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Is there an anti-capitalist perspective in Latin America and the Caribbean?



Sources: Época (Bolivia) [Image: *Capitalism doesn't work, life is something else.* Credits: Época]

In this article the author defends, after analyzing the revolutionary waves and cycles in Latin America, the need to "redirect the anti-capitalist struggle from a revolutionary perspective", for which "the social and political forces of the left must overcome their own demons, overcome the causes of their stagnation and above all return to being anti-capitalist".

There is no doubt that Latin America and the Caribbean have become a territory of arduous dispute so far in the twenty-first century between political forces, in its broadest exception, that bet on maintaining relations of domination / subordination and those that

challenge, in their diversity, an emancipatory horizon. The predominant tendency is still unclear, since in this dispute there have been tactical-strategic advances and setbacks of the currents that reject the hegemonist pretensions of the United States, on the one hand by the imperial counteroffensive and, on the other, by the limitations of the left in the government to exceed the thresholds of capitalism.

Progressive and leftist forces do not have a common emancipatory horizon. The coincidence is in the rejection of neoliberal fundamentalism and the increasingly authoritarian forms of the United States, considered by Fidel Castro as the most powerful imperialism that humanity has ever known. But their differences lie in their position on the type of capitalist organization of social life, which certainly reveals the existence of several currents: those who seek a reform within the system, with greater participation of the State in certain fields, those who do not deny a neoliberal model but want it less orthodox, and those who maintain their aspiration to march towards a post-capitalist horizon, although the ideas of how to move in that direction are not very clear.

With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Latin America and the Caribbean, which has never ceased to be a priority for the United States, whether contemplated in its foreign policy or as part of its "domestic policy", as the strategist Brzezinski argued, a third wave for emancipation [1] begins, which, in general terms, It has gone through two moments or "cycles" [2] and, obviously, "countercycles": the first contemplates the decades of the 60s and 70s [3], when in the Region there was the irruption of national liberation movements, predominantly armed, and the presence of military governments of nationalist orientation that, as expected, were not to Washington's liking either.

Although the United States had become a hegemonic power at the end of World War II, the emergence of contestary processes in its "backyard", encouraged by the victory of the "bearded revolution" just 90 miles from its territory, quickly prompted imperialism to develop a counterinsurgency line. John F. Kennedy, who assumed the presidency in 1961, received from his advisers the view that Third World radicalism – whether described as socialism or radical nationalism – was a threat to American interests that had to be taken very seriously [4]. The imperial response resulted in direct military intervention, as happened in the Dominican Republic in 1965, but also through the installation of military governments of National Security, and in the late 70s with the promotion of "viable democracy" and Carter's "Human Rights". Under the National Security Doctrine and the concept of "internal enemy", guerrilla movements were "eradicated" in Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, although the same

did not happen in Colombia. It also ended the nationalist experiences of Velasco Alvarado in Peru and Juan José Torres in Bolivia.

While the people never stop fighting, the U.S. strategy yielded results. Political stability was the central feature between the 80s and 90s, with the installation of bourgeois democratic regimes, to the point that social scientists affirm that, especially in the 90s, the most important political transformation took place after the wars of independence [5].

In the 80s the few nationalist foci that still persisted ended, as are the cases of Granada (1983) and Panama (1989). Cuba was left alone and in resistance to the criminal blockade that was declared since 1961; and in Colombia the guerrilla movement did not have favorable possibilities for the "seizure of power", although at the same time Sandinismo rose triumphant in 1979 in Nicaragua, but through an electoral process imposed by the United States abandoned power 10 years later.

In the 90s, after the fall of the USSR, the anti-capitalist struggle was weakened because many leftist organizations, communist among them, entered a paradigm crisis. Not a few retreated in their positions and moved towards social democracy at best. The banners of system change were shelved, socialism ceased to be the horizon to be achieved and democracy modeled to the liking of the United States was imposed as the predominant way of doing politics. The discourse of the "end of history" took shape and the neoliberal model was established.

However, when everything suggested that the unipolar world had arrived to never leave anymore, the limitations of the Washington Consensus to meet the growing demand of the population were laying conditions "from below" to open another cycle of popular struggles with state and international effect. The wave of privatizations and transnationalizations, the shrinking of the State, the policy of domestication of the unions and the liberalization of the economy did not produce the expected "overflow" [6] that was to bathe everyone. Nor did the militarization of the continent, particularly in the Southern Cone, under the pretext of the International War on Drugs work, and the attempt to impose the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) failed.

Since the end of the twentieth century, with the political-electoral triumph of Hugo Chávez (1998) and the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution (1999), the correlation of forces in Latin America began to change rapidly and substantially, since from a continent submerged in a neoliberal sea, with the only resistance of Cuba, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the irruption of "those from below" allowed, to varying degrees, the installation of progressive and leftist governments that modified the

geopolitical chessboard of the Region. Until the end of 2012, the winds were blowing in favor of Latin Americanist currents. About 10 states were governed by progressivism and the left, although each of them with different degrees of radicalism; Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Honduras, El Salvador and other Caribbean countries go through similar experience.

Optimism took hold of the popular forces and it was not for less. The peoples have always been in resistance to the plans of the imperial bourgeoisie and its local partners, but this was the first time that the expansive wave produced by the Cuban Revolution had managed to synthesize itself in rebellious governments to the mandates of the United States. The first moment or cycle immediately recorded after the triumph of the revolution in Cuba was much more radical in the methods and horizon it sought to achieve: national liberation and socialism; The second cycle (which progressivism presents as the first) was through participation in elections and with more diffuse horizons. But in the second, and not the first, is that the left has managed to break the armored shirt that the United States and the ruling classes had placed on their political regimes based in restricted democracies. However, the suspicious death of Hugo Chávez left a vacuum in the articulation of progressive and leftist processes.

It would be a mistake to consider these processes and governments as a homogeneous whole. Hence, it is more than necessary, for a better assessment of what was done and not done, and also to know what should be adjusted, to bring together these experiences in two large fields: progressivism and the left.

Progressivism is quite heterogeneous, since it is composed of parties and organizations that move guided by progressive social reform within the current system and institutionality. That is, it is reform as a strategy and not as a tactic [7]. We are talking about Argentina, Brazil, Honduras and Paraguay. It is not that in these countries there had been no currents for socialism, but the hegemony was in other forces that made "possibilism" their mirror [8].

The field on the left is equally diverse. On the one hand, governments that emerged as a response to the "point of no return" that marked the deep crisis of the State stand out and that have been characterized by developing, from below and from the government, processes and constituent assemblies, which are the historical-concrete forms of political revolutions in the twenty-first century. We are talking about Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, but, at the same time, Nicaragua, where Sandinismo returned to government in 2006. From the second part of the decade of the XXI century, the different level of

development and radicality of these three processes would begin to be noticed, of which one traveled the path of "reversal" since 2017, when President Lenin Moreno – who came to government with the same movement that elevated Rafael Correa – aligned himself with Washington's policy. In the case of Bolivia, despite the profound changes introduced in several fields, it did not move from the political revolution to the social revolution, which implied its stagnation already before the coup d'état of 2019, and Venezuela opted for greater radicalism.

But there are also other experiences in which left-wing parties or coalitions, such as the Frente Amplio (FA) in Uruguay, the Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador and the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil, despite their histories, only carried out progressive policies that did not aim to strategically modify the current power relations, much less overcome the frontier of post-neoliberalism.

The last three countries to join this "second cycle" of the progressive and leftist struggle, which at the same time confirmed the validity of the third wave for emancipation in Latin America and the Caribbean are Mexico in 2018, Peru in 2021 and Colombia in 2022. In the case of Argentina, the course is resumed, in December 2019, after having lost the elections in 2015; and in Bolivia, in November 2020, after a historic triumph of Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca with more than 55% of the vote. Of the last three countries in which progressivism won, Chile aligned itself with the United States on several international policy issues; in Peru the empire reversed the process within the framework of a continental strategy; and Petro shows his Latin Americanist talent. The United States took advantage of the serious contradictions in Peru and, after a mistake by President Castillo to close the National Congress, carried out a coup d'état and installed, in fact, a civil-military dictatorship at the head of Dina Duarte.

By way of synthesis, except in Ecuador and El Salvador, where it is not yet possible to determine the magnitude of the setback to which the revolution/restoration (passive revolution) led by Lenin Moreno and Nayib Bukele, respectively, has led, the revolutions of Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia face, within the revolution/counterrevolution dynamic, the great challenge of strengthening themselves "from above" (governments and State) and "from below" (civil society). A premature electoralization within the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) for the 2025 elections has built mined territory that could explode Arce's management and put the brakes on the Process of Change. At a different level, it is also a challenge of the same nature for the governments of Argentina, Mexico and Colombia.

Since 1998, Latin America has been experiencing the most extraordinary moment in its history, but at the same time the most delicate if the revolutions do not rectify their mistakes and do not deepen. In Latin America, the dispute between domination and emancipation has translated, since 2015, into a fragile and unstable balance of forces. The inclination in one direction or another will depend on what the forces in dispute build locally, nationally and internationally.

«Latin America has been living since 1998 the most extraordinary moment in its history, but at the same time the most delicate if the revolutions do not rectify their mistakes and do not deepen»

Redirecting the anti-capitalist struggle from a revolutionary perspective is not easy. To achieve this, the social and political forces of the left must overcome their own demons, overcome the causes of their stagnation and above all return to being anti-capitalist.

Notes

[1] Moldiz, José Hugo (2013). *Latin America and the Third Emancipatory Wave*. South Ocean, Mexico.

[2] It is not very accurate to speak of cycles, but if one has to resort to the use of that concept, after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution the third wave of emancipation in Latin America was inaugurated. The previous two were the indigenous rebellions (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and the second the independence struggles (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Within the third, the "first cycle" occurred with the political processes after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the "second cycle" begins with the triumph of Chávez in 1998.

[3] Here a different periodization is made from that carried out by progressivism, which by placing the first at the end of the twentieth century, actually intends to mark a distance from the seal of the Cuban Revolution.

[4] Klare T. Michael. *Weapons and power in Latin America*. Ediciones Era, Mexico.

[5] Mainwaring, Scott and Pérez-Liñán, Anibal (2019). *Democracies and dictatorships in Latin America*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico.

[6] Stiglitz, Josep (2002). *The malaise in globalization*. Taurus, Argentina.

[7] Regalado, Roberto (2012). *The Latin American left in government*. South Ocean, Mexico.

[8] Regalado, Roberto (2006). *Latin America between centuries*. South Ocean, Mexico.

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