

The propaganda of the governments of Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador and others sought to show that our continent's economic crisis "does not fit", that it is a problem of Europe and the United States. But the Latin American continent is part of it and of the world revolutionary upswing, even with all its peculiarities. The year 2012 has been one of large strikes, indigenous-peasant rebellions and student demonstrations. What is new is the change that occurs in Argentina with the first general strikes in the labour movement against the Peronist government of Cristina Kirchner. It is a change, because for 10 years there had not been a general strike called by the CGT, which has a Peronist bureaucratic leadership.

This is an important change that marks perhaps the new elements in the whole of Latin America. On the one hand, in Argentina it shows that it has entered the global economic crisis and the government of Justicialist (Peronist) Party has been forced to apply variants of adjustment on the workers and the people. But this is a more general issue for Latin America where, although there does not yet exist manifestations of the global capitalist crisis with the depth of Europe and other countries, this does not mean that it has not started to feel the recession of Europe, the decline in purchases of commodities (minerals, agricultural) to Latin America in the global market. And this affects the capitalist governments in Latin America that have to follow the rule of world capitalism, which is trying to adjust those at the bottom. Therefore, these partial or more general adjustments have encouraged the rise of workers and popular struggles on the continent.

In Brazil, as of 2011, there is a wave of strikes that started up in March that year with the wildcat strike of 80,000 construction workers in Rondonia, followed by others such as fire fighters and employees of the city of Rio, chemistry workers of the Johnson, University professors, civil servants and many others.

In Bolivia, there were a strike of the COB which won wage increases and the indigenous mobilizations and claims against construction of Tipnis highway continued. Remember that Bolivia comes from the great popular rebellion in late 2011, the "Gasolinazo" [rebellion against big increases in gasoline prices, NT]. In Chile, after two strikes of the copper miners, a strike of the southern population generated a great strike and mobilization of students against the privatization of education, with marches of over 100,000 students. In Peru the working class sector entered strongly. There was a mining strike and rebellion in the interior of the country against multinationals and mega-mining. There was a large indefinite strike of 350,000 teachers across the country. In Panama there was a popular uprising in the city of Colon which defeated the Liberal government of Ricardo Martinelli, who wanted to impose a free selling of the Free Zone. In Venezuela, 2012 was a year that exceeded the previous year in terms of social conflict, standing out the worker strikes in the Guayana Region, of the so called basic industries,

steel mills, Ferrominera Orinoco, aluminium factories, as well as struggles of public servants and public health, housing struggles, claims for electric power, etc. Also indigenous struggles for land of the Yukpas, where gunmen ended killing Yukpa chief Sabino Romero, and this has generated protest demonstrations. In Colombia also the worker and student struggle has been growing. There was a great college student mobilization against education reform, a strike of judicial workers and a long strike of coal workers.

### **The "Argentinazo" of 2001 opened a new period in the revolutionary process**

The "Argentinazo" of December 2001 began a new period of rise and triumph of the labour and popular movement within the Latin American revolutionary situation. U.S. imperialism wanted to counter attack with a coup in Venezuela, but the mass mobilization defeated this project in April 2002. And then they followed up with the petroleum sabotage at the end of that year. As part of this new period, in Bolivia, the revolutionary rise deepened. In October 2003, a popular uprising (the "Gas War") knocked down Sanchez Losada and in 2005 fell his replacement, Carlos Mesa. In December of the same year, Evo Morales and the MAS won the elections with 54% of the vote, leading for the first time in history an indigenous peasant to the presidency.

In 2005, in Ecuador the class conciliation government of Lucio Gutiérrez, taken shortly before to power by the rise of the masses, collapsed. The very same rise will eventually take, through new elections, Rafael Correa to power, forming a new populist front government allied to Chavez.

Between 2006 and 2007, we lived through the extension of the upswing of the class struggle into new countries. In 2006 there was a change in the situation of Chile. The rebellion of more than 800,000 high school students, called the "Revolt of the Penguins", was the first major mass mobilization since the 1973 coup. Students achieved a partial victory in their demands of free access to university. Later, in 2007 the labour movement burst with the strike of 30,000 copper miners. Later on, a forestry workers strike, with the balance of a worker killed while facing the police.

Another country that entered fully into the upswing was Peru. Shortly after assuming office Alan Garcia and APRA, their credit with the masses was quickly exhausted. The Garcia government action was to continue the neoliberal plans, betting to secure the signature of the FTA with the United States. The response of the masses was forcefully expressed. There were regional popular uprisings for more budget and autonomy over natural resources and against mining

exploitation and pollution. Teachers then began to fight and later on there were large indigenous rebellions against the attempt to deliver entire regions to the multinationals.

Mexico and Central America, in the post "Argentinazo" period, also joined the labour and popular rise. The importance of Mexico in this process is key, as it is the country bordering the United States. In May 2006 began the heroic teachers strike in Oaxaca, which lasted until the end of the year. It became a popular insurrection with hard clashes and the emergence of a new body of local power — the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca. This rise was then expressed distortedly in the vote to Lopez Obrador, the PRD candidate in the presidential election, where it appears that there was a gigantic fraud which was possibly what prevented his triumph. Starring the mobilization against fraud there were more than 500,000 people in the Zocalo Square of Mexico City.

In Guatemala, in 2006 there was a strike in the health sector. In El Salvador, student protests. In Honduras, teachers strikes in 2006 and 2007. In Dominican Republic, a general strike in June 2007. And even in Costa Rica, the same year there were large demonstrations against NAFTA, the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, going so far as to mobilize near to 150,000 people, something unprecedented for this small Central American country.

That is, the period after the "Argentinazo" generated a process of deepening of the labour and popular upswing that would bring consequences, primarily political, for the continent.

### **The governments of centre-left and the Castro-Chavism**

The deepening of the revolutionary process after 2001 is what explains the rise of popular front governments, also called of centre-left, as a general trend in Latin America. They are bourgeois governments of a different type to those normal in the 1990s, such as those of Menem, Cardoso, Sanchez de Losada, Toledo, Lagos, Fujimori, Foks, Moscoso, Pastrana and Uribe, who applied staunch imperialist economic policies. These new governments, the result of the rise and the revolutionary process that destroyed or led the political parties, and in some circumstances even to the bourgeois democratic system itself, to a huge crisis, are governments of class conciliation with nationalist elements in some cases, that have been forced to take some measures of confrontation with imperialism and to make concessions to the mass movement, which partially conquered some claims. These governments are based on class conciliation with labour and popular organizations; they do not stop being bourgeois and having a counterrevolutionary character. Their aim is trying to demobilize the workers and

normalize the political system, especially in cases where, as in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, they were severely hit by great revolutionary mobilizations. As centre-left governments with elements of popular front, we include those of Lula-Dilma, Chavez, Evo Morales, Tabare Vazquez-Mujica, Correa, Kirchner, Lugo, Daniel Ortega and Funes in El Salvador. Undoubtedly, many inequalities have always existed between these governments. We cannot put an equal sign between them. For revolutionaries, it is very important to distinguish between types of popular front or centre-left governments. This is key to the policies and tactics. We always define them as enemies of the working class and popular sectors; we always denounce them and never give them political support. For example, the governments of Lula-Dilma, the Kirchners or the "Frente Amplio" (Wide Front) in Uruguay have been clearly agents of U.S. imperialism. Instead, Chavez, Morales and Correa have always had some friction with imperialism, and so even the masses see them "more to the left". It must be acknowledged that these governments, in their first stages, were having some success in circumstantially channelling the revolutionary upsurge and avoid, for now, going towards new revolutionary crises. Of all these centre-left governments, the one which has been most prominent is that of Chavez in Venezuela. It is the one that has had more weight and that we call as Castro-Chavism. The unit Chavez-Fidel Castro is a version of a new reformism after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which with an apparently more radical discourse, with the slogan Socialism of the XXI Century, states a new version of bourgeois nationalism, which had its historical precedents in Lazaro Cardenas, Peron, Allende, Velazco Alvarado or Torrijos.

He has also had a more radical discourse, though not at the level of the economic measures of nationalization. Chavez adopted a socialist discourse attached to the image of Castro, quoting Marx, Engels, Lenin, Che Guevara and even Leon Trotsky. Castro-Chavism emerged as a current enemy of working class autonomy, of class independence, of the power for the workers and the people and of rupture with imperialism and the multinationals. Ultimately, against a true socialist revolution. This is why we also define it as counterrevolutionary. However, for its partial fights against imperialism and because the masses with their struggles won some gains, it achieved a significant sympathy in the mass movement, not only in their country but also among the vanguard of Latin America and the world. Thus it became the main obstacle to the construction a workers and revolutionary socialist leadership. But in the last period, with the worsening global economic crisis and combined with the need for partial or total adjustments on workers, both the governments of Castro-Chavism as the rest of the centre-left governments in Latin America have begun to suffer a political deterioration in the heat of the beginning of the breakdown of the expectations the masses had deposited on them.

### **The political erosion of governments and regimes grows**

The combination of the first elements of the global economic crisis on the continent and the labour and popular upswing has led to a growth of political erosion of governments and regimes

in Latin America, both of the centre-left, which are the majority, as the more pro-U.S. bourgeois governments, of the type of Piñera in Chile or Santos in Colombia.

Undoubtedly, at the beginning of the governments' crisis not all is alike. In the context of inequality, the crisis begins to advance. In governments of the so-called Castro-Chavism, the most advanced is the political crisis of Evo Morales and the MAS government. The crisis took a leap up since the "Gasolinazo" of 2011, which was a massive rebellion against the increase in gasoline prices, where the social base of Evo Morales came to raise the slogan "Change or you leave". Morales had to step back in his measure. Then the union strikes and large indigenous march against the Tipnis highway followed. That makes this, of all the South American governments and especially the Castro-Chavism governments, the one with the biggest crisis. And this is now reflected in the fact that the bureaucracy of the COB takes distance, launching the formation of a Workers Party, which expresses the breakdown of various leaders and social sectors with the MAS of Evo Morales.

The other new point of jump in the wear and the crisis is the Peronist government of Cristina Kirchner, who after winning the election in October 2011 with 54% of the vote, during all of 2012 has had a drop in popularity and has been faced with various social manifestations of rejection to its policy. Both, the sector of the working class, where even a section of the bureaucracy led by Hugo Moyano breaks with the government and calls for marches and strikes, as well as middle-class sectors that had been supporting Kirchnerism electorally, manifested in a large mobilization on November 8, protesting against the insecurity, power cuts, rising inflation, deteriorating living standards in general.

In the case of Venezuela, even while Chavism won the presidential election in October 2012 with an important majority, it does not mean that, after 14 years in office, it had no wear. Rather, the vote of millions for Chavez is explained because there was still no worsening of the economic crisis in Venezuela and that, in the face of the candidacy of sectors of the right, millions still gave the vote to Chavez although with fewer expectations than before. This has been reflected in various strikes and demonstrations. But now, after Chavez's death, a new stage opens in the reformist current of greater weight in Latin America: Chavism and Castro-Chavism. Venezuela will never be the same politically. It is likely that in the early months the Maduro government may avoid being overflowed using the image of Chavez and the need for "unity". But with the application in early 2013 of an adjustment tied to devaluation, raising prices and deteriorating wages, it has caused another wave of uncertainty and claims, that without Chavez cushioning them, it is likely to resume the process of wear and tear which has slowed momentarily by the elections of October 2012 and April 2013. The outlook is towards the crisis of Chavism in Venezuela, to the occurrence of collisions with its popular base and that this will also lead to divisions within the PSUV. Towards breakups, new political and trade union groupings and new opportunities for the revolutionary left. It is an unknown what changes may

occur in relation to Cuba. It is possible that, in the immediate, no changes happen in the petroleum subsidy and missions. But this may change if in the future the economic and political crisis of Chavism advances.

Overall, centre-left governments, and more specifically the "more to the left" like Chávez and Evo Morales, will show again the historical failure of bourgeois nationalism in Latin America and of the various popular front governments that occurred, such as APRA, Peronism and the PRI in Mexico, which ended up being agents of the economic plans of imperialism. Once again it is evident that the bourgeois nationalism, not leaving the framework of capitalism, ends up letting down the masses and opening a field of breakdown in expectations of millions. This process is what has been started, with inequalities, in all Latin America. This has also been expressed in the government of Ollanta Humala of Peru, who won the last presidential election with nationalist banners and double-talk, and all the hype that he had awakened did not last long. Shortly after his government stripped as agent of transnational mining corporations, as the perpetuator of neoliberal adjustments and therefore its own social base, sectors that had voted them, mobilized against them such as miners, populations of the interior against the implantation of multinational mining companies, teachers, etc. This process of political wear also fits Latin American bourgeois governments more direct agents of imperialism. The most obvious case is that of the Piñera's government in Chile, which has suffered the brunt of the student movement and also the working class. The wear and political setback was expressed electorally in the municipal elections in late 2012, where the right of Piñera suffered a total electoral defeat. To the extent that several of the aldermen of the municipality of Santiago de Chile, who were those who most had faced the student mobilization, all avowed former pro-Pinochet men, were swept electorally.

The trend in Latin America will be for the growth of labour and popular struggles in the heat of the economic crisis and the implementation of the different variants of adjustment that these governments will apply. To the advancement of the political deterioration and to new expressions of crisis, for both governments of the centre left as well as the liberal right.

### **The struggles against the adjustment and plundering will continue**

The governments in Latin America will be still forced to apply different variants of adjustments against the workers, peasants and the people. Under pressure from the multinationals and imperialism in their need to balance their crisis in the metropolises, they will seek to increase the plundering of countries and peoples of Latin America. In this sense, they will continue to increase a counter-offensive of the multinationals and the financial capital to keep on imposing their plans. The fall in international prices, except for oil, will also lower the inflow of foreign

currency to these capitalist governments that are imposing the variable of adjustment on its education and health workers, affecting these fundamental issues, weakening transportation and all essential services to the masses. This will poke more fuel to the fire in the struggle in Latin America. It will lead to greater social confrontation and ever increasing weakening of governments and regimes, both centre-left and liberal right. It will continue combining labour struggles, through strikes, with peasant, indigenous, student and popular mobilizations. Already the Peruvian people faced and defeated the Conga mining project. In Argentina, thousands were mobilized against the proposed mega mining project headed by the Canadian Barrick Gold. Also in Bolivia indigenous people expelled the Canadian mining transnational South American Silver. It will be on the agenda, then, the fight against the plundering projects of the multinationals, against the payment of the foreign debt, against the consequences of rising inflation and deteriorating living standards, for emergency wage increases and mobilizations in defence of education and health, in the perspective of the emergence of new political alternatives for workers and the people in face of the failure of the governments of bourgeois populism, which prepare a new failure to the expectations of millions in Latin America.