

# The new situation in Latin America

This text is part of the book that is entitled "70 years of Struggles and Revolutions in Latin America". By suggestion of comrades, I decided to publish extracts from it (the new situation after 2019) given the actuality that this theme has for the militants of the IV International. It is not a document, but chapters from the book that go as far as the Colombian days. I have added as the last theme the article written regarding Castillo's triumph and in tribute to Tito Prado, internationalist militant who recently passed away, victimized by Covid-19.

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## The new Insurgencies after 2019

Clearly from 2019 Latin America (LA) has stirred. The map has been colored by rebellions, strikes and insurgencies that continue to this day and, it seems, will not stop. Two question marks arise on the left in the face of this new situation. What is the most important element to change LA? The progressiveness or the construction of new alternatives from the vanguard that emerges from these processes?

Before answering these two questions there is still a polemic about the sign of the situation. There are those who opine that we live in a reactionary stage in LA. It is true that Bolsonaro is still governing and Duque has not finished falling. It can be argued that these facts added to Lasso's triumph in Ecuador and the possibility of fraud so that Keiko Fujimori wins in Peru, reinforce this point of view. But this is a mistaken view, which loses sight of both reality and perspective.

Those who defend it lose the general sense of the situation and the democratic and anti-neoliberal victories. The Chilean mobilization has shaken the Pinochetist legacy embodied in Piñera, and in Bolivia the coup plotter congresswoman Añez was defeated and is now in jail. It is also important to register that three years ago the United States could not fulfill its goal of militaristic interference in Venezuela, regardless of whether Maduro and Ortega are part of this totalitarian constellation, but of another sign.

If between 2016 and 2018 LA was marked by a reactionary offensive (Macri, Bolsonaro, Piñera, Duque) this changed in 2019. This change (which was pre-announced in some Caribbean countries like Puerto Rico and Haiti) has taken on a definite sign.

We had the indigenous uprising in Ecuador, right after the Chilean revolt against the neoliberal model inherited from Pinochet and which Piñera represented very well, the general strike in Colombia that seeded the current insurrection. And in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, the heroic Bolivian people ended, literally ended the parliamentary coup of Añez who sought to perpetuate himself in power. The final result was the resounding electoral triumph of the MAS. The mobilizations in Peru defeated the government resulting from Merino's parliamentary coup, which lasted a week in power, and in Paraguay the people rose up against the government's inoperativeness in the face of the pandemic.

In the year 2021 the process continued. One could say that it became even more forceful. The facts that followed are more recent and better known. We will focus only on the last two events.

It is also worth remembering that this wave had a strong expression in the United States when George Floyd was assassinated, which opened the way for the anti-racist struggle around the world. And that later in the elections

Trump, the greatest exponent of the proto-fascist right in the world, was defeated. What is happening in LA is part of these changes that took place in the northern country.

We will dwell on two processes: Chile and Colombia. They are the most recent and illustrative. We will not go into Ecuador (a real youth-indigenous rebellion), nor Bolivia and Peru, where the electoral dispute is between the authoritarian right-wing of Fujimori and the leader of the education workers, Pedro Castillo.

### **Insurgent Chile**

Insurgent Chile inflicted a hard defeat on the right wing in the Constituent Assembly elections. The result did not fall from the sky. As the Chilean comrades say, it is a greater victory than the one Allende won with Popular Unity in 1971. It seems that they are right. The right wing was much more wounded, it didn't get the necessary third that would give it veto power. The Chilean elections open a constituent process at the same time "destituent". It is the institutionalization of the anti-neoliberal insurrection that was calling for Piñera's head in 2019. It finally succeeded, in an even greater magnitude, although he will remain in power until the end of the year.

One can correctly dispute that the state apparatus is far from destroyed. But that is not what was in place for the Chilean people when they mobilized (they did not achieve making a Sandinist revolution). So the right can still maneuver. It can, but it cannot go backwards, back to what it was before. A process has opened that will modify (not dismantle) the Chilean State. How far will it go? Up to which station the train of the democratic and antineoliberal revolution will arrive, will depend on the energy put into it by the Chilean people (the fuel) and on how far the train is organized (the conductor who drives the train). But the train has already started and it won't turn back. How far it goes will depend on

the mobilization and how the constituents support it.

To conclude, it is worth noting the results: the right wing was far from reaching a third [of the seats in the Constituent Assembly], it had 37 elected representatives out of a total of 172 constituents (adding the 17 from the native peoples). Bachelet's Concertación and the Cypriot democrats who governed for several periods under Pinochet's constitution, which can be described as progressivism, also suffered a defeat. Even if added to the right, they are still far from having a majority.

For its part, the Communist Party came out from outside the Concertación and joined the Frente Amplio and independent left currents. This turn to the left of the CP began in 2019, when it voted against and did not participate in the agreement between Piñera and the Parliament, at the moment when Piñera's fall was posed. This change of the CP is an important element to observe, even though it continues to maintain its vertical structure, it has changed its politics. We will have to observe if this is not one more element of the new situation. The failure of a classist policy and of confrontation between sectors of the left and unions. Something similar is happening with the Colombian union leaderships, as we will see later.

We should also add as a victory that there will be a majority of women constituents, something unprecedented, and that is not a gift, but a conquest, since women have been at the forefront of mobilization in all these years. And also that the Communist Party won the Santiago mayoralty with Irací Hassler and Jorge Sharp, a leftist fighter who left the Broad Front because of his opposition to Piñera's parliamentary agreement, was reelected to the Valparaíso mayoralty.

## **Brave Colombia**

For more than a month the people of Colombia have been in the streets, carrying out blockades, mobilizations and successive general strikes. The strength of the mobilization is strong,

with the poor young people of Cali at the head, and a National Strike Command, made up by the unions, the CUT (led by bureaucratic sectors) and also representation of more militant groupings, like the indigenous people.

For their part, in the neighborhoods – mainly in Cali and the Cauca Valley where it is located and in other cities in the northeast of Colombia – a process of self-organization of the youth that support the blockades has advanced. According to the Colombian comrades, they are reaching a degree of organization and some centralization that is still insufficient. Among the young people, mistrust of political parties, unions, and above all, of the government's word in the negotiations, is prevalent.

It should be remembered that the October 2019 strike was “a general rehearsal,” which left an important lesson for the mass movement, especially for the youth: the central unions did not continue it. This time, the mass movement did not fall into that error. Despite the fact that President Duque withdrew the bill for a tax on the middle class and workers, a program of essential points to confront the crisis was raised, and the general strike had to continue with several calls and mobilizations pushed by the blockades that the youth of Cali are making.

This mobilization asks for more than the repeal of the tax reform that the government tried to pass and had to withdraw. With its demands, it attacks the pillars of injustice of the Colombian neoliberal state, which is neoliberal in its economic forms, but which also has the weight of drug trafficking and the intimate relations it establishes with power.

Thus, the mobilization faces a regime that systematically practices state terrorism. Duque is the son of Uribe, a sinister ex-governor allied with drug trafficking and, as his faithful heir, he systematically breaks the peace agreements

signed between the FARC and the Santos government. Whether through his gunmen, paramilitary agents who expel and persecute indigenous peoples, or in his persecution of union activism that has thousands of deaths on its back. Now it continues with the same practices.

If we look at Colombia and compare it with the mobilizations that went through the Andes, there are two common points; will to fight and harsh repression. But Colombia is qualitatively different: the practices of state terrorism have left more than 60 dead, more than half of them in Cali, there are a hundred people missing and thousands injured; a systematic repression that doesn't stop, although the government says it wants to negotiate.

The Colombian peculiarity is that state terrorism is part of the regime. So the government says it negotiates, but at the same time it puts the special police and now the army to repress, kill and disappear demonstrators. There is a stalemate point. The movement demands that they stop the repression in order to withdraw the mobilization, however, the government with its repressive logic and essence does not accept.

At the time of writing this text, the Strike Command, formed essentially by central unions and trade unions – with the participation of representatives from other sectors, such as indigenous peoples or human rights groups – has not managed to reach an agreement with the government. There is one point that seems non-negotiable for this government: stopping the repressive forces.

The situation remains open and we risk a prognosis. It is difficult for the government to achieve a defeat across the board over the mass movement. The latter, throughout the mobilization, has become a questioner of the roots of this regime that may survive, but will no longer be the same, and its future, sooner or later, is defined as a consequence of

the heroic Colombian uprising.

### **Are the progressivisms coming back? Under what conditions?**

Parallel to these processes there is a certain revival of the old progressives, as the governments that emerged after 2000 are called today (Lula, Chávez, Evo, Kirchner, Mujica). Now it is López Obrador, Alberto Fernández, Arce and the probable governments of Petros in Colombia and Lula in Brazil.

An important previous observation. The term “progressivism” was imposed on the left to qualify (as opposed to neoliberal or totalitarian) all governments that did not come from traditional parties in the 2000s. The definition of “progressism” is not faithful to reality because it loses the difference in quality that these governments had. Lula, Kirchner, Mujica were qualitatively different from Chavez, Evo and Correa. And this difference is important, whoever qualifies all of them as progressives, putting them in the same bag, helps to confuse those who think that they now dominate or have dominated the progressivisms.

A question arises on the left in the face of this new situation. Which element is more important in changing LA, the progressivisms or the construction of new alternatives from the vanguard that emerge in these processes?

These are the questions that arise in the midst of the current process of struggle that our continent is experiencing. Sectors of the left think that after the reactionary period (governments of Macri, Piñera, Lenin Moreno, Duque, Bolsonaro ...) through which LA is still moving unevenly, the way to end them is to return to the old progressivisms. It is true that there is a return of them with Fernández in Argentina, Arce in Bolivia, López Obrador and the possible electoral victory of Lula in Brazil and of Petros in Colombia.

We cannot deny this reality, but there are new elements that make it impossible for them to be what they were before.

One of them is the serious multidimensional crisis and, as part of it, the economic and domination crisis. As comrades Ana Valladares and Israel Dutra, members of the IV International bureau, wrote in their latest text to be presented at the upcoming IV International meeting:

“The current unprecedented global economic crisis and the sharpening of the confrontation between the US and China (not to mention Russia) make it impossible to repeat a new period of stability, more or less long, based on the model of a time when the world was growing and the US, Europe, China and Russia coexisted without major tensions. Unfortunately, the progressive options have not overcome this model, and continue to call on the peoples to believe that it is possible to “start over,” as if nothing had happened, as if nothing had changed, as if they had not governed and worn themselves out in front of their supporters and the new generations of activists, clashing with their demands. We will have no peace or stability.

Linked to this structural element (the crisis does not allow reforms), the progressivisms of today are structurally empty of the masses; they have no organic relationship with them, they are electoral superstructures that exist for parliamentary and presidential elections. Although important sectors of the people may see them as a lesser evil, thinking that “the past was better”, they don’t have the mass weight they had in the first decade of the 2000s, when they created enthusiasm and optimism in the workers’ movement.

Along with these issues, a new element has emerged in LA after 2019: the insurgencies sweeping through it in response to the crisis and the emergence of a new broad vanguard, objectively anti-systemic, apart from the progressivisms.

We have already taken a quick flight over our Continent. Uprisings and rebellions have covered much of the map. These movements are different from the progressivisms of the early



2000's. They have new characteristics in common, within their particular logics:

(a) the protagonists are young people, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants (who in most countries are a noteworthy majority), poor peasants, women, and service and tele-delivery workers. In all sectors, women and young people are a prominent force. That is to say, in these new uprisings new sectors have entered the scene that are joining workers, in particular service workers, who continue to lead strong struggles.

b) These insurrections face strong repression by the governments. In all of them they have repressed violently. There were dozens of deaths in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru. But the insurgents are not afraid and face repression. In Chile there were demonstrations for more than a month until the Constituent Assembly was achieved, and in Colombia (when we wrote this chapter) there have already been more than 12 days of facing the methods of repression typical of a regime that has more than a thousand murders behind its back and that practices state terrorism. One of the characteristics of this new period – different from the 2000s – is this harshness of repression by governments that have no other way out but to resort to it.

These mobilizations have not only incorporated new social subjects, but have also incorporated new and old demands in a more immediate way than before, as a consequence of the multidimensional crisis we are experiencing. Points of the same, are already placed in the mobilization:

= It is about the defense of indigenous peoples, the defense – linked to the previous one – of the environment against predatory extractivism. The ecological question was put on the agenda as a new essential topic;

= The multidimensional crisis aggravated by the pandemic has

put the nationalization of health care as a task to end the capitalists' profits in this area. It is about nationalizing the system, breaking patents, expropriating laboratories under social control;

= The need for a minimum income for the entire population can only be achieved if the big capitalists are taxed, while at the same time it is necessary to nationalize the banks and cancel the debts that the governments have contracted with the World Bank and the IMF.

= In summary, to get out of the crisis, Latin America needs emergency measures that can only be carried out if, at the same time, the interests of the upper bourgeoisie, financial capital and imperialism are not touched. This begins to be and will be the mark of the next period; the search for the vanguard of a new anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and eco-socialist program, as the new processes indicate.

= In all these processes, a broad anti-systemic vanguard emerges, independent of the progressives and the old parties. It is a vanguard of the masses, or rather, of sectors of the masses that in Cali (today the epicenter of the revolts) are the young residents of the poor neighborhoods of Cali and the indigenous people. This vanguard is objectively anti-systemic, that is, it makes a global questioning of the crisis of the capitalist system. This does not mean that it is socialist or revolutionary, it rejects the current reality, but it still cannot find the way out. And this is because there is still a crisis of the program, in the sense of seeing another power and, of course, seeing another alternative.

The role of progressivisms in the face of mobilizations

The role of progressivisms is one of conciliation. It is not by chance. As we said, in different degrees they are all institutionalized, part of the political regime and the system against which all these insurrections collide. Hence their

role as “mediators” where polarization does not allow mediation.

This was their attitude in Chile. When the mobilization called for Piñera’s resignation, the entire left, with the exception of the Communist Party, agreed to hold a Constituent Assembly in which 40% of the constituents (a number accessible to the right) have the power of veto. To give another example, in Ecuador, instead of being an active part and vanguard of the mobilization, Correism remained independent. Its own action was to try to burn the public building where the archives of Correa’s trials are kept.

In Brazil, Lula advocates that we have to get Bolsonaro out in the elections, when this genocidal murderer has on his back what so far are more than 420,000 dead. And in Colombia, where the mobilization is at its peak, both the mayor of Bogotá, Claudia López Hernández and the presidential candidate for the 2022 elections, Gustavo Petro from the Polo Patriótico, made statements calling for an end to the strike at the beginning of the uprising, when the government withdrew the tax reform, but didn’t comply with the mobilized people’s agenda.

In this way, all the progressivists were outside or against the mobilizations, waiting for the electoral processes.

To get out of the crisis requires emergency measures that can only be carried out if, at the same time, the interests of the upper bourgeoisie, financial capital and imperialism are confronted. This begins to be and will be the mark of the next period; the search for the vanguard of a new anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and ecosocialist program, as the new processes indicate.

In this concrete framework, progressivisms can become – at some moments – an intermediate station, but never a way out of the crisis.

**The real contradictions that can confuse**

Sectors of the left that see progressivism as a way out of the current situation are wrong to abandon the socialist strategy. They also weaken the connection of more sectors of the left with this new vanguard. But, every mistake has an element of (half) truth. There is an unequal development between the magnitude of the crisis and the anti-capitalist alternatives to it. Overcoming progressivism on the left is not easy and encounters real difficulties, which will now be overcome with the advance of the Latin American insurgency.

However, this delay does not justify a left wing politics that sees the alternative in progressivism. They are following orientations that go against mass mobilization and delay the construction of new alternatives.

Let's compare it to the situation of a train that has departed. The fuel that moves it is the mobilizations we are talking about. The train is destined for a new anti-capitalist mass alternative that opens a new process in our continent. When the fuel is too much, progressivism cannot stop it at the class conciliation post, as happened in Chile. Then, the train continues without stopping on its way to the new station. In other countries, as is the case in Brazil, the helmsman (lulopetism) has the skill and mastery to stop it at the class conciliation station. It is true that this is the alternative in Brazil. The debate on the left is whether, on the way to that station, we prepare ourselves to continue, that is, to build a new driver that considers continuing forward after that stop. There is a big difference there, because sectors of the left think that only this first station is the final destination; then they get off the train together with the driver of progressivism. On the contrary, the anti-capitalists don't get off, we stay inside the train so that when the masses get it moving, they have a conductor to guide it to the new stations.

## **Tactics and strategy**

Leaving the example and moving on to the concepts. With progressivism it is only possible to have a policy of unity of action and a specific single front, that is, around some present task that is defined by reality and that is achievable to help mobilization.

On the electoral terrain in Brazil (and perhaps Colombia) it is clear that in next year's elections it is necessary to defeat Duque and Bolsonaro, and that to do this we will have to support Petros and Lula, if he is the opposing candidate in Brazil. But we will have to do this as an electoral tactic. It is not about a programmatic vote as some sectors of the left think. Programmatically it is necessary to sustain the anti-capitalist program that responds to the needs of the masses to get out of the crisis.

In the case of Brazil, where elections are held in two rounds, this discussion is open even within the ranks of the PSOL. There is a sector of the left and of the PSOL that defends voting for Lula already in the first round. (In other words, going back to the example, they consider the day closed in the first station).

They argue that we should vote for him, calling for him to form a left front, that is, a front with the whole range of parties from what would be the Brazilian Social Democrats to the PSOL. But this policy runs into two problems. The first is that it is publicly known that Lula does not want a left front; he wants an electoral alliance that includes even center-right parties, that is, a vice-president of the bourgeoisie. Lula is the one who decides with whom he wants to make an alliance, and in this sense he has already established dialogues with the establishment. Therefore, it is wrong to create illusions in a front that is impossible.

So this confusion will mean putting under the carpet the program and the very tradition of the party that arose in opposition to the Lula government when it made the pension

reform, in which it was shown that its class interests were in favor of the big bourgeoisie. It is essential to present a program so that the anti-capitalist alternative does not disappear before the vanguard and the mass movement. Politics is not only oriented by the possible and immediate. (Which in this case is even an impossible immediate). In revolutionary politics, there is a relationship between tactics (the means) and strategy, the objective. Our strategy is to contest a sector of the masses for a transitional and anti-capitalist program.

There are no economic improvements in Brazil, or in any country in Latin America, within the framework of this regime. Our tactic cannot contradict the strategy of building an anti-capitalist alternative. Of course it is not a mechanical relationship, the tactic can follow and appeal to different means, but it can never clash with the strategy.

### **Vote for a program**

Nowadays the urgent, immediate measures become transitional. You can't talk about breaking patents if you don't also put the nationalization of the laboratories that produce the Covid vaccine and the new viruses to come.

A basic income – which is a survival income – cannot be obtained if the fortunes of the richest are not heavily taxed. The unbearable foreign debt cannot continue to be paid. Its cancellation also means the expropriation and nationalization of finance. We need to end the aggression against nature, the extractivism, the deforestation of the ecological reserves and especially the Amazon, which are no longer just a threat for the future, but for the present. Expelling multinational companies, making a rational use of natural resources is only possible with measures that attack imperialism and its agents. We must combat racism against indigenous and Afro-latin (black) peoples.

For these reasons, an anti-capitalist program must be defended in the first round, even if this policy immediately appears mistaken to the sectors that see the way out in Lula's lesser evil. But the dynamics and the future (when Lula is in office and fills his cabinet with prominent bourgeois leaders) will show that those who defended the radical program were right. In politics, we should see the most likely dynamic: Lula governing with the bourgeoisie. This is the possible, but this is not why we will become possibilists: we maintain the PSOL with its own candidacy in the first round, that is, we prepare the future machinist. In a second round, we need full weight to defeat Bolsonaro. We must vote against this neo-fascism, even if the alternative is inside the regime.

### **An end that is also a beginning**

There was no better way to conclude this book than in the midst of the constituent elections in Chile and the Colombian uprising. Through them, we must look to the future of LA, a future that has already begun. For those of us who lived in the house of the 1960s and walked the path of triumphs and defeats, some of which we address in this book, we are undoubtedly facing a new beginning. And for the new generations it is good to face it by turning to that past which, badly or well, is touched upon in this book.

The road ahead is not easy. There is no open avenue for us. There is a road full of insurgencies and confrontations, of struggles and repression (as the deaths in Colombia show), while the people continue to suffer from this monster of a system that dominates us. The crisis drives the struggle and, as in all previous stages of the rise of the masses, vanguard detachments emerge and the need to arm ourselves with a new transitional program emerges.

As we were saying, today immediate and urgent measures become transitional and must be disseminated throughout the vanguard that is in the streets of LA. These are propagandist agitation

slogans that are set to be disseminated, especially with the sectors in struggle.

However, we can only do this if we fulfill a previous task: to connect with these sectors in uprising, to know their way of thinking and seeing reality, to listen to them attentively. Don't go "down the line"! Go to learn too! To gain their trust. So that we can learn to listen, to know how to start from their struggles, concerns and needs.

Well, for the readers, I have reviewed this story (certainly incomplete) to contribute to the much needed training of future leaders, that is, of the "machinists".

To conclude: we have lost one. Tito Prado, historical militant of Peruvian Trotskyism. His death occurs when Pedro Castillo wins the elections. Here is the analysis and the tribute.