

May Day 2017

The fight for socialist internationalism in Latin America

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5 May 2017

This speech was delivered by Bill Van Auken, from the Socialist Equality Party (US), to the 2017 International May Day Online Rally, held on April 30.

This May Day rally is directed first and foremost at the development of a mass international movement of workers and youth against war, a life-and-death task that is inseparably linked to the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Like every other region of the globe, Latin America, obviously, will not be spared the catastrophic impact of a Third World War. It is already viewed as a field of battle by US imperialism in the struggle to defend US hegemony against encroachment by a rising China.

This May Day we mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and, in particular, its most enduring lesson: the irreplaceable role of a genuine revolutionary party of the working class armed with the program of socialist internationalism.

The Trotskyist movement, organized in the International Committee of the Fourth International, has alone defended this perspective, against the attempts by Pabloite revisionism to liquidate the Fourth International and subordinate the working class to Stalinism, social democracy and bourgeois nationalism.

Nowhere more than in Latin America was there a greater attempt to impose these theories, directed at finding a substitute for the building of a revolutionary party through a relentless political struggle in the working class and theoretical battle against opportunism.

In the past year, we witnessed a series of historical milestones, marking the culmination of the political projects upon which these revisionist attacks on the

Fourth International were founded. The death of Cuba's Fidel Castro, at the age of 90, came amid the attempt of Cuba's ruling strata to achieve rapprochement with Washington, in order to secure its own power and privileges through the influx of US capital, and at the expense of the Cuban working class.

Despite the heroic resistance of the Cuban people to US aggression, this revolution, like every other bourgeois nationalist movement and national liberation struggle, has reached an ultimate dead end, having failed to resolve the fundamental problems stemming from the imperialist oppression of Cuba.

The legacy of Castroism, however, cannot be evaluated solely through the prism of Cuba. It played an even more catastrophic role in Latin America, where various left nationalists, with the support of petty-bourgeois radicals in Europe and North America, promoted the theory that the Cuban revolution had opened up a new path to socialism, requiring neither the conscious and independent political intervention of the working class, nor the building of revolutionary Marxist parties. Rather, Castro's coming to power had supposedly proven that armed guerrillas, led by petty-bourgeois nationalists, and basing themselves on the peasantry, could become "natural Marxists," compelled by objective events to carry out the socialist revolution, with the working class reduced to the role of a passive bystander.

This false and ultimately catastrophic perspective was promoted most enthusiastically by the Pabloite revisionist trend that emerged within the Fourth International, led by Ernest Mandel in Europe and Joseph Hansen in the United States, and subsequently joined by Nahuel Moreno in Argentina.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) fought intransigently against the Pabloite perspective, insisting that Castroism did not represent some new road to socialism. It warned that the Pabloite glorification of Castroism represented a repudiation of the entire historical and theoretical conception of the socialist revolution, going back to Marx; that the emancipation of the working class, as Marx insisted, was the task of the workers themselves.

These warnings were tragically vindicated in Latin America, where the theories promoted by the Pabloites helped divert a whole layer of radicalized students and young workers away from the struggle to mobilize the working class against capitalism, and into suicidal armed struggles. These claimed thousands of lives, served to disorient the workers' movement and helped pave the way to fascist-military dictatorships.

The overall impact of Castroism, and, even more decisively, that of the revisionist tendencies which promoted it, was to hold back the socialist revolution throughout the hemisphere.

In Venezuela, meanwhile, we are witnessing the death agony of chavismo and so-called 21st century socialism, in the increasingly violent confrontation between two rival sections of the national bourgeoisie, both of which fear, above all, a revolutionary eruption of the working class.

The same layers that promoted Castroism fostered illusions in the "Bolivarian revolution," a bourgeois nationalist movement, based on the military. It has defended private property and, above all, the interests of finance capital in Venezuela for nearly two decades, and continues to do so as workers face unemployment and hunger.

Finally, this year has also seen the ultimate shipwreck of the Workers Party of Brazil, with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the consolidation, by her former political allies, of the most right-wing government since the end of the military dictatorship.

If the PT has paved the way to the present situation, it must also be said that the collection of pseudo-left organizations, which played a pivotal role in founding and promoting the PT, themselves bear political responsibility for the sharp dangers now confronting the Brazilian working class.

The leading role in this political project was played by the same organizations that had broken with the

Trotskyist movement in the 1960s, to embrace Castroism.

In the waning days of the Brazilian military regime, under conditions of massive strikes and militant struggles by students, these same elements joined with sections of the union leadership, the Catholic Church and left academics to found the Workers Party. Once again, they had found a substitute for the building of a revolutionary party and the fight for socialist consciousness in the working class. The PT was to provide a unique Brazilian parliamentary road to socialism. The dead end of that road has now been reached.

With the thorough discrediting of the Workers Party, all of these Pabloite and Morenoite groups are moving to the right, dedicating themselves to erecting a new political trap for the working class, along the lines of such "left" bourgeois parties as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

Their efforts notwithstanding, an explosive development of the class struggle is on the agenda in Brazil and throughout Latin America.

In Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and throughout the continent, a successful struggle against the attacks now being carried out by native and international capital requires the independent political mobilization of the working class across Latin America and internationally. That is, it requires the fight to build a unified mass movement of the Latin American working class, together with the workers of North America, in a common struggle against finance capital and the transnational corporations that exploit them all.

The urgent question remains that of developing revolutionary leadership and political perspective. This requires the assimilation of the long history of struggle for Trotskyism, embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International, and the building of its sections in every country.



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