

May Day 2016: The US-China conflict and the political crisis in Latin America

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Bill Van Auken, Latin America editor of the WSWS, delivered the following speech to the International Online May Day Rally.

The International Committee of the Fourth International turns its attention this May Day 2016 to the growing revolutionary crisis in Latin America. This region of nearly 630 million people is emerging as both an explosive arena of the class struggle and another battleground in the drive by US imperialism to impose its global hegemony by means of escalating confrontations with real and potential rivals.

While the masses of Latin America were spared the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, clearly this will not be the case in the event of a third world war, a conflagration that would inevitably involve nuclear weapons.

US imperialism, which long referred to the region contemptuously as its “own backyard,” has faced mounting challenges to its historic regional hegemony from its global rivals, particularly China. Trade between China and Latin America increased by some 2,000 percent over the past 15 years.

Plans have been unveiled to build a new Nicaraguan Canal that would eclipse the Panama Canal and a trans-oceanic railway between Brazil and Peru, Chinese-funded projects aimed at redirecting the region’s economies toward China.

Pentagon strategists have warned that China’s increasing economic ties to the region are undermining US influence. They argue that the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” must be accompanied by a “pivot to Latin America” aimed at reasserting US imperialist hegemony.

One leading US military strategist has posed the issue in the stark language of war. “To view the matter through a military analogy, Latin America is the

unoccupied high-ground overseeing the US position. A responsible commander would recognize that the occupation of that high ground by an adversary poses an unacceptable threat to his force, and thus would dedicate resources to block the adversary from doing so.”

It is nearly two-and-a-half years since US Secretary of State John Kerry proclaimed before a meeting of the Organization of American States that the “era of the Monroe doctrine is over.” The 200 year-old pillar of US foreign policy had endowed Washington with the supposed right to use force to prevent outside powers from establishing a foothold in the Western Hemisphere.

Throughout the 20th Century, this doctrine was invoked as a rationale for carrying out some 50 direct US military interventions along with the fomenting of military coups that imposed brutal dictatorships over much of the region.

Kerry’s statement notwithstanding, it is apparent that a new and even more virulent form of the Monroe Doctrine is being prepared to justify an explosive growth of militarism directed not only against China, but at the working masses of Latin America itself and aimed at asserting US imperialist hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, its strategic markets and resources.

Washington is determined to exploit the growing economic and political crises sweeping the region—in large measure the product of the collapse of the commodities and emerging market booms—to further these ends.

Brazil, the region’s largest economy, is facing its deepest economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s, with over 100,000 layoffs every month and inflation eating into workers’ living standards.

Venezuela's oil export dependent economy is projected to shrink by a staggering eight percent this year, while it is estimated that the inflation rate will top 700 percent.

The crisis has undermined one government after another associated with Latin America's so-called "turn to the left," including the ousted Peronists of Cristina Fernandez in Argentina; the Partido dos Trabalhadores in Brazil, which now faces the impeachment of Dilma Rouseff; Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela confronting a recall drive and Bolivia's Evo Morales of Bolivia, denied another term in a popular referendum.

All of them headed bourgeois governments that defended capitalist property relations. Brought to power to stabilize capitalist rule, they employed minimal social assistance programs to dampen class tensions, while utilizing rising commodity prices and trade with China as a means of asserting a certain independence from Washington. The economic crisis and the growing attacks from the political right have only driven these regimes themselves to the right, attacking workers struggles and imposing capitalist austerity measures.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its supporters in the Socialist Equality Party of the United States oppose every maneuver and intervention by US imperialism to exploit these crises to reassert US imperialist hegemony in the region.

At the same time, our movement insists that the attacks by both imperialism and the native bourgeoisie can be defeated only by means of the independent mobilization of the working class throughout the Americas based on a revolutionary socialist and internationalist program.

Those who promoted bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalist movements in Latin America—from Castroism, which is now inviting US capital back to Cuba, to the Brazilian Workers Party, a thoroughly corrupt bourgeois apparatus, to Chavismo—as substitutes for the building of revolutionary Marxist parties in the working class bear responsibility for politically disarming sections of workers and youth in the face of the current crisis. Chief among them are the Pabloite revisionists who broke from the Trotskyist movement in the 1960s, including their Morenoite variant.

The conditions being prepared against workers

throughout the Americas find bloody expression in Mexico, the country closest both geographically and economically to US imperialism. The continued coverup of the brutal massacre and disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa teaching students has been unable to conceal the involvement of every level of the state and the ruling establishment in this historic crime. Meanwhile, the drive to privatize Pemex, the state-owned oil industry, has claimed its own victims with the deaths of at least 32 workers last month in an explosion at a privatized company installation in Veracruz.

Just as in Europe, so in Latin America the approach of war goes hand-in-hand with the vicious persecution of refugees and immigrants. In the United States, Republicans like Donald Trump have sought to whip up anti-immigrant fervor to divide the working class. The Obama administration has imposed its own wall of repression, imprisoning in detention camps and deporting families and children fleeing the social devastation wrought by US imperialism in Central America. It has also contracted out repression to the Mexican and Central American security forces, which have been guilty of torturing and murdering migrants.

The ICFI and the Socialist Equality Party in the United States unconditionally defend the right of refugees and of all immigrant workers and youth to live and work in the country of their choice without being subjected to repression and deportation.

We fight to unite workers across all of the hemisphere's borders in a common revolutionary struggle against war and for the Socialist United States of the Americas. This perspective can be realized only through 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.



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