

The crisis in Latin America and the fight for revolutionary leadership

Bill Van Auken
7 May 2015

This speech was delivered by Bill Van Auken, leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (US), to the May 3 International May Day Online Rally, organized by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

In this celebration of May Day 2015, the International Committee of the Fourth International reaffirms its determination to fight to unite the workers of North, Central and South America in struggle against their common enemies—US imperialism and the capitalist system.

The growth of social inequality and the relentless attack on the social and democratic rights of the working class of every country in the hemisphere are creating the most powerful objective conditions for forging this unity in practice.

Latin America remains the world's most unequal region. Approximately 167 million of its people now live in poverty, while 200 million more are on the brink of poverty. Side by side with misery for the masses, the region's richest 1 percent have accumulated staggering wealth. The number of Latin American billionaires has risen to 114, with a combined wealth of \$440 billion, an amount that exceeds the gross domestic product of all but Latin America's four largest national economies.

Conditions of mass poverty, systemic violence and social breakdown have, as we have seen in other regions, sent refugees fleeing their homes, particularly from the Central American isthmus, where US imperialism orchestrated near-genocidal wars of repression, decimating entire societies.

The Socialist Equality Party of the United States defends the right of these immigrant workers and youth to live and work in the country of their choice, without being subjected to repression and deportation at the hands of the police and immigration authorities. Our party fights for the unity of immigrant and native born workers in struggle against the policies of both the Obama administration, which has deported a record number of immigrants—over 2 million—and the Republican right, which seeks to whip up anti-immigrant chauvinism.

Latin America is an arena for the same fundamental

contradictions that are producing a drive to war internationally. US imperialism, which has long described the region contemptuously as its “backyard,” faces increasing challenges for hegemony from its rivals, particularly China.

Chinese banks increased their investments in Latin America by 71 percent last year, lending more than the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank combined. China has already outstripped the US in terms of total bilateral trade in Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Venezuela.

The head of the US military's Southern Command remarked worriedly in recent testimony to the US Congress that, while the Pentagon is launching its “pivot to Asia,” China is engaged in its own “pivot to the Americas.”

US imperialism is not about to surrender hegemonic domination quietly, and to compensate for its economic decline it will resort to increased militarism.

In the century following Washington's emergence as a global imperialist power with the Spanish-American war of 1898, the US overthrew more than 40 governments in Latin America, either by direct military intervention or through Pentagon and CIA orchestrated military coups. The more recent period has seen the unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Venezuela's late president Hugo Chavez in 2002, the ouster of Aristide in Haiti in 2004 and the 2009 coup to remove Zelaya in Honduras.

Washington continues to intervene militarily in the region, quietly building up a network of military bases and dispatching troops for military exercises throughout the hemisphere.

Defeating imperialism is the task of the working class of the Americas, including the workers of the United States. It cannot be outsourced to bourgeois governments or movements no matter how “left” their pretensions.

This is the bitter lesson of the 20th century. The confusion fostered over the nature of the Cuban Revolution, and the attempts to replicate it by promoting guerrilla warfare, led to the betrayal of a wave of revolutionary struggles that swept

the region in that period.

A critical role in this betrayal was played by Pabloite revisionism, including its Morenoite variant in Latin America. These forces rejected the revolutionary role of the working class, advancing the perspective that Castroism in Cuba had established a workers state, and that petty bourgeois nationalist guerrillaism generally represented a new road to socialism.

The rapprochement between US imperialism and the Cuban regime, backed by the US Chamber of Commerce and celebrated in last month's OAS Summit of the Americas, underscores the real character of this regime and the revolution that brought it to power. It is the occasion for drawing up a balance sheet of this experience.

The Pabloites rejected the fundamental conception elaborated by Karl Marx that "the liberation of the workers shall be the task of the workers themselves." They claimed that socialism could be achieved without the active and conscious intervention of the working class, and that the building of a Marxist revolutionary party, fighting to develop within the working class the consciousness required for the seizure of political power, was no longer necessary.

The International Committee of the Fourth International alone fought against this revisionist perspective. It warned that its political implications extended far beyond Cuba and posed catastrophic consequences for the working class.

These warnings were tragically vindicated. The promotion of Castroite guerrillaism diverted radicalized sections of the youth from the fight for revolutionary leadership in the working class, throwing them into suicidal combat with the military. This aided the Stalinist, Social Democratic and bourgeois nationalist bureaucracies in maintaining their grip over the workers movement and suppressing the revolutionary struggles of the workers. It simultaneously provided the pretext for the imposition of fascist-military dictatorships. The net result was the defeat of a powerful revolutionary upsurge throughout Latin America, which contributed to imperialism's survival of a period of intense revolutionary crises internationally.

The International Committee fought implacably against this Pabloite perspective, basing itself on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and insisting that the struggle to defeat imperialism could be won only under the leadership of the working class, its conquest of power and the extension of the revolution internationally.

The conditions for the realization of this perspective are emerging throughout Latin America. Consider the political situation in the region's two largest countries, accounting for more than half its population and GDP, Mexico and Brazil. In Mexico, the massacre and disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students has provoked powerful upheavals. It

has discredited every political party, including supposed "lefts" like the PRD and the Moreno movement. All of them are implicated in this historical crime, which is a direct manifestation of the methods employed by imperialism and the Mexican bourgeoisie to prosecute their social counterrevolution.

In Brazil, after over 13 years in power, the Workers Party is totally discredited, mired in the Petrobras corruption scandal, implementing attacks on workers' rights and social conditions and responding to right-wing mobilizations in the street by itself turning ever more sharply to the right.

As in Mexico and as in the United States and all over the world, the ruling class in Brazil resorts to naked state violence, as seen in last week's savage attack by the military police on protesting teachers in the southern city of Curitiba. It is no accident that under these conditions, the PT government's principal spokesman is one Miguel Rosseto, previously the leading member of the Pabloite movement in Brazil.

The fact that the bourgeoisie in Latin America is recruiting such elements to defend its rule is symptomatic of a deep-going crisis and a coming explosion of the class struggle.

The decisive question in preparing for this coming wave of revolutionary upheavals is the building of a socialist and internationalist leadership in the working class—that is, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country of the hemisphere, fighting for the common perspective of the Socialist United States of the Americas.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact