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Latin America

A new “pink wave” in Latin America?

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Recently there has been talk of a return to so-called “progressive” governments. There are several possible ways of describing such governments and we could have a long discussion around the use of the term “progressive”. Using this designation makes it possible to describe a trust rather to the left or national-popular, partly comparable with the beginning of the 2000s: we should remember the election of Chávez in Venezuela then, from 2002, those of Lula in Brazil and then Evo Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador.

There was a rather long period of a “golden age” of these progressive governments, with social advances facilitated by a very favourable economic context, which made it possible to have policies of redistribution of extractive rents (minerals, oil, agribusiness) without radically challenging the power of the dominant classes.

We then entered a very harsh period marked by coups d'etat and institutional coups or even by the return of the right through elections, and a brutal rise of reactionary and conservative forces. It also sanctioned the strategic limits of the progressive thrust, of “reforms from above”, in a context accelerated by the collapse of the Bolivarian process due to external sanctions but also for internal reasons (“Bolibourgeoisie”, corruption, rentier economy, etc.).

Since 2018, we have witnessed a return of what some refer to as a moment of “late progressivism” with the election of Lopez Obrador in Mexico and, in the process, the return to power of left-wing Peronism in Argentina, embodied by Cristina Kirchner. In Bolivia, we saw the return to power of the MAS (Movement towards socialism) in 2020 with new figures and a clear electoral victory against the reactionaries. We can also cite Honduras and the surprise election of Pedro Castillo in Peru. This dynamic has been reinforced by the important election of Gustavo Petro, rather on the centre-left, and his running mate Francia Marquez, very committed in particular to the struggle of the Afro-Colombian community from which she comes, in a country dominated by one of the most violent oligarchies on the continent. The future of this “late progressivism” is also obviously being played out in the elections in Brazil in October, where Lula is in a favourable position after the first round, but also where Bolsonarism appears to be well implanted in broad sectors of society and in the structures of the state.

It should be noted that this new period is taking place in a very degraded setting, marked by the pandemic, high inflation, the impact of climate change in the Americas and a deep economic crisis (with “extreme” cases such as in Haiti and Venezuela). It is also characterized by the resurgence of popular movements: in 2019, there were major mobilizations and uprisings in Chile, Colombia, Haiti and Ecuador, mobilizations with multiple factors, often interclassist, very powerful and radical, where feminist movements, indigenous movements and radicalized youth have occupied an important place. This youth is at odds with a whole part of the political system, with parties, whether right or left, as evidenced by a record abstention rate of more than 50 per cent in several countries. These ruptures “from below” nevertheless find it difficult to emerge politically, in the absence of large anti-capitalist organizations capable of fueling them and offering outlets (as the Chilean experience has just reminded us).

It is a context of turbulence, where the right and the far right are on the offensive, often allied with the conservative current of the Evangelical Churches, with the big landowners and big business, with the support of a media field totally under the orders of capital. State reaction, repression and arbitrariness can also be embodied in *sui generis* forms, as is the case in Nicaragua with the Ortega clan .

In the background, an inter-imperialist confrontation is also playing out, which is gaining momentum, between the United States, which remains the “master” at the geopolitical and military level, and China, whose economic presence is in full expansion.

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The text is based on a video interview made at the NPA Summer University and available in full on the Youtube channel of L'Anticapitaliste.

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