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Ecuador

New lessons from the popular struggle in Ecuador: preliminary ideas

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The current context clearly shows the application - in blood and fire - of neoliberal policies by the government of Guillermo Lasso, but also new understanding of what has been happening through these days in terms of strife and popular mobilization. It might seem hasty to outline the understanding of the whole political moment, however, there are certain elements that allow us to illustrate this experience of popular struggle.

Undoubtedly, the specificities and the platform of demands of the indigenous movement are characterized by the inclusion of demands of sectors of the middle and popular classes, which are hit, with a different intensity and virulence, by the neoliberal policies of the government. But also, in situ, we need to look at the forms of urban resistance. This text elucidates four ideas thought up in the heat of the mobilization, which can subsequently be refined to present a broader picture of this new cycle of conflict and demands.

This is an indigenous uprising... and also a popular one

The new historic bloc created in 2019 demonstrated the strength and interlocution abilities of the indigenous movement as a fundamental organized actor mobilized in resistance against the neoliberalism that was being implemented with greater strength by the Moreno government. However, it also exhibited the organizational limit of organized urban movements (which in, in the past, were part of the Coordinadora de Movimientos Social) but that also motivated – with difficulty and in a defensive form - its recomposition for the popular social fabric in the capital.

The progressive uprising that began on 13 June 2022 is however far from that of 2019 in terms of strategy and mobilization. In the latter case, urban social movements were substantive in defending and mobilizing every day, in a complex unity, but with the participation of high school and university students, especially from the Central University of Ecuador (UCE), neighbourhood residents, the anti-fascist movement, teacher trainers, women and surrounding communes. Almost all this diversity of actors converged decisively in the UCE, to sustain a permanent mobilization, joined by spontaneous sectors of young people, housewives and neighbours, among others. At that time, this struggle phased between the countryside and the city, allowing two very important convergent actors and strategies to be established: first, the takeover of territory up to Quito by the indigenous movement and second, sustained and diverse mobilization, in the face of a repressive onslaught throughout the city.

The uprising showed the re-emergence of the urban movement

Although the organized urban sector was of central importance in the nineties and the first five years of this century, it had experienced more than a decade of demobilization, harassment and weakness from 2007 to 2019. The turning point came in 2019, because this exposed the need for convergence between the countryside and the city. If then, the urban movement was able to sustain the mobilization and resistance to the government and its repressive apparatuses, for no more than a day and a half, today it is completely different, the mobilizations are daily, without rest, characterizing a determining variable in the praxis of the urban sector.

We exemplify this with the unusual force – although it is a historical feature – of the peri-urban sectors, for example, the south of Quito, the neighbourhoods of Nueva Aurora, Cutuglahua, Guamaní, Lucha de los Pobres, Unión Popular; the southeast like Edén del Valle, Obrero Independiente, La Forestal up to Conocoto and, passing through, La Toglla; the northwest like La Comuna, Atucucho, Jaime Roldós, El Condado pobre and to the north, San Antonio, Carapungo, Calderón to the Oyacoto sector; finally, the centre north and south from the Central University to La Villaflora.

This institutes two central elements – first, that the peri-urban sectors share many of the exclusions and shortcomings of the rural world, that is why their demands and resistance are powerful and urgent; the second is social regroupment in the city, in addition to the still complex strengthening of the mobilized urban sector, as a new element in the popular struggle and resistance against the current neoliberalism.

This uprising exhibits class struggle and anti-colonial struggle

This connects with the previous point because it is clearly observable that the foci of resistance to the onslaught of the Policía Nacional are the peri-urban neighbourhoods, essentially working class and impoverished. The battles in the sectors of the south and north, show a total distance from the spontaneity of the inhabitants, if not a process of organization and learning to mobilize, which goes hand in hand with the characterization of a class identity. We say, then, that the effects of the increasingly brutal measures of neoliberalism concern the basic questions of subsistence and survival such as the daily costs of food, transport and public health in the popular classes. On the other hand, in the sectors of the middle classes tending towards the popular camp, the priorities are embodied in everything relating to higher fuel prices, rather than basic subsistence itself.

However, these two attacks came together, in a scenario of class confrontation against the Lasso government and against the upper and upper middle classes. In terms of the latter there is also a strong inter-bourgeois conflict characterized by disputes between and on bank financial capital (Banco Pichincha and Guayaquil) as another ingredient of the country's general crisis.

On the other hand, and as part of this drift, the racialized component of the protest, thus, the indigenous movement, has historically wielded and wields a proposal for a pluri-national state, which goes beyond ethnicity. Which has met with the most visceral responses from the hegemonic *mestizo* based on racism, classism and xenophobia. This is based on statements, and coverage on social media and television channels and a bourgeois public opinion that posits the idea of an attack on Quito, a strictly indigenous rebellion, therefore uniquely representing the interests of this sector. They seek to associate the indigenous movement with *Correísmo*, when we know that the latter, since 2019, based its administration on discrediting the Conaie indigenous organisation, because they rejected its extractivist policies. So, the anti-colonial component is shown in this struggle, against these racist discourses and practices.

The university is moving rightwards

This point is unprecedented in the mobilizing processes in recent years, and it is the role adopted by the university institutions. Their resistance to popular demands to open their doors and campuses to turn them into fields of peace

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and accommodation for the brothers and sisters of the nationalities, is evidence of a worrying rupture in their role, not only as builders of possible knowledge, but of expanding solidarity spaces to the vulnerable and impoverished sectors of the country. This act exposed in a pristine way the articulation of the private sectors of the Chambers, in this case the Chamber of Commerce, for example, with the Catholic University of Ecuador, through its principal, Fernando Ponce Leon. In addition, the lukewarm nature of the press releases of the main rectors calling for dialogue, combined with the quietism of many lecturers about what is happening in the country, elucidates how Lasso's discourse poses an important niche in the public university, as shown through lecturers who uncritically repeat their policies in digital portals, or question the organizational forms of students using the argument of violence, among other things.

These days have shown that the only possible politics and democracy is that of the people, in the streets, the tumultuous. Politicizing politics starts by no longer thinking that it can be done from social networks, quietism is one of the harmful components of neoliberalism, the real possibility of all change and construction is the people as a force and as history. Nothing else.

PS:

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