

A balance sheet of the betrayals of left nationalism in Latin America

By Bill Van Auken
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As we commemorate May Day and today's 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, the resurgence of the class struggle that is shaking political and social relations on a global scale is finding particularly sharp expression within Latin America, the most socially unequal continent on the planet.

As in the United States and elsewhere in the world, teachers have taken the lead in this renewed upsurge of the class struggle, going on strike and taking to the streets from Sao Paulo to Buenos Aires, and from Santiago, Chile to Mexico City to San Juan, Puerto Rico to fight the decimation of public education and defend their living standards and basic rights. In many instances, these struggles have been met with naked police repression.

The new crop of right-wing governments—Macri in Argentina, Temer in Brazil, Piñera in Chile—are no more able to resolve the crisis gripping the capitalist system in Latin America than their supposedly left predecessors. Like them, mired in filthy corruption scandals, their only answer is to shift the burden onto the backs of the working class.

As the Latin American working class once again moves toward revolutionary struggle, it is high time for the drawing up of an unsparing balance sheet of the betrayals of past struggles and the role played by leaderships that have done everything in their power to disorient and mislead the working class.

“The emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself,” Marx and Engels famously insisted. This essential affirmation of the role of the working class as the sole consistently revolutionary class in capitalist society, and the impossibility of establishing socialism under the leadership of any supposedly radical or left section of the bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie, has been confirmed again and again through tragic historical experiences in Latin America.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has insisted that defeating the attacks carried out by both imperialism and the native Latin American bourgeoisie is possible only through the independent mobilization of the working class, throughout the Americas, based upon a revolutionary socialist and internationalist program.

The ICFI has waged a decades-long battle against all those who have promoted one or another bourgeois or petty-bourgeois movement as a substitute for the decisive task of building revolutionary Marxist parties in the working class.

Left nationalism, with the fawning support of petty-bourgeois radicals in Europe and North America, has played a catastrophic role in Latin America.

This found its consummate expression in the development of the thesis that the coming to power of Fidel Castro in Cuba had opened up

a new road to socialism, which no longer required either the conscious and independent political intervention of the working class, or the building of revolutionary Marxist parties.

Instead, guerrilla warfare, waged by small groups of armed men under the leadership of radical petty-bourgeois nationalists, would suffice. This myth, derived from the coming to power of Castro's July 26 Movement, was distilled into the retrograde theories of guerrillism, elaborated by his erstwhile political ally Che Guevara, as the model for revolutions throughout the hemisphere.

This false perspective found its most prominent proponents in the Pabloite revisionist tendency, which emerged within the Fourth International under the leadership of Ernest Mandel in Europe and Joseph Hansen in the US, subsequently joined by Nahuel Moreno in Argentina.

This anti-Marxist perspective was propagated throughout Latin America with disastrous consequences. It served to divert a layer of radicalized youth away from the struggle to build a conscious revolutionary leadership in the working class, and into grossly unequal armed confrontations that claimed the lives of thousands and helped pave the way to fascist-military dictatorships throughout the continent.

The International Committee of the Fourth International fought intransigently against the Pabloite perspective. Defending Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, the ICFI insisted that Castroism did not constitute any new road to socialism. Rather, it represented only one of the more radical variants of the bourgeois nationalist movements that had come to power throughout much of the former colonial world in the post-World War II era.

The ICFI warned that the Pabloites' elevation of Castro as a “natural Marxist,” entailed the wholesale repudiation of the historical and theoretical conception of the socialist revolution going back to Marx, and laid the basis for the liquidation of the revolutionary cadre assembled by the Trotskyist movement internationally into the camp of bourgeois nationalism and Stalinism.

Last month saw the formal end of the nearly six-decade rule of the Castro brothers, under conditions of mounting social inequality on the island and the attempt by the ruling strata to salvage its privileges by means of a rapprochement with US imperialism. Today, deals signed with Obama remain in abeyance, as Trump demands even greater concessions from Havana and promotes the activities of the rabid anti-Castroites in Miami, while threatening a renewal of US aggression. The fate of Cuba will be determined by the development of the class struggle and the struggle to build a new revolutionary leadership in the working class, both on the island as well as in the United States and throughout the Americas.

The same Pabloite revisionists who promoted Castroism went on to declare the Sandinista Liberation Front in Nicaragua, and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador, as the basis for a new path to socialism and the foundation for a new revolutionary international. Despite the immense heroism and the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of lives in the struggle against US-backed dictatorships and CIA terrorist armies, both these movements transformed themselves into bourgeois parties, made peace with the reactionary ruling oligarchies they had previously opposed and became faithful executors of the austerity programs of the IMF.

Last month saw the Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega—who has amassed wealth and power rivaling that of the former dictator Somoza—unleash violent repression against workers and youth protesting against draconian cuts to pensions, leaving some 30 dead.

Last month also saw the jailing on trumped-up corruption charges of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the former metalworkers leader, who became president of Brazil as the leader of the Workers Party, or PT, the Partido dos Trabalhadores.

Many of the same Pabloite and Morenoite revisionists, who had previously extolled the virtues of Castroism and Sandinismo, presented the PT as a new uniquely Brazilian road to socialism. They entered and helped build the PT into what became a thoroughly corrupt bourgeois party that for a dozen years served as the preferred instrument of rule of the Brazilian bourgeoisie. It is telling that Lula's imprisonment by the right-wing government of Michel Temer has produced no mass outcry from Brazilian workers, who saw their living standards and rights subjected to sharp attacks by PT governments, with the collaboration of its affiliated trade unions.

A tendency that learns nothing and forgets nothing, the Morenoites, having seen their Brazilian adherents long since expelled from the PT, have concentrated their efforts on a series of unprincipled electoral alliances and maneuvers within the trade union and parliamentary arenas in Argentina. The logic of this activity is directed toward the preparation of a new betrayal of the Argentine working class through the creation of a new left bourgeois party, along the lines of Podemos in Spain or Syriza in Greece.

As its principal ally in perennial unprincipled electoral alliances acknowledged, in a candid—and self-incriminating—fashion last year, the PTS [Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo], the main continuator of the discredited politics of Morenoism in Argentina, represents a “Podemos in diapers.”

Finally, there was the fraud of Bolivarian or “21st century” socialism, introduced with the coming to power of former army colonel Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. While able to adopt a “left” posture and provide minimal social assistance programs to the working class under conditions of rising oil prices, with the collapse of the commodity boom, this bourgeois nationalist movement, based firmly on the military, has turned sharply against the working class. Its policies have enriched a layer of financiers, commodity speculators and senior military officers, while upholding the interests of international finance capital, even as workers confront growing hunger and unemployment.

Meanwhile, the Ecuadorian government of Rafael Correa, another proponent of Bolivarianism and 21st century socialism, has given way to that of his hand-picked successor, Lenin Moreno. While introducing a series of capitalist counter-reforms, Moreno has sought to curry favor with US and British imperialism by means of a grotesquely reactionary betrayal, cutting off WikiLeaks founder Julian

Assange's Internet access and barring him from receiving visitors at the Ecuadoran embassy in London, where he has been a virtual prisoner for the last six years. As Moreno's government seeks closer ties with the US military and the Trump administration, it collaborates in suppressing a man pursued by Washington for exposing the crimes of US imperialism. Such is the logic of bourgeois nationalism.

These bitter experiences with the politics of bourgeois nationalism, and its Pabloite and other petty-bourgeois pseudo-left props, underscore the necessity of forging a new revolutionary Marxist movement, based upon the independent political mobilization of the working class and the unification of workers in Latin America with workers in the United States and internationally in a common struggle to put an end to capitalism.

We appeal to our comrades in Latin America, those participating in this online rally, those who read the *World Socialist Web Site* and all those workers and youth seeking a revolutionary path: the history of the class struggle in Latin America is one not merely of betrayals, but of immense heroism, self-sacrifice and determination, all of which will be summoned up in the revolutionary battles to come. The decisive question, however, is to learn the lessons of the past, so that the mistakes and betrayals will not be repeated. This above all means the study and assimilation of the long history of the struggle waged by Trotskyism against revisionism and, on this principled foundation, building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country.

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Hacemos un llamado a nuestros camaradas en América Latina, a quienes están participando en este mitin en línea, a quienes leen el *World Socialist Web Site* y a todos los trabajadores y jóvenes buscando un camino revolucionario. La historia de la lucha de clases en América Latina no solo está compuesta de traiciones, sino también de inmenso heroísmo, autosacrificio y determinación, atributos que serán invocados en las batallas revolucionarias venideras. Sin embargo, la cuestión determinante será aprender las lecciones del pasado para que no se repitan errores ni traiciones. Ante todo, esto significa estudiar y asimilar las enseñanzas de la larga historia de luchas del trotskismo contra el revisionismo y, con base en estos principios fundamentales, construir secciones del Comité Internacional de la Cuarta Internacional en cada país.

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