Securities Administration of Puerto Rico helped set up 410 small farms,

²¹⁵ Ibid.,43.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 43.

most of which were sugar farms of less than sixty acres in size.²¹⁸ In 1943 there were about 52,000 farmers of which 42,000 were small operations working fifteen acres or less.²¹⁹ Most of what these farmers raised was sent to the market and sold. However, at this time, production in Puerto Rico had reached a plateau, but unfortunately it did not plateau in importance, due in large part because other industries such as tobacco, coffee, fruit, vegetables, and needlework had greatly declined.²²⁰

The Chavez Commission investigated the impact that the United States sugar quota was having on Puerto Rico. They discovered that the restrictions imposed by the laws of the Sugar Act restricted Puerto Rico more heavily than other regions—even when Puerto Rico was the only domestic area to have filled its basic quota every year. In the last unrestricted year, Puerto Rico was able to produce approximately 1,500,000 tons of sugar, but the quota imposed a restriction of 800,000 tons in 1934, which amounted to a 25 percent reduction—no other area suffered such a severe cut. In 1941, Louisiana’s quota was raised from 260,000 tons to 420,000 tons, whereas Puerto Rico’s quota was dropped to 797,000.²²¹ Cuba received a sugar quota of 1,900,000 tons per year, which was double that of Puerto Rico and she was not even a part of the United States—a fact that drove Mr. James A Dickey to suggest an increase in Puerto Rico’s sugar quota to the Chavez Commission.²²² Dickey argued, if Puerto Rico was allowed to produce to capacity, 50,000 to 60,000 more jobs would have been created helping out about 12,000 to 15,000 families. He further argued that it took twenty to twenty five days to produce one ton of sugar, which, put the average amount per man at 200 days, which amounted to

²¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 30.

²²⁰ Ibid., 20.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., 23.

about ten tons of sugar per worker a year. Thus, Dickey argued, the Sugar Quota denied 7,000 families on the island an opportunity to work in the sugar industry. Coupling this with the rising costs of fertilizers and other means of production, the end result was more people were out of work and unable to buy goods and feed their families.²²³

Dennis Chavez and his committee discovered that many of the Puerto Rican people blamed the United States for the lack of jobs, food and access to proper medical care. They witnessed, as the economic situation got worse in Puerto Rico, fewer people were able to feed their families and take care of their sick. Because food and proper medical care were unavailable in Puerto Rico, the Chavez Commission revealed that the main cause of death was diarrhea and enteritis.²²⁴ Both of these ailments were due in large part to intestinal infections, food scarcity, and the lack of adequate sanitary conditions, with the most important being the contamination of the water supply. They also discovered that another large problem in Puerto Rico was tuberculosis due to poor ventilation and overcrowded homes. Sadly most of the deaths occurred in children below the age of two. The lack of food, below average medical care, and poor economic conditions perpetuated the deaths of the young and helpless.²²⁵

Upon this discovery, the Chavez Commission called Dr. Pablo Morales Otero, Director of the School of Tropical Medicine, for an interview. During this interview, Dr. Morales stated that the basic problems of Puerto Rico's health was "essentially a problem of nutrition and housing"²²⁶ He claimed the health problems due to tuberculosis could be diminished significantly if the people of Puerto Rico could afford a better diet and better

²²³ Ibid., 22.

²²⁴ Ibid., 131.

²²⁵ Ibid., 136.

²²⁶ Ibid., 142.

housing. Also, Dr. Antonio Fernos Isern testified that Puerto Rico was not receiving adequate funding to carry out necessary medical practices; and that the best place to spend money would be on the water supply, because, “in urban areas the water supply is 30 percent polluted and 100 percent in rural areas.”²²⁷ In Puerto Rico, the number of doctors was 500 to 2,000,000 people. Because a large portion of the water supply was contaminated and food scarce, the nurses and doctors were eating the same food and drinking the same water—creating a situation where the sick were taking care of the sick.²²⁸

The medical issues in Puerto Rico drove Dennis Chavez to push hard on the Puerto Rican government for answers. Chavez wanted to know where the government was spending money on public health. To get this information Senator Chavez interviewed Rafael Buscaglia, then treasurer of Puerto Rico. Initially, Dennis Chavez wanted to know how much was being spent and where on public health issues. Mr. Buscaglia could not produce any numbers for the committee, which angered Chavez. Frustrated, Chavez said to Mr. Buscaglia, “You should know that there must be some records in the office to show how much money has been spent on every particular item. You should be able to furnish this information this afternoon. Haven’t you some records in your office?”²²⁹ From this incident, it was clear to Dennis Chavez that this government was being run very inefficiently. The Commission revealed how one section of government did not communicate with the other departments exacerbating the economic and social strife the people were going through. The Chavez Commission uncovered how the Auditor of Puerto Rico was not auditing what each agency was doing with the money

²²⁷ Ibid., 140.

²²⁸ Ibid., 147.

²²⁹ Ibid., 113.

that was appropriated to them. Senator Chavez very snidely remarked, “That was the purpose of the creation of the Auditor, to check on the expenditures of the Insular Government, to see that the money was spent according to law!”²³⁰ Frustrated with this testimony, Dennis Chavez concluded the session and adjourned until the next day, where he did not get any further.

In April of 1943, at the completion of the Chavez Commission’s inspection of Puerto Rico’s economic, medical and governmental institutions, they organized the problems of Puerto Rico into two groups—temporary or permanent. The temporary problems were those directly associated with a decrease in shipping due to World War II, and the effects of German submarine activity in the Caribbean. Permanent problems were classified as: (a) overpopulation, accentuated by the lack of arable land, the lack of emigration, the advancement of sanitation and modern medicine, and the continuation of a large birth rate; (b) need for new industries; (c) unemployment and low wages; (d) foreign trade.²³¹ For these problems in particular, Dennis Chavez believed that a major shift in relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico needed to happen. For the temporary problems, the Chavez Commission came to the general consensus that shipping and control of foodstuff was the first priority, meaning an increase in the sugar quota bought from Puerto Rico coupled with increased shipping space. Third, unemployment would be curtailed by an increase in WPA activities and an increased investment in the needlework and clothing industries.

²³⁰ Ibid., 118.

²³¹ Report of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, S Res 26, 78th Congress, “A Resolution to Investigate Economic and Social Conditions in Puerto Rico,” December 21st, 1943, Government Printing Office.

The final result of all investigations, Dennis Chavez's commission and others, into the conditions in Puerto Rico, was Senate Bill 981 of the 78th Congress on November 1, 1943. This bill authorized the Federal Works Administrator to use government funds to provide "useful" jobs for the Puerto Rican people. The projects the Administrator was to put in place were schools, educational facilities, hospitals, clinics, anti-malarial facilities, sewers, roads, airports and other projects certified by the Secretary of War for the protection of the island. To pay for the relief of Puerto Rico it was decided that 50 percent of all the taxes gathered from the production and sale of goods in Puerto Rico would be sent to a special fund to be administered by the Federal Works Administrator, who was required to submit a yearly report to Congress on where the monies were spent. Aside from providing money for Puerto Rico, this bill also made one final change in policy in the legislative process with Puerto Rico. No longer would the Legislature consider the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico together. It was felt that both island possessions had very distinct issues apart from one another, and to effectively deal with either, the two needed to be handled separately.²³²

Dennis Chavez continued to talk about the plight of the Puerto Rican people and personally came to the conclusion that the basic economic problem of Puerto Rico was overpopulation, lack of land, and lack of viable and sustainable industries.²³³ Although sugar was its number one industry, he believed that it had not been developed to its fullest. Also, he argued that a diversified industrial base would prevent the Puerto Ricans from starving when the bottom fell out in the sugar industry. Dennis Chavez wrote, "The

²³² Jasper Bell, 78th Congress, SB 981, Assisting in Relieving Economic Distress in Puerto Rico, November 1st, 1943.

²³³ Dennis Chavez, "Puerto Rico: American Problem", Published in The Sign: National Catholic Magazine" pg 588, box 71, file 41, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

only possible and apparent solution to the foregoing problems is the industrialization of the island.”²³⁴ The second largest industry in Puerto Rico was needlework, employing 80,000 women making \$8,000,000 in wages. Dennis Chavez stated that all industry was suffering because of a lack of shipping space due to the war. He believed that the Puerto Ricans wanted to work and develop industry, but they were held back by a lack of capital and opportunity.

Dennis Chavez espoused that the people of Puerto Rico needed help and that it was the duty of the United States to find a solution. He also saw that it was to Americas’ advantage, in both a material and a spiritual sense to find this solution. It was an American problem, not just a Puerto Rican problem.²³⁵ During a radio interview, on March 10, 1944, Dennis Chavez was asked if the conditions in Puerto Rico were as desperate as the American people had been lead to believe? Dennis Chavez replied, “Worse... You can’t comprehend how hungry those Americans are in Puerto Rico until you see their starving bodies.”²³⁶ He also pointed out how the United States often was the good neighbor to Latin American countries, but that it often forgot to take care of its Puerto Rican citizens. He also noted how Puerto Rico had to overcome trade barriers much like any other country instead of being treated like a territory of the Union. He expressed that this was wrong since they were a part of the United States. He knew that the biggest challenge to helping the Puerto Rican people was engaging the Americans on

²³⁴ Dennis Chavez, “Puerto Rico: American Problem”, Published in The Sign: National Catholic Magazine”, 588.

²³⁵ Dennis Chavez, “Puerto Rico: American Problem”

²³⁶ Radio Interview In Connecticut, March 10, 1944, box 72, folder 4, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

the mainland—to get them to understand that these people were American, not foreigners.²³⁷

An interesting development in Dennis Chavez's connection to Puerto Rico came with his effort to place his brother, David Chavez Jr., as a District Court Judge in Puerto Rico. There is no indication, other than cronyism, as to why Dennis Chavez would want his brother to get the position. Most likely, it was a matter of access. Dennis Chavez was aware of the position, and knew his brother could do the job; even if he did not know he wanted it.

David Chavez Jr. was born in Albuquerque New Mexico on November 12, 1898. He attended college at the University of New Mexico where he graduated and immediately enlisted in the army during World War I. After the war he worked for the General Land Office while attending Law School at Georgetown University. He graduated with his LLB degree in 1922 and returned to New Mexico where he became an attorney for the State Land Office. In 1924 he was appointed to the District Attorney's office for the First Judicial District of New Mexico where he served out an unexpired term and was reelected. He served as District Judge from January 1, 1936 to July 1, 1942 after which he resigned to enter the armed service during World War II. He served until September 26, 1946 and retired as an inactive Colonel. Upon his discharge he returned to New Mexico and was re-nominated and re-elected to the judgeship of the First District again. This is where he was when his brother Dennis Chavez began encouraging his interest in the United States District Court in Puerto Rico.²³⁸

²³⁷ Radio Interview In Connecticut, March 10, 1944.

²³⁸ Biographical Sketch of David Chavez, nd, box 13, folder 17, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Dennis Chavez believed that his brother, David Chavez Jr. was perfect for the job. He had the necessary legal experience plus experience living in and succeeding in New Mexico, which spent most of its history with the United States as a territory under Congressional control. A vacancy in the District Court of Puerto Rico gave him an opportunity to take care of Puerto Rico, his brother, and the Democratic Party. Upon hearing of the vacancy, Dennis Chavez wrote Gael Sullivan, Executive Director of the Democratic National Committee, and requested his assistance in gaining the appointment for his brother.²³⁹

Dennis Chavez began a firestorm of support before his brother David was even aware of the opening because he “didn’t want to take any chances of having anyone else getting in on the ground floor first.”²⁴⁰ The story, as told by Dennis Chavez, was that after hearing that Judge Cooper was retiring and being approached about another nominee, Dennis Chavez took Senator Hatch aside to a cloakroom and both came to the conclusion that David Chavez would be the natural candidate. They called Tom Clark, the Attorney General right away and told him they had a candidate for the job, and to not make any commitments until Hatch and Chavez talked with him. After talking with Clark, they got an appointment to talk with the President as soon as possible. They made the appointment for April 3, 1947.²⁴¹ There is no documentation indicating that the meeting was held as scheduled, but there is a strong indication that David Chavez did

²³⁹ Dennis Chavez to Gael Sullivan, May 15, 1947, Box 13, folder 17, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁴⁰ Dennis Chavez to Dave Chavez, April 2, 1947, box 13, folder 17, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁴¹ Dennis Chavez to Dave Chavez, April 2, 1947.

meet with the President at sometime which led to Truman signing his certificate and confirmation on July 10, 1947.²⁴²

Once his brother had been appointed, Dennis Chavez received letter after letter from many prominent senators pledging support to Dennis for his brother, David. Also many prominent citizens of Puerto Rico wrote Senator Chavez pledging support to his brother and gratitude for Dennis' unwavering support for the people of Puerto Rico, who had no senatorial support. In many of these letters Dennis Chavez was referred to as "their senator".²⁴³

After receiving the appointment, David Chavez Jr. moved his family to Puerto Rico. The political climate was rough to say the least in Puerto Rico and it turned out that David Chavez and his family found themselves caught in the middle of the situation. The Nationalist Party had developed into a terrorist-like organization bent on total secession from the United States. On January 20, 1948 a letter was sent to Dennis Chavez from J. Edgar Hoover describing the arrest of Victor Manuel Colon-Zayas who had written a threatening letter to his brother David Chavez Jr. on January 11, 1948. The letter contained a threat against David and his family. Also, the letter contained specific threats against President Truman and Dennis Chavez. Colon-Zayas demanded \$10,000 in exchange for David's, life. Colon-Zayas was charged with extortion and committed to the District Jail.²⁴⁴ Perhaps this was a portent of what was to come in 1954 when Lolita

²⁴² Dennis Chavez to David Chavez, July 11, 1947, box 13, folder 17, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁴³ Letters about David Chavez's appointment as District Judge in Puerto Rico, box 14, folder 7. Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁴⁴ J Edgar Hoover to Dennis Chavez about threats to Brother, January 20, 1948, box 13, folder 17, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Lebron, a Puerto Rican Nationalist, attacked the House of Representatives and attempted to assassinate President Truman.

Finally, one of the little known desires of Dennis Chavez was that Puerto Rico should become a state in the Union. His belief in this matter was definitely influenced by his history in New Mexico. In her biography of Dennis Chavez, Rosemary Diaz tells of a young man growing up in New Mexico—a territory on the path to becoming a state. As Senator, Dennis Chavez received letter after letter asking for his political support in moving the Puerto Rican people towards statehood. For instance, in 1946, Chavez received a letter from Providencia R. De Villamil, President of the Puerto Rico Women's Association for Statehood. She appealed to Dennis Chavez to exert his influence to prevent the President's approval of Bill 51 passed by the Insular Senate over Tugwell's veto. This bill, she claimed, would eliminate the teaching of English in Puerto Rican schools.²⁴⁵ Dennis Chavez believed that English was essential to the future of Puerto Rico, and needed to be taught in the school system. Dennis Chavez remarked on how English had been taught on the island since 1898 to one degree or another in public schools. According to the census of 1940, over 200,000 people "know English." He also stated that the language issue was one of the most critical social problems of Puerto Rico since the 2,000,000 people on the island were American citizens. The lack of universal knowledge of English was not the fault of the Puerto Rican, but instead the educational system.²⁴⁶ Dennis Chavez, who taught himself English as a young man, knew of the

²⁴⁵ Letter to Dennis Chavez from Providencia R. de Villamil, April 10, 1946, box 11, folder 23, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁴⁶ "Puerto Rico: American Problem" by Dennis Chavez, Published in The Sign: National Catholic Magazine, 588.

benefits to those who could master the English language. Also, he knew that English would be essential for Puerto Rico to become a state.

While Dennis Chavez was in favor of statehood for Puerto Rico, he felt that the decision should be made by the voters of Puerto Rico themselves. He held this view partly because of his long established connections with the people of Puerto Rico, both political and familial. (His youngest daughter was married to a Puerto Rican man with whom she had three children).²⁴⁷ On July 16, 1959, Dennis Chavez introduced a bill to the Committee on Insular Affairs requiring the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to conduct a referendum to determine whether the people desired statehood.²⁴⁸ That referendum never took place, but Dennis Chavez believed that the people of Puerto Rico were dedicated to democracy and the preservation of the union between the United States and Puerto Rico.²⁴⁹ Dennis Chavez once stated “The word Independence has a great significance, and it appeals to the most laudable emotions, but in this particular instance, knowing the consequences of the independence of Puerto Rico, I feel that the majority of the people in the island want American Liberty, not Puertorican independence.”²⁵⁰

By 1962, Puerto Rico’s political status was a hot topic, especially surrounding the admittance of Alaska and Hawaii to the United States. Dennis Chavez believed that the admission of Alaska and Hawaii into the Union once and for all buried the old arguments used to block Puerto Rico’s admission into the Union. He noted how it used to be argued

²⁴⁷ Statement issued by Dennis Chavez on Puerto Rican statehood, July 16 1962, box 50, folder 32, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico

²⁴⁸ Senate Resolution S.2396, July 16, 1959, box 52, folder 49, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁴⁹ Friendship Day Booklet, March 2, 1957, box 43, folder 55, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁵⁰ Letter to Dennis Chavez from Jane Nicole De Mariani, June 25th, 1960, box 52, folder 49, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

that territories outside the continental limits of the United States should not be integrated into the Union. With the addition of Alaska and Hawaii, this exception, Chavez argued, no longer applied. Then there was the contention that the linguistic and cultural differences between Puerto Rico and the United States made statehood inadvisable. Dennis Chavez quickly pointed to the Spanish heritage in the Southwest and Florida, making this argument null and void. Secondly, three quarters of Hawaii's population was non-white with people of Oriental decent dominating, making null and void the cultural argument.²⁵¹ Chavez demonstrated how Puerto Rico had met the requirements for statehood as defined by Senate Report 1028. This report stipulated that:

1. The inhabitants of the proposed new state are imbued with and are sympathetic toward the principles of democracy as exemplified in the American form of government.
2. The proposed new state has sufficient population and resources to support state government and...carry its share of the cost of Federal Government.
3. A majority of the electorate wish statehood.²⁵²

Dennis Chavez firmly believed that Puerto Rico qualified for statehood and met each of these criteria.²⁵³ He believed that admission of Puerto Rico as a state would take away an issue that the Communist Party in Latin America had seized upon to stir up resentment towards the United States. Also, Puerto Rico stood as a strategic gateway

²⁵¹ Dennis Chavez, "Puerto Rico, Our Fifty-First State," June 29, 1959, box 52, folder 49, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁵² Chavez, Dennis, "Puerto Rico, Our Fifty-First State,"

²⁵³ Ibid.

between the Caribbean and the Atlantic and provided a strong defense against attempts to take the Panama Canal.²⁵⁴

On May 17, 1962, Dennis Chavez introduced a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of The United States granting representation in the Electoral College to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. They were to receive a number of electors equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives in Congress which they would have been allowed if they were a state. However, they shall not have more electors than the least populous state.²⁵⁵ Dennis Chavez received several letters from people all over the country asking if his bill would be ratified. If not, would he reintroduce it? One such writer proposed a caravan of automobiles from New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, and Detroit to Washington D.C. to demonstrate the interest Puerto Ricans on the continent had with Puerto Rico's statehood. Dennis Chavez continued to show a sympathetic interest towards the people of Puerto Rico and lobbied for Puerto Rican statehood.²⁵⁶ Even after his death in 1962, Dennis Chavez continued to receive petitions from Puerto Ricans who desired statehood.²⁵⁷

In many ways, Dennis Chavez was a perfect surrogate representative for Puerto Rico. He could speak Spanish, understood how to manipulate the federal system to develop an under-developed territory and knew that he could use Puerto Rico in his adoption of the Pan-American ideal. All speculation aside, Chavez's involvement in Puerto Rico is probably his most impactful contribution to relations with the Latin

²⁵⁴ Chavez, Dennis, "Puerto Rico, Our Fifty-First State," June 29, 1959,

²⁵⁵ Senate Resolution S.J RES. 188, 87th Congress , 2nd session, May 17, 1962, box 50, folder 32, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁵⁶ Ralph Bosch to Dennis Chavez, August 2, 1962, box 50, folder 32, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

²⁵⁷ Felicitas Duarte, Secretary to Dennis Chavez, to Antonio Cesario Camacho, November 26, 1962, box 50, folder 32, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

American people. It is not clear how he ended up on the Committee on Insular Affairs, or why he chose to become involved in the affairs of Puerto Rico in addition to those of his own state of New Mexico. Most likely, he was drawn to the plight of Puerto Rico because of his Hispanic background, the status of Puerto Rico as a quasi territory similar to New Mexico when he was growing up, and a deep belief that the sincerity of the Good Neighbor policy was being judged by how the United States treated Puerto Rico. Chavez knew that the nations of Latin America were watching closely how the United States treated the people of Puerto Rico, and could infer from that observation how they in turn would be treated under the Good Neighbor Policy. As a consequence, Chavez stayed in tune with the political and economic atmosphere in Puerto Rico, and regularly weighed in on certain issues pertaining to the development of her future. If nothing else, Chavez was a reassuring figure to Puerto Rico. He was a person they could point to and assume that he had their best interest at heart. He was their senator.

Chapter Six Conclusion

As we have seen, when Dennis Chavez's story is told, very little is ever mentioned about his quest for Inter-American solidarity. Most often he is lauded as a prominent New Mexican Senator that helped shape that state into what it is today. As true as that is, Dennis Chavez had an ideal, a vision, that the entire Western Hemisphere would be united as allies, trading partners, and neighbors. Early on in his career, Dennis Chavez adopted the tenets of Inter-American Solidarity as a template for his vision of United States and Latin American relations. Inter-American Solidarity was the ideal that all the republics of the Western Hemisphere would be united in mutual benefit, whether it be in wartime or peacetime.

Dennis Chavez argued for this ideal on many occasions throughout his entire career. The first significant event in which Chavez argued for Inter-American Solidarity was during the years leading up to the United States involvement in World War II. Once it appeared that Europe was going to be embroiled in another war, Dennis Chavez adamantly argued that the United States should focus its efforts on strengthening its ties with Latin American Republics, and limit its exposure to Europe. His rhetoric called for the rejection of any support that would draw the United States into another European war. Instead he argued for rapid and massive investment in Latin America as a means to secure both the United States' economic and political future. Much of his rhetoric failed to produce action. In theory his vision and ideas made sense, but in practice they could not be accomplished. Dennis Chavez failed to recognize the connection the United States

had with Europe. In fact, most people in the United States at that time could identify more easily with Europe than with Latin America.

After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, like all isolationists, Dennis Chavez's rhetoric stopped. It was apparent at that moment that the United States and the world were in for a war the likes of which no one had ever seen. During the war, Dennis Chavez worked, in a very limited fashion, to maintain the flow of resources from Latin America. He was in no way a significant player in the procurement of vast quantities of resources. However, Chavez was involved in certain deals that surrounded the procurement of military weaponry for the Allied cause in Europe.

After World War II was over, and the Cold War had begun, Dennis Chavez worked to further the Inter-American Solidarity ideal in direct opposition to Communism. Because of World War II, Latin American republics lost access to the European markets and became more and more reliant on the United States as a trading partner. Also during the war, under wartime consumption, many Latin American republics became too reliant on the United States to purchase their goods. Once the war was over, demand fell, leaving many countries unstable. Dennis Chavez saw this instability and bitterness towards the United States as fertile ground for the seeds of Communism. Dennis Chavez resurrected the Inter-American Solidarity ideal as a means to combat Communist infiltration and to stand in opposition to Russia worldwide. He even argued that Latin America was due a recovery package similar to the Marshal Plan. Just as before, Chavez's rhetoric fell on deaf ears. He did have some success in using the threat of Russian infiltration into Latin America to complete the Inter-American Highway, increase education in Latin American countries, and call attention to the issues of poverty.

During the Post-War era, Dennis Chavez did find his way into a very precarious situation when it came to Argentina and Juan D Perón. It is not very clear as to how or why Dennis Chavez became involved with Perón and Argentina. However, it is very clear that Chavez made multiple trips to Argentina during a time when the United States was very distrustful of and non-supportive of Juan D Perón. Chavez had several meetings with Perón, and on one such occasion caused one of Perón's cabinet members to be fired. Again, it is very unclear as to exactly what Dennis Chavez was up to in Argentina. His papers hardly mention it, and there is no mention of him and Argentina foreign relations in the congressional records or in the FBI data base. The most difficult aspect of his affinity towards Argentina and Perón is that it barely seems to fit into his ideal of Inter-American Solidarity. Most of the other Latin American Republics refused to accept Argentina and her President into their fold. All that is offered in this paper is a hypothesis that cannot be proven to a conclusion.

The final and most significant impact Chavez had in Latin America was his support for Puerto Rico. During his tenure as a statesman, Puerto Rico was experiencing an identity crisis. Puerto Rico was not considered a state, nor was it an independent country. Chavez latched on to the Puerto Rican experience because he believed that if the United States were to make any inroads with Latin American Republics, Puerto Rico and its people had to be treated equitably. Dennis Chavez brought to the Puerto Rican people another voice to their struggle for an identity. He took correspondence, headed an economic commission to assess the islands economic situation, and finally argued for Puerto Rican statehood. Puerto Rico factors into his vision for Latin America as a show

piece--an example to the Latin American people of what to expect from the United States should true solidarity happen.

Dennis Chavez supported Latin America because of his belief in the ideal of Inter-American Solidarity and an affinity born out of a common Spanish ancestry. He often spoke of a strong union between the nations of the western hemisphere. He argued that it was the surest and most effective way to ensure that the United States would live in a state of peace. Dennis Chavez stated “I take special interest in Latin-American affairs, perhaps because I am of Spanish ancestry, but principally because I believe that a strong union of western hemisphere nations is the surest means of promoting international peace today. If our countries are strong industrially, economically, and politically, we can assure peace for the world because none will dare attack us.”²⁵⁸

This study was important because Dennis Chavez’s interests in Latin America have yet to be fully explored; there is much more work to be done. Through the exploration of the available resources it is clear that Dennis Chavez held a special interest for Latin America, but failed to exact any real tangible changes. During the years leading up to World War II, he spoke of isolating relations to Latin America and the Western Hemisphere, but failed to make any headway in making it a reality. Chavez was unsuccessful largely due to his underestimation of the connectivity between the United States and Europe, born out of economic centers of influence and cultural background. While Latin America had its connectivity to Spain, the United States was undoubtedly connected to Britain, France, and yes, Germany.

²⁵⁸ Chavez, Dennis, *Good Highways –Promoters of Good Will*, Speech delivered before the American Road Builders Association, February 9, 1949, box 73, folder 4, Dennis Chavez Papers, MSS 394, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Overall, Dennis Chavez made many friends in Latin America, from the peasant farmer to the heads of state. Some of these so called friends were controversial figures. Juan D. Perón was regarded as fascist leaning dictator in Argentina, yet Chavez visited Perón on many occasions. Similarly, Chavez had close relations with President Somoza of Nicaragua who was generally considered a dictator with a penchant for violence. It is the support for these individuals that lost Chavez some credibility. How could he argue for peace and the rights of the people, and support these repressive regimes? By and large Chavez was a politician. He used rhetoric to gain support for his ideas and yet knew that he must court the people in power.

It is interesting to ponder where the state of relations with Latin America and the United States would be if the advice of Dennis Chavez had been put into action. Would Latin America have experienced the multiple revolutions from the late 50's to the 80's? Would the United States have such major issues with Venezuela, Cuba, and others today? These questions cannot be answered of course. The truth is that Latin America has had a long and complicated history with the United States. During his time as a Senator, Chavez spoke up for better relations with Latin America, but ultimately he failed to make any significant changes. Relations with Latin America continue to be dominated by the United States due to its economic and political power—a position that does not look to be changing soon.

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