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Latin America

Socialist Revolution and Latin American Unity

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In the 1960s the Cuban revolution projected itself as the beginning of the Latin American revolution, reviving and rearming the old utopia of Latin American unity. Since then I have studied the origins, history and validity of this utopia, in Cuba, Poland, which is my country of origin and in France. I wish to share my reflections with you.

Somebody once said that the historic legend, fabricated by scribblers in the service of the Latin American oligarchies and the colonial or imperialist powers, presents the Libertadores (Liberators) as partisans of the creation of a couple of dozen distinct states, and not one. And that this truly monstrous falsification of "official history" resides in the fact that, whereas in western Europe and the United States nations were constituted as the result of the victories of bourgeois democratic revolutions, in Latin America the states that appeared following the defeat of the bourgeois democratic revolution are considered as distinct nations.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/main_guevara.jpg]

Whoever the author was, it was very well said.

Latin America has an extraordinary particularity on the world scale, which it shares with the Arab world, also divided. In his History of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky said in relation to the national question, "language is the most important instrument of human communication, and consequently of industry. It becomes national together with the triumph of commodity exchange which integrates nations. Upon this foundation the national state is erected as the most convenient, profitable and normal arena for the play of capitalist relations". [1].

It is true that many national states do not cover the totality of territories on which their national language is spoken and that - albeit in fairly exceptional circumstances - two neighbouring states sometimes have the same national language.

But what happened in Latin America is very specific. In a continuous territory where the state language is the same or similar, in the classic epoch of the formation of national states, not one state but around 20 were formed. The anomaly is undeniable and its scale is enormous. In it the condition of Latin America as a dependent, exploited and underdeveloped periphery of the world capitalist system is materialized. So it is natural than in Latin America the idea periodically resurges that the homeland is America, as happens also in the Arab world, with the existence of pan-Arab nationalism.

"The junker road was possible in Germany because the road of Münzer had failed", said René Zavaleta Mercado, referring to the defeat in this country of the peasant war and to the subsequent development of German capitalism by the so-called Prussian, that is oligarchic, road. In the dominant centres of world capitalism all roads, whether democratic, involving the development of capitalism as the consequence of an active bourgeois revolution, led from below and complete, or oligarchic, taken following a passive bourgeois semi-revolution imposed from above, have led to an independent development.

However, in the periphery the oligarchic road could only be a dependent road of under-development of capitalism. As shown by Zavaleta Mercado, if it is precisely this road that has been imposed in Latin America, it is because the road of Túpac Amaru y Túpac Catari has not been taken. [2]

In 1780-81, parallel to the first North American revolution, namely the war of independence of the thirteen British colonies in North America, on the territory of the Inca civilization, a great insurrection for independence combined with a radical uprising of the indigenous peasantry, broke out under the leadership of Túpac Amaru y Túpac Catari.

To a much greater extent than the north American revolution, which was fundamentally political, the Andean insurrection was a real and profound bourgeois democratic revolution.

In its class composition and on the basis of its own civilization, it had a much greater potential than any subsequent movement for independence to lay the bases for the unification of Latin America and a democratic and independent development of capitalism.

Its savage suppression and the destruction of the Inca civilization by the Spanish colonial power sounded the death knell of a revolution which could have changed the course of history of the Spanish or Iberian-American part of the hemisphere.

In North America the war of independence in the British colonies was victorious and led to the unification - concretely, to a federation - of the latter. But the maintenance and expansion of slavery in the southern states of the new union prevented the road of development of capitalism - democratic and independent or oligarchic and dependent - from being definitively taken for the next 80 years.

In Latin America the wars of independence waged in the first half of the 19th century, although victorious, were defeated as bourgeois revolutions: they did not succeed in transforming themselves into a Latin American national revolution and building a Latin American union or at least a solid base of support for its formation. Instead of forming a federation or, at least, a confederation, America freed of the Spanish yoke was fragmented into a constellation of states.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Bolivar.jpg] Simon Bolivar

In close articulation with the defeat at this level, the wars of independence did not lead either to the suppression of the colony inside the new republics. On the contrary, after the wars of independence, through numerous civil wars, the dominant classes and the colonial modes of exploitation were preserved. Simon Bolivar had a bad, but brilliant, premonition that the union of the old British colonies in north America and the fragmentation of the former Spanish empire would determine their mutual relations, namely that the United States would dominate Latin America. For this reason he aspired to the unification of the former Spanish colonies in a single nation.

In the United States, 80 years after the first American revolution, the civil war between the states of the north, where capitalism had developed on the basis of the exploitation of wage labour, and the southern secessionist states, where capitalism was based on the exploitation of slave labour, became transformed into a revolutionary war for national reunification and the abolition of slavery. It was thanks to this terrible war that the United States definitively won its national unity. It also allowed the democratic and independent road of the development of capitalism to triumph over the oligarchic and dependent road. If the southern secessionist states had won, which was neither impossible nor improbable, the latter would have triumphed, the US would be divided and would have remained in the dependent periphery of world capitalism.

Events a little after the defeat of the South are very revealing of the different and even opposed courses of history in the two parts of America.

In Latin America, a terrible genocidal war led by the triple Alliance of the oligarchies of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay with the support of Britain, the hegemonic world power, against Paraguay led to the complete and irreversible destruction of the sole attempt emerging from the wars of independence to ensure an independent development of capitalism.

The tragic end of this attempt, as audacious as it was disastrously provincial, shows us two things. First, that in this

epoch, an independent capitalist development in the dependent Latin American periphery of the world capitalist system was not possible without a prolonged rupture with this system - a rupture as radical as that led by the founder and first governor of independent Paraguay, José Gaspar de Francia. Secondly, that already at this time a durable independent development was not possible in a single country in the Latin American periphery of the world system.

Against any fatalistic conception which suggests that the United States and Latin America were destined to follow the roads that they have effectively followed, it should be recalled that this attitude reflects the fact that history is written by the victors, that "history is not a teleological movement, with a road traced in advance, but a scenario in which classes confront each other", as AgustÃ-n Cueva observed. "As this fatalism is only the other side of elitism, knowledge of the history of the revolutionary movements and the democratic alternatives of Latin America in the 19th century remains still "the bastard of history". [3]

The big European powers of the time were very conscious that - as French prime minister François Guizot put it - it was the final result of the struggles between the "European party" and the "American party" which would decide the destiny of Latin America.

Was the victory of the "American party" over the "European party" inevitable in the US, while the opposite was true in Latin America? No, in the two cases nothing was predestined or predetermined. It was in the class struggle and the battlefields of civil wars that the winning party was decided.

Were the big victorious combats waged under the leadership of the head of the "American party" in Mexico, Benito Juárez - the Reform, the civil war and the war of national resistance - destined to end in the super-oligarchic and super-dependent modernization of Mexican capitalism which happened under the regime of Porfirio Diaz? No, they could have ended in a radically different manner.

The calculus of probabilities included the effects of the almost simultaneous victories of the "American parties" in the wars in the US and in Mexico being rapidly extended, with the joint support of their governments, towards the south of the hemisphere, provoking a decisive clash of the continental "American party" with the bastion of the "European party": the triple Alliance which would crush Paraguay. But this is not what happened, "the defeat of the bourgeois democratic alternative during the period of the Reform", says Cueva, "consolidates, in any case, the channeling of the whole of Latin America along the reactionary - "oligarchic" - road of development of capitalism, which coincides perfectly with the imperialist phase which the world system had entered, defining a new period of our history" [4]

Two things should be very clear. First, we are talking about the historic epoch of the bourgeois democratic revolutions. Secondly this epoch was closed once and for all on a world scale, only a few years after the defeat of the "European party" of the slaveholders in the US, after the enormous blow administered by the Mexican people to the European bourgeoisie with the execution of the usurper Habsburg in Mexico and after the destruction of Paraguay by the "European party" of the triple Alliance. It ended with the Paris Commune: the first proletarian revolution to seize power, although only in a transitory manner.

At the end of the epoch mentioned, we thus have two series of logical and historical correlations distributed between the two parts of the hemisphere: north American national unity, the democratic and independent development of capitalism and the promotion of the country to a central position in the world capitalist system; Latin American national fragmentation, oligarchic and dependent underdevelopment of capitalism and a durable peripheral positioning of Latin America in the world capitalist system.

With the transition of capitalism to its imperialist phase, these two series of correlations could produce nothing other than what Bolivar had anticipated: the polarization of the hemisphere between the developed capitalism of the US

and the underdeveloped capitalism of Latin America, united inseparably by a relationship of domination and dependence. As Trotsky would say later, Latin America has been subjected by the US to "national exploitation which completes and reinforces class exploitation".

In the framework of world capitalism and on the basis of capitalist relations of production there is an unshakable union between these two series of correlations.

Although the historic epoch of the bourgeois democratic revolutions definitively ended in 1871, in every country in the world where the historic tasks of these revolutions have not been completed, they remain still unfulfilled. The contradiction between the irreversible end of this epoch and the delay in the full realization of these tasks means that they can no longer be resolved by the bourgeoisie or by any of its sectors or factions.

The entire subsequent course of history in Latin America and in other parts of the world has fully confirmed this. Now, faced with the bankruptcy of the Latin American bourgeoisie in the accomplishment of its historic tasks it is the revolutionary class whose ineluctable rise had been announced by the Paris Commune, which should accomplish once it had established its own power.

All the same, the idea of the great Latin American homeland survived among revolutionary Latin American nationalists. The most remarkable revolutionary to emerge in Latin America and indeed the whole colonial and dependent periphery during the transition of capitalism to the imperialist stage, José MartÃ-, activated it as a revolutionary strategy.

Pedro Pablo Rodriguez a has described thus this strategy as applied to Cuba: "The war would be for independence, but would include other goals: this would be no more than a landmark in a very long term political strategy which, beginning in Cuba, would continue through the independence of Puerto Rico and the progressive unification of Latin America, in the face of the expansionist attempts of the US, where the West Indies were the first barrage.

This strategy would guarantee the elimination of all vestiges of Spanish colonialism in Latin American societies avoiding the creation of new colonialist forms. In the language of our times, one would call this a continental strategy of national liberation against imperialism (...) It is indubitable that on this road alone Bolivar preceded Marti, when he demanded a Latin American union as powerful as that which had been formed in the north of America.

Nonetheless, the epochs of the two men were very different; Bolivar led the war for the independence of South America when the US began their territorial expansion to the Pacific coast, seizing the lands of the Indians, and Great Britain was dominant in the developed capitalist world. MartÃ- lived through the decisive years of the transition from pre-monopolist capitalism to imperialism in the US, which had ensured its hegemony in the countries of the Caribbean and threw it into competition with the Europeans in the south of the continent. What was a more or less distant possibility in the time of Bolivar was a reality in the time of MartÃ-." [5]

The references made throughout MartÃ-'s work indicate that for him Latin American unity would imply also the formation of a single "new republic" on the Latin American scale, that is, as defined by MartÃ- himself, a republic that would distinguish itself radically from the traditional Latin American republics because it would combat the colony that survived inside it.

Contrary to what might have been logically expected, the development of the Latin American workers' movement and its Marxist parties was in no way translated by an appropriation of Bolivar's and by MartÃ-'s ideas of the great homeland. The first Latin American socialist parties, linked to the Second International, ignored them. It might be supposed that the Communist movement would break radically with this social-democratic legacy.

This was confidently expected by those revolutionary militants influenced by Bolivar and MartÃ- who joined the movement, like Julio Antonio Mella, drawn irresistibly by the October Revolution. But they were quickly disillusioned.

The question was first posed in 1928, at the 5th congress of the Communist International. The Comintern's main person responsible for Latin American affairs, the Swiss Communist Jules Humbert-Droz, proposed that the Communist movement recognize as one of its major revolutionary tasks the formation of the Union of Federated Workers and Peasants Republics of Latin America. His proposal, while obvious and indispensable, provoked a hostile reaction and he was accused of following a "petit bourgeois nationalist Latin Americanism" in a clear allusion to a movement like APRA. At the same congress, the Comintern eliminated from its programme the struggle for the Socialist United States of Europe.

This was one of the innumerable disastrous consequences of the rise to power of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and the subordination to its strategy of the construction of socialism in one country that it imposed on the international Communist movement. It followed a sharp break by the Communist parties with the policy, adopted under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, of the united anti-imperialist front and alliance with revolutionary nationalists - a rupture which enormously affected the development of Latin American revolutionary movements. Recall the radical distinction made by Mella between bourgeois and revolutionary nationalism, a political current which is very important in the history of Latin America, in which Mella said that he "wanted a free nation to put an end to the internal parasites and the imperialist invaders, recognizing that the principal citizens in any society are those who contribute to elevating it with their everyday work, without exploiting their fellow human beings." [6] It is precisely in this sense that we use this term.

Faced with the Stalinization of the Comintern, it was the clearest thinkers and activists of revolutionary nationalism who would preserve the idea of Latin American unity as one of the essential tasks in the fight for liberation from imperialist domination. But, in the direct tradition of the October Revolution, whose original programme Stalin abandoned and betrayed, the main leader, besides Lenin, of this revolution, took up the idea rejected by the Comintern at his initiative. Trotsky not only took it up but also based it on his decisive contribution to Marxist thought, the theory of permanent revolution.

In Russia, not only up until the taking of power by the proletariat in October 1917, but for almost a year after, until autumn 1918, the revolution was proletarian through its leading social force, but bourgeois democratic rather than socialist in its immediate tasks. In taking power, the proletariat first carried out the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution still unfulfilled in this country, including one of the most important, the liberation of nationalities oppressed by the Russian empire, passing immediately, in an uninterrupted or permanent way, from the latter to the first socialist tasks.

Trotsky extended the theory of the permanent revolution, elaborated initially for the revolution in Russia, to all the underdeveloped, colonial and dependent countries. According to him, the possibility of the proletariat taking power in these countries is, naturally, largely determined by the role of this class in the economy of the country, and consequently by the level of its capitalist development. But this was not the sole criterion.

For Trotsky, a no less important question was whether there existed in the country a vast and incandescent "popular" problem, whose resolution would interest the majority of the nation and which demanded the most audacious revolutionary measures. Among the questions of this order he stressed the national question.

Given the insupportable national oppression exerted by the imperialist powers, the young and relatively small proletariat could come to power, in Trotsky's view, on the basis of the national democratic revolution, before the proletariat of a highly developed country dominant in the world capitalist system could come to power on a purely socialist basis. If the proletariat did take the leadership of an oppressed nation and seize power, no national

democratic revolution, even one as great as the Mexican Revolution led by leaders as radical and exceptional as Lázaro Cárdenas, could fulfill its task of freeing the nation from imperialist domination.

Whereas the Stalinized Comintern rejected the idea of Latin American unity in attributing to it the reformist petty bourgeois nationalism of APRA, Trotsky posed the question in a fundamentally different manner. In commenting on the positions of the chief Aprist, he wrote, "Haya de la Torre insists on the necessity of the union of the Latin American countries and ends his letter with this formula: †We, the representatives of the United Provinces of South America'. In itself, the idea is completely correct. The struggle for the United States of Latin America is inseparable from the struggle for national independence of each of the Latin American countries. Nonetheless it is necessary to respond clearly and precisely to the question of what road can lead to this unification Some extremely vague formulations by Haya de la Torre can lead one to conclude that he hopes to convince the current governments of Latin America to unite voluntarily... under the tutelage of the United States. In reality, one can only attain this objective with the revolutionary movement of the popular masses against imperialism, including "democratic" imperialism and its internal agents. It is a difficult road, we admit it, but there is no other." [7]

In indicating the belated and already decadent character of a Latin American capitalism based on the semi-servile conditions of life in the countryside, Trotsky explained: "The American bourgeoisie, which has been capable, during its historic rise, of uniting in a single federation the northern half of the continent, now uses all the power that it has drawn from it to divide, weaken, reduce to slavery the southern half. Central America and South America can only uproot themselves from backwardness and slavery by uniting their states in one powerful federation.

But it is not the backward South American bourgeoisie, venal agency of foreign imperialism, which will be called to resolve this task, but the young South American proletariat, the leader chosen by the oppressed masses. The slogan in the struggle against the violence and intrigues of world imperialism and against the blood-soaked domination of the indigenous comprador cliques, is, then, the Soviet United States of Central and Southern America." [8]

After having taken up this thesis, the Manifesto of the Fourth International on imperialist war and the world proletarian revolution, drawn up by Trotsky in May 1940, continued, "It is only under its own revolutionary leadership that the proletariat of the colonies and semi-colonies can realize an invincible collaboration with the proletariat of the metropolis and the working class as a whole.

"It is only this collaboration which can lead the oppressed peoples to their complete and definitive emancipation, through the overthrow of imperialism in the entire world. A victory of the international proletariat would deliver the colonial countries from the long and painful stage of capitalist development in opening to them the possibility of arriving at socialism hand in hand with the proletariat of the advanced countries. The perspective of permanent revolution does not mean in any case that the backward countries should await the signal from the advanced countries, or that the colonial peoples should wait patiently for the proletariat of the metropolis to free them. God helps those who help themselves. The workers should develop the revolutionary struggle in all countries, colonial or imperialist, where favourable conditions exist so as to set an example for the workers of other countries. Only initiative and activity, resolution and courage can really materialize the slogan †Workers of the word unite!" [9]

The Cuban Revolution was the first revolution in Latin America which freed the nation from the imperialist yoke and carried out the other democratic tasks historically unfulfilled. It was capable of doing so for a fundamental reason: because in a similar manner to what happened in the Russian Revolution in 1917, it brought to power a consistently revolutionary force which identified itself with the immediate and historic interests of the proletariat and the popular masses and in a permanent and uninterrupted manner passed from the accomplishment of the tasks of the national democratic revolution to the accomplishment of the tasks of the socialist revolution.

Anyone familiar with the so-called stages theory of revolution, then adhered to by the absolute majority of forces on

the Latin American and world left as constituting, since the coming to power of Stalin in the Soviet Union, a fundamental principle of the Communist movement, will know what an enormous rupture the Cuban Revolution brought about. The result of the application of the stageist theory has always been the same, where it was applied: not only was the socialist revolution always relegated to the Greek calends, but even the tasks of the first stage were not fulfilled. They could not be fulfilled, because the only possible way of ensuring the conquests of the national democratic revolution is to realize the tasks of the socialist revolution. It is the essence of the theory of permanent revolution. Julio Antonio Mella has summed it up thus: "To speak concretely, absolute national liberation can be won only by the proletariat through the means of the workers; revolution." [10]

Moved by a powerful Latin American vocation, the Cuban Revolution brought together the programmatic aspirations of the most revolutionary currents of Latin American nationalism with the socialist revolution. For the first time since the death of MartÃ- and inspired by his example, this revolution elaborated during the 1960s a strategy of continental revolution whose audacious implementation was assumed in Latin America by comandante Che Guevara at the head of an internationalist guerilla force. We know today that in Che's strategic plans, the Army of National Liberation under his command was to unite on the basis of a single strategy all the Latin American revolutionary movements and would one day be integrated into the International Proletarian Army whose formation was announced in his Message to the Tricontinental. After having taken part in the Congolese revolution and witnessed its defeat, Che wrote: "The initiative of the International Proletarian Army should not die before the first setback." [11]

When Che and his Cuban, Bolivian and Peruvian comrades fought in Bolivia, a historic event happened in Havana. The great majority of revolutionary currents and left organizations from all the countries of Latin America met at the conference of the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS). "The organizations here represented" said Armando Hart, president of the Cuban delegation, "have met to elaborate a common strategy of struggle against Yankee imperialism and the bourgeois oligarchies and landowners, which are bent to the interests of the US government. The Cuban delegation represents a revolutionary party. Our theses are based on the ideology of Marx and Lenin. We are heirs to a fine revolutionary tradition of solidarity between the peoples of this continent. We should be faithful to this tradition. Karl Marx said at the time of the Paris Commune, that the objective of the popular revolution consisted in destroying the military bureaucratic machine of the state and replacing it by the armed people. Lenin said later that in this thought resided the fundamental lesson of Marx in relation to the tasks of the proletariat in the revolution, concerning the state. Our delegation considers that historical experience has confirmed these affirmations of Marx and Lenin. We consider that it is necessary to analyze these approaches of Marx and Lenin in terms of both the theory and their practical consequences." [12]

In its report on the strategy of the continental revolution, the Cuban delegation recalled that "the value and the profundity of MartÃ-'s conceptions can be measured bywhat follows: [Marti] deepened the Bolivarian ideal consisting in the conception of LatinAmerica as a single great country [and] posed the struggle for the independence of Cuba as part of the Latin American Revolution ". At the same time, the Cuban delegation stated that "today, the revolutionary solidarity of the peoples of Latin America has a greater depth than the antecedents which served as its basis, because the continental conception of a single Latin American people has been strengthened." [13]

One year later Inti Peredo, a survivor of the Bolivian guerilla force, confirming his faith in "the triumph of the revolutionary forces which will establish socialism in Latin America" and his fidelity to "the dream of Bolivar and Che of politically and economically uniting Latin America", said: "Our single and final objective is the liberation of Latin America, which is not only our continent, but also our country, currently divided into 20 republics." [14]

Nearly 40 years later, it is urgent that we reclaim "the continental conception of a single Latin American people" and the idea, with which Che went to fight in Bolivia, that "Latin America will be a single country", as it is urgent to inscribe Latin American socialist unity in the programmes of the popular movements and revolutionary currents. I believe that, without further delay, we must begin to prepare the conditions for the elaboration, once more, in a future which will probably prove much closer than it appears, of a strategy of continental revolution. A strategy which would

correspond to Latin American and world conditions of neoliberal capitalist globalization and a unipolar world dominated by US imperialism, more than ever powerful, aggressive and mortally dangerous but at the same time more than ever decadent and rotten with explosive and insoluble contradictions.

Only the proletariat and its broad popular allies can win that which was not won by the wars of independence and what was irreversibly lost by the Latin American bourgeoisies, making the goal of the great struggles of the exploited and oppressed masses which approach inexorably the unification of Latin America as a single nation. Today, continental unity is posed in a vaster still framework which should be capable of attracting the diverse nationalities of the Caribbean.

In the report, already quoted, of the Cuban delegation to the conference of the OLAS in 1967, we read that there was "an obvious fact which has not been evaluated in all its dimensions: there has never been a group of peoples so numerous, with such a big population and so extended a territory, which nonetheless preserve very similar cultures and interests, and identical anti-imperialist goals. Each of us feels ourselves part of our America. Thus we have learnt from historic tradition, thus we have inherited from our ancestors, thus we have learnt from our predecessors! None of these ideas is new for the representatives of the revolutionary organizations of Latin America.

But have we sufficiently evaluated what these facts represent? Have we analyzed in depth the meaning of the fact that, since the distant epoch of the first years of the 19th century, we have a continental idea of struggle which has developed across Latin America? Have we analyzed with sufficient clarity the irrefutable fact that Latin America constitutes a single and great people?" [15] All these questions are today as pertinent as they were then.

To be a single nation, Latin America should be socialist. To be socialist, Latin America should be a single nation. For Latin America will achieve its second, true and definitive independence, announced more than 100 years ago by Marti and more than 40 years ago by Fidel Castro, when the Latin American revolution again goes on the march until it builds a single Latin American socialist nation. It seems that it is already on the march again with the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela.

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- [4] A. Cueva, op. cit., p. 59-60.
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- [15] "Informe de la delegacion cubana"., op. cit., p. 26.