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Colombia

Our solidarity with the Colombian people!

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After the spectacular uprisings in Ecuador and Chile in 2019, we are witnessing a huge rebellion of the Colombian people, who, after last Sunday's partial victory - with the government's withdrawal of its tax counter-reform bill - are still fighting to reverse the Duque government's adjustment plan and to put an end to the repressive and corrupt nature of the regime.

Background

In the midst of the brutal pandemic crisis, the government of Iván Duque launched a Tax Reform whose fundamental goal is to increase taxes on the population to the benefit of the richest. The government took advantage of the health situation to launch this bill, ignoring the 500 deaths per day and the 70,000 deaths in total, in addition to the enormous impoverishment of Colombians.

Development of the movement

Faced with this situation, social movements called for a National Strike on 28 April to stop this tax reform. Mass mobilizations were unleashed all over the country, including in the medium-sized cities, and they brought together not only formal workers, but also informal workers, unemployed youth, women's, and neighbourhood organizations. The government responded to this with the same recourse as always: savage violence against the people.

The breadth and strength of the popular mobilization was due to the fact that, among other factors, the Tax Reform is not an isolated act; it is the culmination of the neoliberal policies of the current and previous governments that finally clashes with the resistance of the Colombian people. It is a legitimate struggle that has been building up against all the abuses of power and the historical postponement of the most basic rights.

Anti-social offensive

For several decades, Colombia has had governments whose economic policy has been reduced to transferring public money to the financial groups that control private banks and big business, and to accepting investments from extractive industries that displace populations, destroy territories, and pollute water and biodiversity. The social consequences of this policy have been devastating: unemployment is at historic levels and the threat of throwing a significant segment of public workers out of work as part of the adjustment plan is imminent. The indebtedness of families as a result of government-sanctioned financial speculation is evident. And the list could go on and on.

Failure to comply with the peace accords

To this we must add the daily assassination of social leaders and the killing of peasant and indigenous populations prepared to implement a plan for the voluntary substitution of illicit crops, as agreed in the peace accords signed in Havana in 2016, by drug trafficking mafias. Crimes that count on the full complicity of the army, which does nothing to stop them, while the government, on the contrary, has decided to fumigate the territories where they live with glyphosate.

Catastrophic management of the pandemic

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The management of the pandemic could not have been more disastrous.

- Unconditional support for the big pharmaceutical companies, including international discussions at the World Health Organization when the temporary elimination of patents was proposed, including the secret payment of the cost of vaccines and the recognition that in the case of illnesses resulting from vaccination, the victims cannot take legal action for reparation.
- Unconditional compliance with the conditions of payment of the public debt to the IMF and the rating agencies to the point of opening up the possibility of a debt-for-nature swap.
- Lack of public resources to resolve the situation of the millions of Colombians who have been dragged into unemployment and those who live in informality, forcing them onto the streets in the midst of the pandemic and with a privatized health system that abandons them to their own fate - only 4 million people have been vaccinated out of a population of 46 million inhabitants.
- The increase in poverty is alarming. The official statistics themselves recognise that poverty now reaches 60% of the population, which has consequences: of the total number of deaths caused by Covid-19, more than two thirds belong to the poorer sections of the population.

A great victory, but the struggle continues

After four days of huge protests and more than thirty deaths and 100 disappeared at the hands of the military forces, on Sunday 2 May the popular movement achieved a very important victory when the right-wing president of the government, Duque, was forced to appear on television and announce the withdrawal of his regressive tax reform bill in order to stop the mobilizations.

The capitalist offensive does not stop, but neither does the popular resistance.

The Colombian people have resisted and continue to resist, encouraged by this great victory. What is now on the agenda is to stop Duque's "package deal", which in addition to the tax reform includes an even more privatising health reform, a labour reform and a pension reform... All this to further cut workers' rights, which has been demanded by transnational finance capital through the IMF and the risk rating agencies. Therefore, these just demands must be associated with the slogan of the immediate suspension of the payment of public debt as an unpostponable measure to find budgetary resources to resolve the humanitarian tragedy that the country is experiencing.

The resistance is taking the form of territorial assemblies, which is a magnificent opportunity to broaden the social base of the struggles, to coordinate them better, to democratise them and, especially, to elaborate a broad platform, a great national platform that brings together the main demands of all social sectors: Women's struggles against the unfortunately recurrent femicide in the country, the fulfilment of the peace agreements starting with the voluntary substitution of illicit crops, the demands for the right to land and decent work, the defence of nature from an ecosocialist perspective.

Stop the massacre of the repressive forces, put an end to the militarization of society

In the immediate future, the urgent and united action must be to stop the massacre that the national police and its elite body, the Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD), are carrying out against an unarmed population on the direct orders of the general command of the Armed Forces and President Duque. They are arriving at the sites of demonstrations, firing on the demonstrators and nearby neighbourhoods with long arms, grenades and gas, in violation of the conventions of International Humanitarian Law. They are also detaining mainly young people in official vehicles or vehicles without official insignia, which then disappear. On 3 May, during the night, in neighbourhoods of Cali - the city where the largest protests have taken place - after laying siege to the city, they even strafed and threw incendiary bombs from official helicopters at residences.

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The human cost of armed violence

This war-like treatment of legitimate protest is unjustifiable. The human cost being borne by the Colombian people for exercising this right is enormous. The numbers of dead, disappeared, wounded, and those brought to justice are increasing daily. This systematic violation of human rights has been recognized by the United Nations delegate office in Colombia, by Michelle Bachelet on behalf of the OAS and by Human Rights Watch, among others. The moment demands, and therefore we support it, a humanitarian solution to this unbridled militarization of social protest. For this reason, we support the proposal for an urgent International Observation Mission that has already been put forward by democratic and progressive sectors in the country. At the same time, we will support the demand for international condemnation of the Duque government for its genocidal and repressive character.

The symbiosis of the reactionary government of Colombia with the US, which for years has facilitated the installation of US military bases in the country, is well known. From there, military operations are planned in other countries, such as in the south of Chile against the legitimate demands of the Mapuche people and fundamentally on the border with Venezuela, from where armed attacks on that country are being implemented to facilitate a military invasion. Duque rejects any peace initiative in the region and is subordinate to the dictates of the master to the north.

In view of the current events, the Fourth International calls on the social movements and revolutionary, progressive and democratic organizations to organise solidarity and to speak out urgently for a humanitarian solution to stop the massacre that the Duque government is carrying out against the Colombian people.

For the distribution of wealth and labour, for an ecosocialist transition, for an anti-capitalist democracy,

Down with the criminal and genocidal government of Duque!

*Executive Bureau of the Fourth International
Tuesday 4 May 2021*

PS:

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