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# LATIN AMER- ICA AND THE EURO- PEAN LEFT

Francisco Dominguez

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 30 years of neoliberal hegemony in Latin America, the stubborn and persistent resistance by all manner of social movements gave rise to a novel form of politics and political strategy that involved the thorough transformation of the state, constitutional principles and guiding societal principles aimed at putting the social, economic and political rights of human beings over and above the diktats of the market.

Sustaining 30 years of neoliberalism necessitated massive levels of institutional violence and direct US involvement in organising, funding, training, and deploying death squads which wreaked havoc by perpetrating literally hundreds of thousands of extrajudicial killings of innocents civilians, the torturing of tens thousands of individuals,

the exiling and the illegal and arbitrary imprisonment of many more. Dictatorship, civil war, economic blockade, military intervention, genocide, and the whole catalogue of mechanisms of ‘dealing with the enemy’ were unleashed by the US against any out-of-line southern neighbour. The actual figures are indeed shocking. The table shows figures for extrajudicial killings in a selection of countries in the period 1973-2000.<sup>1</sup> The table does not include the 1989 US invasion of Panama, when 5,000 Panamanians were butchered by the invading GIs in the time span of a few days.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Murders</b>
Chile	3,000
Argentina	30,000
Nicaragua	50,000
Peru	70,000
El Salvador	80,000
Guatemala	200,000

This vision of transformation, that back in the harsh neoliberal days of the 1980s and 1990s was expressed as a set of aspirations, gradually but steadily morphed into a strategy of political power. This strategy, accelerated through economic crises brought about by neoliberal economic policies, catapulted the left into government in a continental trend inaugurated by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 1998. His success was followed by that of the Workers’ Party in Brazil, with Lula as president in 2002; left-wing Peronism in Argentina, with Nestor Kirchner in 2003; the Broad Front, with Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay, in 2005; the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), with Evo

Morales in Bolivia in 2005; the Alianza País Movement in Ecuador, with Rafael Correa in 2006; the Liberal Hope Movement, with Manuel Zelaya, in Honduras in 2006; the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, with Daniel Ortega in 2007; with Liberation Theology bishop, Fernando Lugo, in Paraguay in 2008; and the former guerrilla front, FMLN, with Mauricio Funes in El Salvador in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

Other countries in the region elected administrations that came to office on more moderate anti-neoliberal platforms such as nationalist Leonel Fernandez in 2004 in the Dominican Republic; Michelle Bachelet in Chile in 2006; and the left-wing social democrat (a rare world commodity these days) Alvaro Colom in Guatemala in 2008. Overall, this was indeed a sweeping political tide creating a political context and balance of forces that allowed the region to begin the arduous task of dismantling the Washington Consensus. It made it possible to initiate a strategic process of regional integration, to integrate and collaborate with socialist Cuba in all aspects of politics and economics, and, most difficult of all, to implement policies to reverse the highly negative consequences of 30 years of US-led neoliberalism.

Below we examine the historical roots of these emerging radical political forces, their ideological cornerstones, and their national and regional policies so as to have a framework to explore the political and intellectual bases for commonalities and collaboration with Europe's Radical Left.

## THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT: FORGED IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST NEOLIBERALISM

Who are these political currents, parties or movements that came to office in this sweeping radical tide that gained government in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? They are now identified as *Bolivarians* – after 19<sup>th</sup> century independence leader, Simón Bolívar –and they have found their most radical manifestations in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba<sup>3</sup>, and according to the late Hugo Chavez, they are building ‘socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’.

It would be a mistake, however, to consider them a homogeneous political development informed by a single ideology and following a single political project even though there is a great deal of ideological and political common ground. They arose as counterhegemonic social and political movements that originated in their unique domestic contexts. Their current democratic challenge to national and/or foreign elite-dominated polities, economy and society rides on the back of five centuries of resistance. However, their resistance, ever since most of the Latin American nations obtained their independence at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has acquired the character of a conscious or unformulated project aimed at completing the democratic but unfulfilled promise of equality, at political, economic and social levels, contained in the proclamations, constitutions, and undertakings made by those who led the wars of liberation against the French, Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires.

The most poignant example of this is Haiti at the end

of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The mass of the slave population in the then French colony of Saint Domingue, inspired by the principles of the French Revolution, rose up, demanding fulfilment of the promise of ‘Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité’, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens, proclaimed by France’s National Constituent Assembly in August 1789. Haitian Black slaves, led by former slave, Toussaint L’Ouverture, militarily defeated Napoleon’s armies, sent to crush the rebellion, in an extremely bloody conflict. This culminated in 1803, with the victory of the slave rebellion and the establishment of the first Black Republic in the history of humanity. And it was the first nation to obtain its independence in Latin America, at least a decade earlier than the Spanish and Portuguese speaking colonies in the hemisphere. The Black Jacobins – the immortal and brilliant name with which West Indian Marxist C.L.R. James was to christen them – by nimble and astute manoeuvring, by playing off one imperial power against another, were also able to inflict defeats on Spanish, US and British troops sent to crush this unacceptable revolt against the established order. James summarizes the 12 years of struggle for freedom thus: ‘The slaves defeated in turn the local whites and the soldiers of the French monarchy, a Spanish invasion, a British expedition of some 60,000 men, and a French expedition of similar size under Bonaparte’s brother-in-law.’<sup>24</sup> Though victorious, Haiti paid a heavy price for having successfully defied its colonial masters, a price it is still paying: Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

Haiti is a poignant epitome of Latin America: gripped in the claws of underdevelopment brought about by the



failure to carry out the democratic tasks posed by liberation and independence to their ultimate conclusion. This is nothing more and nothing less than what the Bolivarians are endeavouring to accomplish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The region is immensely rich in radical traditions of struggle, in the development of radical and revolutionary ideas, which have fed, inspired and moved into action vast social and political movements. Over five centuries Latin Americans have had the knack of turning particularistic struggles into legitimate battles for universal principles.

Although it applies to different countries in different ways, this dialectic of the historic necessity to complete what the Liberators began can be seen just about everywhere. In Bolivia, before Evo Morales came to office in 2006, the majority indigenous population (65% of the total) was socially and politically excluded, economically kept in a state of economic poverty, and heavily racially discriminated against. In Guatemala, the indigenous population (70% of its population), despite some minor positive changes, is still subjected to the conditions their brothers and sisters had experienced in Bolivia. Venezuela, a country rich in oil, had by 1998 about 80% of its population living in poverty and grotesquely excluded from the economy, society and politics. In Mexico, despite 19<sup>th</sup> century liberation and independence, and social revolution at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the actual levels of marginality of the poor and the indigenous population is simply atrocious. The same applies to most countries in Central America, where with the exception of Costa Rica and Panama, the levels of poverty and social exclusion have historically reached 70-80%. Colombia had about 50% of its popula-

tion living in poverty in 2002, in a society dominated by an oligarchy that uses systemic violence as *the* mechanism to ensure its rule, thus producing levels of extrajudicial killings almost unsurpassed in the region, leading to a severe democratic deficit.<sup>5</sup>

Even in Chile, the much-acclaimed neoliberal success story, the high levels of employment precariousness and obscene levels of income inequality, made it a paradise for domestic and foreign elites. People were literally stripped of all their social and economic rights during the 17 year-long Pinochet dictatorship with *de facto* restrictions on organizing socially in trade unions. This continued despite formally granting ‘democratization’ at the end of the 1980s. Worse still, its small indigenous population has been subjected to levels of repression and social and cultural exclusion that would embarrass even US politicians. Anti-terrorist legislation has been regularly applied to their resistance in defending their ancestral lands from the encroachments of greedy multinational companies. And, with the thorough pulverisation of the pre-Pinochet welfare state, involving the wholesale privatisation of just about everything: education, health, pension systems, utilities, and even motorways, unless people have the capacity to pay, they are denied health care and education. Thus, for most of the working classes, the poor, and the indigenous population, democracy, social, economic and political rights have been a fiction.<sup>6</sup> It is only with Bachelet’s second administration (2010-2014) that mild reforms have begun to alter some of this slightly.

The struggles of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s gave rise to powerful counterhegemonic social and political movements

riding a programme of government aimed at the radical transformation of society. So where do these currents come from and what are their historic roots, inspirational sources and ideological tenets, and why are they striving to build socialism?

## THE INDIGENIZATION OF THE POLITICS OF EMANCIPATION

As stated above these, movements seek to ‘complete’ what their historic national political ancestors began, and are Bolivarian in a Latinoamericanista sense: they share a common history, a common ‘enemy’, face similar obstacles to their progress, are mortgaged to the same international financial institutions, suffer similar kinds of discrimination, similar kinds of social, cultural, economic and political exclusion, and are in the grip of the same straitjacket, namely, neo-liberalism.<sup>7</sup> They seek to reassert national sovereignty by making it integral to the fulfilment of people’s social, economic and political rights. As parties, many of these new formations behave and have the dimensions of mass movements and, conversely, mass movements behave and tend to have the outlook of political parties.<sup>8</sup>

The Brazilian Workers’ Party originates in the militant trade unionism of the 1970s and the Bolivian Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) originates in the *cocalero* union. The Federación de Juntas Vecinales of El Alto (association of neighbor organizations), in La Paz, Bolivia, is a social movement that has not only behaved as a political party, they have had crucial responsibility for the ousting of three Bolivian governments, and CONAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas of Ecuador) joined the short-

lived government led by a bunch of radical military officers, headed by Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez in 2000, following the decision of the ousted Ecuadorian government to dollarize the economy. CONAIE's politico-electoral arm, Pachakutik, fielded candidates at elections. Likewise, in 1997 in Bolivia, a federation of social organizations (peasants, miners, indigenous nations, farmers, and so forth, the Assembly for the Sovereignty of the Peoples), fielded candidates to parliament electing 4 deputies, including Evo Morales, then president of the coca growers' trade union. Morales would be their presidential candidate in 2002 and would be elected president in 2005.

Furthermore, it was the actions of the *piqueteros* (laid-off workers who organized road blocks to draw attention to their plight) that contributed most to bringing about the conditions that led to the ousting of de la Rúa in December 2001.<sup>9</sup> The Zapatistas in Chiapas claim not to have a strategy of state power, nevertheless, are an armed movement which has defied the dominant paradigms of politics even of those on the Left such as the Partido Revolucionario Democrático in Mexico. The FMLN, FSLN and URNG in Central America are parties with strong links to social movements of workers, peasants, urban poor, women, indigenous groups, squatters, street vendors and such like. In Venezuela, the Movimiento V República, predecessor of the ruling PSUV, never quite acquired the nature of a political party. It was more a bunch of personalities led by Hugo Chavez, on the back of a gigantic and motley social movement based in the *barrios* primarily of Caracas. In Uruguay, the Frente Amplio is a coalition that includes former Tupamaro guerrilla fighters, trade unionists

and left and right-wing social democratic politicians. After the 2009 coup in Honduras, we have seen the rise of the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Contra el Golpe de Estado in Honduras, the first ever national mass movement of that country that became the backbone of the newly formed left-wing party, LIBRE (FREE). Many more could be added (there are movements that tend to behave as parties also in Colombia, Paraguay, Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico). It is clear that the political landscape in the continent as a whole has been significantly reshaped in the way it does politics.

This new type of politics necessitated shaking off the old intellectual paradigms that had become – perhaps they always were - objective and subjective obstacles to an emancipatory project that incorporates, in a coherent totality, the broad social alliance that the social movements express in their actions, demands and objectives. And furthermore, which takes into account the specific socio-economic formation and class configuration of the region's nations. To be sure the more conventional emancipatory paradigms – revolutionary nationalism and the various Marxist perspectives - had been valuable. They endowed Latin American politics with a long, heroic and honourable tradition of struggle, as well as with formidable intellectual tools, but which nevertheless neglected key aspects of the socio-economic realities of Latin American societies.<sup>10</sup>

In a certain way the pre-chavista Left was pervaded by a mechanistic and teleological conception of progress and modernization within which significant features of societal reality – notably the indigenous and peasant questions - were seen as backward. More within Marx's deterministic

dictum: 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future', than the Marx who examined the colonial question.<sup>11</sup>

In Latin America this dichotomy has been informing the politics of the Left, with one school of thought arguing that Imperialism '[had] initiated a process of capitalist development which coexists with feudal relations from the colonial period [...] thus the revolution has to be anti-feudal and anti-imperialist so as to liberate the nation from feudal and foreign domination. It cannot be a socialist revolution as [...] it is not possible to skip the historical stages of development, and thus, it is necessary first to develop capitalism fully.'<sup>12</sup> On the other extreme of the debate, it was posited that the creole bourgeoisie, being subordinated to the power and social outlook of the landed aristocracy and to foreign capital with which it collaborates, has proven to be incapable of developing capitalism fully and, therefore, incapable of bringing about economic progress, modernity and development thus condemning society to perpetual underdevelopment; in other words, the revolution has to be socialist.<sup>13</sup>

In short, unless Marxism, or any other ideological framework, moves away from a narrow class-corporatist frame of analysis – however socialistic its objectives may proclaim to be – and incorporates in its emancipatory project the fundamental questions of oppression and exclusion that so characterize Latin American societies, no progress towards socialism or modernization can be achieved. As García Linera, current vice-president of Bolivia, argues, since the contemporary Republican state has been a power structure erected on the bases of the exclusion and exter-

mination of the indigenous population, in order for the indigenous question to be resolved, the indigenous people themselves must be at the head of the state, or be part of national-popular coalition at the head of the state, which is exactly what the Morales government is.<sup>14</sup>

Evidently, the 'Indian' issue does not apply to all the countries in the region but it is central in Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and Paraguay, and the defence of Mapuche ancestral lands from capitalist encroachment has become a heated political issue in Chile. In them all, the inspiration they draw from the history of their ancestors' resistance is a key feature of their politics and the necessity to transform the state so that it is organized to promote and defend their interests, is a distinctive contemporary trait. In this regard, Ecuador's indigenous movement sent President Rafael Correa a public letter making their support for the constitutional transformation of the Ecuadorian state conditional on it becoming a pluri-national state, making it possible to strengthen the autonomous self-government of the indigenous communities in the country.<sup>15</sup> The new constitution, approved in a referendum in 2008, includes the proposal for an oral system of the administration of justice and the right of indigenous communities to exert jurisdictional authority on the bases of their ancestral traditions. Indigenous peoples are mentioned in five articles of the 1994 Bolivian Constitution and in more than 100 Bolivian laws, supreme decrees and directives. Article 1 of the current Bolivian Constitution characterizes the country as 'multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural, constituted as a unified republic.'<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, the Brazilian MST is the epitome of the social movements in Latin America with an impressive re-

cord of success as they themselves state:

[The] Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), is the largest social movement in Latin America with an estimated 1.5 million landless members organized in 23 out of 27 states. The MST carries out long-overdue land reform in a country mired by unjust land distribution. In Brazil, 1.6% of the landowners control roughly half (46.8%) of the land on which crops could be grown. And just 3% of the population owns two-thirds of all arable lands. Since 1985, the MST has peacefully occupied unused land where they have established cooperative farms, constructed houses, schools for children and adults, clinics, promoted indigenous cultures, a healthy and sustainable environment and gender equality. The MST as a result of its actions has won land titles for more than 350,000 families in 2,000 settlements, and 180,000 encamped families currently await government recognition. Land occupations are rooted in the Brazilian Constitution, which says land that remains unproductive should be used for a 'larger social function'.<sup>17</sup>

The MST is a university of radicalism; it holds seminars, conferences, schools, publishes book (it has its own publishing house, *Expressão Popular*), establishes libraries for its own centres of education throughout the nation, and does much, much more. Its virtual library has a rich collection of articles vindicating the struggles of Zumbi, Luiz Car-



los Prestes, Chico Mendes and a gallery of 'heroes of the people' among which we find Gramsci, Sandino, Camilo Torres, Che Guevara, João Pedro Texeira (leader of the Peasant Leagues of the 1950s), Pablo Neruda, Salvador Allende, Tupac Amaru and Toussaint L'Ouverture.<sup>18</sup> The full implementation of its programme would necessitate a complete overhaul of Brazil's state apparatus.

The list could be longer but the sample examined will suffice to demonstrate that what we have labeled the Latin Americanization of the politics of emancipation is indeed profound and, through a different type of politics, it places the mass of the people in a position to challenge the hegemony of their comprador elite and its imperialist mentors.

This type of politics is quite generalized and it is being actively promoted: The official website of the *Alternativa Bolivariana Para los Pueblos de Nuestra America*, contains historiographical works on Puerto Rican nationalism in the 1930s, Salvador Allende, Inti Peredo, Víctor Jara, Che Guevara, Hugo Chávez, the US invasion of Panama, Chico Mendes, José Martí, the Argentine workers' movement, Manuela Saenz, Fidel Castro, Omar Torrijos, Francisco de Miranda, Simón Bolívar, Camilo Cienfuegos, the massacre of Santa Maria de Iquique, Alí Primera, Augusto César Sandino, and the Caracazo. ALBA sees its own ancestry in the dream of Martí and Bolívar, of a Latin America of solidarity, united for social justice, the realization of the human potential of its inhabitants, the defence of their culture and the achievement of a dignified position in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

In the *Antecedentes históricos del ALBA* section of ALBA's official site we find Francisco de Miranda's 'Plans of

government' and 'The Coro Proclamation', Miguel Hidalgo's 'Decree on Land and Slaves', Mariano Moreno's 'Operations Plan, Simón Bolívar's 'Letter from Jamaica', José Artigas's 'Provisional Law on Lands', Bernardo Monteagudo's 'On the Need for a Federal Union of the Spanish-American States and its organizational Plan', José Cecilio del Valle's 'Saint Peter's Abbot was dreaming and I can also dream', Simón Bolívar's 'Invitation to the Panama Congress' and 'The Perpetual Union, League and Confederation', José Martí's 'Our America', and Augusto César Sandino's 'Plan to Realize Bolívar's Supreme Dream'. Latin American history is an inexhaustible reservoir of inspiration for contemporary battles.

Nowhere is this process more advanced than in Venezuela. Hugo Chavez had been barely a few months in office in 1999 when he embarked upon a structural transformation of the Venezuelan state by first sweeping away the old oligarchic parliament, followed by the drafting of a new constitution which would be approved by referendum in December of that same year. The re-founding of the Venezuelan state had begun with formidable vigour. The term 'Bolivarian' that defines the revolution in Venezuela, when examined through the prism of the country's history, reveals its revolutionary nature. Bolivarian ideology draws its inspiration from the 'Tree of Three Roots': Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez and Ezequiel Zamora.

The reference to Bolívar needs no explanation, and Rodríguez, although little-known in the English-speaking world, was an outstanding Venezuelan intellectual influenced by the Enlightenment, a socialist in the tradition of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, who was Bolívar's tu-

tor and mentor. Zamora was a 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal military and political leader who led popular struggles for land and freedom in the 1859-63 Federal Wars; he was a sworn enemy of the landed oligarchy.<sup>20</sup>

Similar stories can be written about the other countries in Latin America. In Bolivia, socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has Tupac Katari, leader of the 1780 indigenous rebellion against Spanish colonialism, as its iconic figure. In Mexico, the struggle for social justice and democracy is strongly associated with the peasant leader of the Mexican revolution, Emiliano Zapata, and 'Zapatista' is the label of the revolutionary indigenous movement in Chiapas. In Nicaragua, it is the historic guerrilla leader, Cesar Augusto Sandino, who waged war against a US invasion of the country, from 1927 to 1933, who has inspired the heroic battles of the FSLN since the 1960s. These have taken the form of leading the revolution that ousted the US-sponsored Somoza dictatorship in 1979, defending the FSLN government from the US-funded war of attrition, leading the struggle against brutal neoliberal policies after their electoral defeat in 1990, and back to government in 2007. In El Salvador the governing party, the FMLN, is also seeking to build a socialist society inspired by the example of the leader of the peasant insurrection of 1932, Farabundo Martí. The insurrection was brutally repressed by the army, leading to the massacre of over 30,000 peasants. And, the most radical nation in the region, socialist Cuba, draws inspiration primarily from José Martí, leader of the revolutionary nationalist movement that organized two armed rebellions against Spanish colonialism, one in 1868-78 and the second in 1895-1898.<sup>21</sup>

This intellectual armoury, which might be problematical to many a theoretical zealot, has produced thus far, substantial results in Venezuela: the state has undergone so many changes that it has ceased to function as a normal bourgeois state apparatus. The armed forces identify largely with the revolution and are willingly helping to build Venezuelan socialism. The constitution, if applied to its logical conclusion ought to produce a socialist society and a socialist economy. Multinational capital has been almost completely expropriated from its previous bastions in the oil industry, as has private capital in the electricity industry. Massive amounts of land have been redistributed; health and education have expanded to historically unprecedented levels and so has social spending in general. Women have seen their situation improve drastically; indigenous peoples have been granted special cultural and political rights as have gay people and recently, Afro-descendants. Political power is also being shifted from the state and local government to communal councils and so forth.

The above is true even considering the serious setbacks that Bolivarians have recently suffered in Argentina and Brazil and the dreadful state of the Venezuela economy brought about by an all-out economic war and destabilization plan reminiscent of what was done to Salvador Allende's Chile in the 1970s. Given the substantial dependence of the region's countries on the exportation of primary products and raw materials, the 2008 world credit crunch, and subsequent recession, significantly contributed to these destabilization plans.

## SOCIAL PROGRESS,

## DEMOCRACY, ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND PEACE

The Left in government has led to extraordinary social progress in the region as a whole, especially in poverty eradication, social inclusion and the strengthening of national sovereignty. At the height of neoliberalism, in 1990, The Economic Commission for Latin America reported in its annual report that the situation in Latin America was thus:

...the level of poverty in the region was 48.4%, 22.5% of which were living in conditions of extreme poverty. This meant 200 million and over 90 million people respectively. And although by 2002 total poverty had declined to 43.9% and indigence to 19.3%, due to population growth, those percentages represented 225 million and 99 million people respectively. Such gross levels of inequity were very unevenly distributed with countries such as Uruguay having 15.4% of poverty whilst Honduras had a whopping 77.7% of poverty, with the reminder countries falling in between these two extremes and with 15 out of 18 of them with rates of poverty of 30% and above.<sup>22</sup>

By 2013, thanks to the implementation of anti-neoliberal and redistributive policies the regional level of poverty had gone down to 28% and extreme poverty had been halved from over 22% to 11%. In Brazil alone, the policies of the Workers' Party governments have, since 2002, taken 40 million people out of poverty and its

social programme reaches about 14 million households benefiting 50 million people.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, economic growth reached average levels of 6% in 2004. The region's external debt was also substantially reduced from 59.5% of its GDP in 2003 to 32% in 2008 and the influence of the IMF and World Bank in the region was completely eliminated. The IMF itself praises the region's debt reduction in the 2003-2012 period:

Between 2003 and 2008, Latin America witnessed a steep improvement of its fiscal sustainability indicators, most notably bringing public debt-to-GDP ratios down, on average, by about 30 percentage points of GDP... The decline was primarily driven by a combination of the direct effect of rapid economic growth and sizeable primary surpluses. Negative real interest rates also appeared to have played a role in the downward debt dynamics in some countries.<sup>24</sup>

Many of these governments have undertaken radical nationalizations and re-nationalizations of key sections of their economies, hitherto in the hands of multinational capital principally due to the privatizing zeal of the 1990s. Among them there are oil, gas, steel, electricity, transport, telecommunications, airlines, minerals and even banks. In some cases the state has obtained majority ownership over key economic assets. All are essential for a policy of economic growth and for the assertion of national sovereignty. Both are preconditions for redistributive policies and for dependency reduction from US-dominated financial

and economic multilateral institutions. Additionally, the state is in a stronger negotiating position to secure investment contracts with foreign capital where there is majority state ownership. This substantially increases state revenues, furnishing the state with the wherewithal to finance social programmes on education, health and poverty eradication. These extra resources have also allowed the state to increase massively the number of people entitled to pensions. In the case of Venezuela, this went from 300,000 in 1998 to over 3 million in 2016. In Bolivia, the retirement age has been reduced from 60 to 58 years old and there is legislation in parliament to reduce it even further to 55. Illiteracy, through the use of the *Yo si puedo* Cuban method, has been eradicated in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and in Nicaragua (the latter for the second time). Millions of hectares of land have been redistributed to hundreds of thousands of peasant families.

Indigenous peoples have been granted special cultural, political and ancestral rights thereby putting an end to hundreds of years of racist and discriminatory practices. In Bolivia, for example, the new 2009 constitution recognizes 39 official languages, Spanish being only one of them. Similar constitutional developments have taken place in various other Latin America nations in which Afro-descendants are granted special rights. Anti-racist legislation is promulgated or included in the constitution, and people are empowered and actively encouraged to promote their own culture and identity. Thus, the region has taken huge strides to reverse centuries of racist discrimination. The same applies to women, who, as in Cuba, have been massively integrated into the economy and politics,

and have also benefited from anti-sexist and anti-discriminatory practices. The LGBT community has also gained legitimacy, benefitting from anti-homophobic practices and culture and in many countries massive gay parades are broadly supported.

In the field of regional integration, Latin America has also made substantial progress. The high degree of commonality amongst the countries of the region has made the collaboration of their progressive movements, parties and governments not only easy but unavoidably necessary. The amount, intensity and regularity of their supranational collaboration are indeed unprecedented. Their joint efforts include liquidating the US-inspired FTAA, collaboration on all sorts of regional and bilateral energy agreements (such a PetroCaribe) and health (Mission Miracle), finance (Bank of the South), media (Telesur) and now defence (creation of a South American Council of Defence).

They have also established the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) involving all the countries in South America, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) which includes all 33 countries in Latin America and specifically excludes the United States and Canada. There is no question that it has been the overall collective effort from Latin America that has been critical in ensuring the signing of a peace agreement in Colombia.

At the more political level, there are bodies such as the Sao Paulo Forum at the initiative of Brazil's Workers' Party in which the whole of the Latin American Left engages, particularly its mass political organizations (Cuban Communist Party, Nicaragua's FSLN, El Salvador's FMLN, Bra-



zil's Workers' Party, Venezuela's PSUV, Bolivia's MAS, Colombia's Marcha Patriótica, Ecuador's Movimiento Alianza Pais, Honduras's LIBRE, Paraguay's Frente Guasú, Uruguay's Frente Amplio, and dozens of smaller parties. The Forum was established so that the Left could have a political mechanism of discussion, exchange of experience and information, and an opportunity to adopt broad policy positions. Left political parties from non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries are also members of the Forum.

The need for a continental approach, first to organise resistance against neoliberalism, and then the process of integration, has intensified this political liaison and collaboration across frontiers among the whole of the Latin American Left.

## LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE: THE LEFT

In the last period Europe has seen the rise of strong left-wing currents with a mass base, but they have only occasionally been able to successfully dispute the predominance of social democracy among the mass of the people and working class movement. Among this new emerging Left we have Spain's Podemos, Germany's Die Linke, France's Parti de Gauche, Portugal's Left Bloc and Communist Party, Greece's Syriza, Ireland's Sinn Fein and others.

The many complexities they face and the relatively small size of some of them notwithstanding, their robust vindication of socialism belies the predominant official discourse that socialism is either dead or dying. As with the Bolivarian Left in Latin America, the new European Left, has abandoned and rejected rigid and fossilised doctrinaire frame-

works and has given rise to a new kind of left politics as Hudson points out in *The New European Left*, ‘more open to different traditions, linking up with social movements, and developing and strengthening green, feminist, anti-racist and pacifist policies, as well as Marxist-based socialism.’<sup>25</sup>

There is a strong parallel here with the new Latin American Left in that it concerned itself with

issues such as poverty, the environment, privatization, land reform, social services, rights of indigenous people, unemployment, youth, women, ethnicity, democracy and democratization, justice, multinational capital, human rights, imperialism, colonialism, racism, free trade agreements, and exploitation.<sup>26</sup>

And, to paraphrase Hudson, the politics of both Lefts evolved as part of the developing anti-capitalist, anti-globalisation movement and both strive to establish socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The key difference is that whilst in Latin America, despite current difficulties, the Left is in government in a number of countries and in the process of putting its policies into practice, in Europe most of the Left is not in office. One exception is Syriza in Greece, a governing party enjoying a significant majority but whose radical policy intentions have been brutally squashed by the troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF) which has imposed a set of humiliating austerity policies and a wave of privatizations in exchange for loans to cover its massive debt.<sup>27</sup> The other, more positive experience of the Left in government, is in

Portugal where both the Communist Party and the Left Bloc furnish parliamentary support to the Socialist administration of Antonio Costa. This has restored lost salaries, ended public funding for some private educational establishments, reinstated social programmes, reduced unemployment, and advanced gender equality. Costa's rate of approval has soared to an extraordinary 81%, up from 47% when he took office in 2015.<sup>28</sup>

Spain's Podemos, Greece's Syriza, France's Parti de Gauche and Portugal's Left Bloc and Communist Party, together with like-minded parties across Europe have been inspired in the development of their policies by the ideas of the radical Bolivarians in Latin America. What the new European Left shares with the Bolivarians is substantial, such as their global anti-capitalist perspective, opposition to neoliberalism on a global scale and their rejection and active opposition to imperialist wars everywhere. They are both pacifists, they strongly believe in organising and empowering society at its grassroots and strive to build broad social coalitions as the bases for electoral challenges to the power elites with the aim of forming a radical government. Though less explicitly in the new European Left, the function of coming to office to form the government is to create a context that allows for a democratic re-founding of the nation on a socialist basis.

Through the Foundation Centro de Estudios Políticos y Sociales (CEPS) Spanish radical intellectuals such as Juan Carlos Monedero, Pablo Iglesias, Carolina Bescansa, Iñigo Errejón and Luis Aguilar have collaborated with the government of Chavez, well before their party, Podemos, became a mass electoral phenomenon. On its website, the

CEPS has the section ‘Papeles de trabajo America Latina Siglo XXI’ which shows their intense intellectual engagement with developments in Latin America. One of the working papers penned by Iñigo Errejón is about ‘The construction of political power and indigenous national-popular hegemony in Bolivia’.<sup>29</sup>

It is well known that Alexis Tsipras, Syriza’s leader and prime minister of Greece, is a strong admirer of Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarians in Latin America. He named his son Ernesto in honour of Che Guevara and conducted electoral campaigns where images of Hugo Chavez were prominent. Several of Syriza’s candidates to parliament have also deployed images of Chavez during electoral campaigns. And Syriza stands in strong solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution and draws inspiration from the experience of the Latin America Left in government. At an interview with Telesur on June 12, 2012, Tsipras pointed to Venezuela as a model to follow, in order to leave behind the capitalist model dominant in Europe. And Alexis Tsipras was the only European head of government to attend Hugo Chavez’s funeral in March 2013.

Although the links between Syriza and the Bolivarians are more tenuous than with Podemos, there is no question that their views have drawn inspiration from the Latin American Left, as can be gauged from its own political definition

Together with the European Left Party, of which it is a very active member, SYRIZA is fighting for the refunding of Europe with no new divisions or cold-war alliances, such as NATO.

As for the E.U., SYRIZA denounces the

dominant extreme neoliberal policies and believes that it must be and can be transformed radically in the direction of a democratic, social, peaceful, ecological and feminist Europe, open to a future of socialism with democracy and freedom. That is why SYRIZA is for cooperation and coordinated action of the left forces and social movements on an all-European scale. In any case, we do not hold euro-centric views and reject a “fortress Europe”.’

And it adds: ‘SYRIZA draws inspiration from the progressive anti-neoliberal changes in Latin America and promotes close relations with many left forces in that region including with the São Paulo Forum.’<sup>30</sup>

In France, Parti de Gauche’s identification with the politics of the Latin American Bolivarians is also strong especially in the politics of its leader, former Socialist Senator, Jean-Luc Melenchon. Melenchon made a deliberate association of his presidential electoral campaign in 2012 with the image and politics of Hugo Chavez, declaring himself a great admirer of the late Venezuelan leader. He obtained 11% of the vote.

During the 2012 Venezuelan presidential elections, the Parti de Gauche sent a delegation to Caracas, publishing a ‘Militant Kit’ for its members, explaining the details of the electoral process in the South American nation, stating that ‘a victory for Chavez is also a victory for us’. Furthermore, in the 2017 French election campaign, Melenchon’s sturdy defence of Bolivarian Venezuela led to a more than 5% increase in his electoral support.<sup>31</sup> It is not only Venezuela

that the Parti de Gauche identifies with, but with the whole of the Bolivarian Left. In one its latest posts, the party salutes Lenin Moreno's victory in the recent presidential elections in Ecuador. We read that Moreno's victory 'puts an end to the US-supported reactionary wave that has hit Latin America as a whole expressed in the victory of the ultra-neoliberal Mauricio Macri in Argentina and the illegitimate impeachment by a constitutional coup d'état of Brazil's president Dilma Rousseff.'<sup>32</sup>

Among the many commonalities with the Bolivarians on its programmatic and socialist opposition to the consequences of global neoliberalism, the Parti de Gauche has a programme of government which, among other things, aims to refound the state by creating the VI Republic out of the ashes of the V, reminiscent of Chavez's establishing the V socialist republic of Venezuela after the demise of the capitalist and rentier IV republic. The Latin American connection is also visible in its programme in other ways: it aims to make France part of the BRICS alliance to counter US militarism and financial deregulation; to make France's overseas departments in the Caribbean associate themselves with the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), to strengthen the geopolitical position of the progressive states in the region.<sup>33</sup>

Other parties of the European left, notably Germany's Die Linke hold similar views on global capitalism. In the party's programme we read

We are not alone in our struggle for social alternatives going beyond the capitalist mode of production and way of life. The most diverse forces and

different movements are convinced that another world is possible: a world without war, exploitation, foreign tutelage and ecological devastation. They are looking for new paths to non-capitalist development and are demanding, as in Latin America, not just our solidarity but our willingness to learn as well. In the countries of the global south, new forms of property and cooperation are developing, making an important statement against neo-liberalism. DIE LINKE is watching with great interest the model of the ALBA countries, which have agreed on solidarity-based economic cooperation.<sup>34</sup>

The importance Die Linke attaches to Latin America can be seen, for example, in an international conference organised by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, associated with Die Linke, on the theme: ‘The Left in Government: Latin America and Europe Compared’, that took place in June 2010.<sup>35</sup> At the conference the experiences of the Left in government in Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Chile, were discussed. The papers were delivered by Latin American intellectuals.

Thus, there is no question that despite their substantially different contexts, the new European Left and the Latin American Bolivarians share a great deal politically. This poses the strategic need to develop a common approach and much more comprehensive and systematic levels of collaboration and when appropriate, joint political action across the Atlantic. The current low level of cooperation is a serious weakness that needs to be

remedied as soon as possible.

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## NOTES

- 1 These figures mask the full extent of human rights violations; a Chilean commission tasked with investigating human rights abuses under Pinochet came up with the following: killed or disappeared, 3216, survivors of political imprisonment and/or torture, 38,254 (Chile: 40 years on from Pinochet's coup, impunity must end, *Amnesty International*, 10 Sept 2013, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/09/chile-years-pinochet-s-coup-impunity-must-end/>)
- 2 For detailed analysis of this sweeping tide see Geraldine Lievesley and Steve Ludlam (eds.), *Reclaiming Latin America. Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*, Zed Books, 2009.
- 3 Cuba's 1959 socialist revolution took place almost four decades earlier and its gestation, unlike the contemporary Bolivarian revolutions, demolished the old and established a revolutionary state from the start (see Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution*, Monthly Review Press, 1960). The Cuban Revolution is added here due to the closeness it has with the dynamics of revolution in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.
- 4 Everybody ought to read this wonderful piece of political historiography (C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, first published in 1938); quote is from the 1963 edition published by Vintage Books, 1963, p. v111. For a more recent and broader analysis of the slave revolts and struggles against slavery see the excellent Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848*, Verso, 1988.

- 5 For the regional consequences see De La Barra and Dello Buono, *Latin America after the Neoliberal Debacle*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009.
- 6 A good analysis of Chile's model is Valentina Montero, *By Reason or by Force: The Chilean Neoliberal Model and Its Implications for Education and Culture*, Errant Bodies Press, 2013; see also by Tomas Moulian, *Chile actual, anatomía de un mito*, Lom Ediciones, 2002.
- 7 Francisco Dominguez, ALBA: Latin America's anti-imperialist project, 21st Century Socialism, [http://21stcenturysocialism.com/article/alba\\_latin\\_america\\_anti-imperialist\\_economic\\_project\\_01110.html](http://21stcenturysocialism.com/article/alba_latin_america_anti-imperialist_economic_project_01110.html)
- 8 Monasterios, K, Stefanoni, P. and Do Alto, H. (eds.), *Reinventando la nacion en Bolivia*, CLACSO/Plural Editores, 2007, 75-95.
- 9 See special feature published by Argentine newspaper *El Clarin* which charts the number of *piquetes* per year for the period 1997-2002: 1997=140; 1998=51; 1999=252; 2000=514; 2001=1383 and 2002=1609 [nearly 4,000 in total] (<http://www.clarin.com/diario/especiales/piqueteros/index.html>).
- 10 The struggles, particularly for indigenous rights but also for racial equality, are issues that the Latin American Left has incorporated into its agenda only recently. The same applies to the issue of gender equality and the defence of the environment.
- 11 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vo.1, Preface, Penguin Books Limited, 1979, p.91; for the latter see Marx and Engels, *On Colonialism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974.
- 12 Cristóbal Kay, *Latin American Theories of Development*

- and Underdevelopment*, Routledge, London, 1989, p.16.
- 13 José Carlos Mariátegui, *Siete Ensayos de la Realidad Peruana*, Empresas Amauta, Perú, 1996 (a great deal of *Siete Ensayos* was devoted to demonstrating the Peruvian bourgeoisie's incapacity to develop capitalism in Peru).
  - 14 Alvaro García Linera, "El Desencuentro de dos Razones Revolucionarias, Indianismo y Marxismo", *Cuadernos del Pensamiento Crítico Latinoamericano*, no 3, CLACSO, Dec 2007, p.6
  - 15 Comisión de comunicación CONAIE-ECUARUNARI, Positivo dialogo entre el Gobierno y el Movimiento Indígena con respecto a la construcción del Estado Plurinacional, 11 March, 2008, [http://www.conaie.org/es/ge\\_comunicados/20080311.html](http://www.conaie.org/es/ge_comunicados/20080311.html)
  - 16 Website Ecuador's Constituent Assembly, La administración de justicia será mediante el sistema oral, <http://asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec/boletines/la-administracion-de-justicia-sera-mediante-el-sistema-oral.do>; World Bank, Chapter on indigenous rights, [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Bolivia\\_CSA\\_Indigenous\\_Rights.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Bolivia_CSA_Indigenous_Rights.pdf)
  - 17 Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement, <http://www.mstbrazil.org/?q=about>
  - 18 Section Biblioteca of MST's website, <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/listagem.php?sc=8&p=1>
  - 19 Diputado Rafael Correa Flores, Construyendo el ALBA "Nuestro Norte es el Sur", Ediciones del 40 Aniversario del Parlamento Latinoamericano, 1ra Edición, Caracas, República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Mayo 2005, p. 16.
  - 20 Diana Raby, *Democracy and Revolution, Latin America and*

- Socialism Today*, Pluto Press, London, 2006, p.147; an official brochure of the Bolivarian government in the Colección Temas de Hoy, called *Socialismo del Siglo XXI*, Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Comunicación y la Información,, April 2007, pp.28-29.
- 21 For a detailed discussion of the role and intellectual influence of these leaders and intellectuals see Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State. Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America*, Verso, 1999.
  - 22 Francisco Dominguez, 'With Chavez gone and disturbances in Brazil, has Latin America's progressive march been halted?', *Journal of Global Faultlines*, 2013 Vol. 1, No. 1, 89-69.
  - 23 World Bank, Bolsa Família: Brazil's Quiet Revolution, Nov 4th, 2013, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2013/11/04/bolsa-familia-Brazil-quiet-revolution>
  - 24 Adler, G. and Sosa, S., External Conditions and Debt Sustainability in Latin America, IMF Working Paper WP/13/27, January 2013, p.7
  - 25 Kate Hudson, *The New European Left: A Socialism for the Twenty-First Century?*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 2.
  - 26 Francisco Dominguez, 'The Latin Americanization of the politics of emancipation', in Geraldine Lievesley & Steve Ludlam (eds.), *Reclaiming Latin America. Experiments in radical social democracy*, Zed Books, 2009, p.47.
  - 27 Greece signs up to a painful, humiliating agreement with Europe, *The Economist*, 13th July 2016.
  - 28 Richard Zimmer, Portugal's Secret Revolution, *Tikkun*, 24th January, 2017, <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/>

- portugals-secret-revolution. But, as Zimmer points out, Portugal's situation is far from ideal, the country's banking sector is frail and has a debt of 129% of its GDP.
- 29 Papeles de trabajo America Latina Siglo XXI (Working papers on 21st century Latin America); the article by Errejón can be found in <http://www.red-redial.net/revista-papeles,de,trabajo,america,latina,siglo,xxi-215.html>
  - 30 Syriza, <http://www.syriza.gr/page/who-we-are.html#.WOQhsRi-LgE>
  - 31 Francia: la defensa de Venezuela dispara a Mélenchon, *Insurgente*, June 2016, <http://insurgente.org/francia-la-defensa-de-venezuela-dispara-a-melenchon/>
  - 32 Le Parti de Gauche salue la victoire de la Révolution Citoyenne en Equateur, 3rd April 2017, <https://www.lepartidegauche.fr/?p=3153>
  - 33 Programme du Parti de Gauche Convention programmatique du 27 et 28 mars 2016, pp.15 and 49.
  - 34 Programme of the DIE LINKE Party. Resolution of the Party Congress, Erfurt, 21 to 23 October 2011, approved through a vote by the party membership on December 2011, pp. 27-28, [http://en.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/english\\_pages/programme\\_of\\_the\\_die\\_linke\\_party\\_2011/programme\\_of\\_the\\_die\\_linke\\_party\\_2011.pdf](http://en.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/english_pages/programme_of_the_die_linke_party_2011/programme_of_the_die_linke_party_2011.pdf)
  - 35 Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, The Left in Government: Latin America and Europe Compared, <https://www.rosalux.de/publikation/id/3832/>