

Pseudo-left president-elect Gustavo Petro: “We will develop capitalism in Colombia”

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Gustavo Petro, candidate of the pseudo-left coalition Pacto Histórico (Historic Pact), was elected president of Colombia last Sunday. With 50.44 percent of the vote, he defeated the fascistic candidate Rodolfo Hernández, nicknamed the “Colombian Trump,” who received 47.04 percent. The result was heralded as the first victory of a “left-wing government” in Colombia’s history.

Petro’s and his vice president Francia Márquez’ election has been heralded as the newest achievement of a new wave of the so-called “Pink Tide” in Latin America. All of those identified with this tendency celebrated the event, among them Mexico’s Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Argentina’s Alberto Fernández, Bolivia’s Luis Arce, Peru’s Pedro Castillo and Chile’s Gabriel Boric. Former Brazilian President Lula da Silva, who intends to retake the presidency in Brazil’s October elections, declared that “[Petro’s] victory strengthens democracy and progressive forces in Latin America.”

Petro will take over a country going through the deepest economic, social and political crisis. The current far-right president, Iván Duque, leaves his seat as one of the most hated leaders in Colombian history, with a disapproval rate that exceeded 70 percent. His government was marked by successive national strikes and massive demonstrations that challenged the terrible levels of social inequality and the murderous violence of the Colombian state.

The COVID-19 pandemic represented a drastic worsening of social conditions in Colombia. The country had one of the highest COVID mortality rates in the region, with 140,000 deaths, according to official data. In the same period, 3.6 million Colombians were thrown into poverty, with unemployment reaching an all-time high in 2021.

The social opposition in the streets, driven by these conditions, was brutally repressed by the Duque government. More than 80 people were murdered during the *Paro Nacional* [protests] of 2021, according to a survey by the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (INDEPAZ). The deaths were directly perpetrated by police and military officers, who also collaborated with and

assisted civilian elements in committing murders and other acts of violence against demonstrators.

The Colombian state apparatus of violence, funded by US imperialism under the guise of the war on drugs, was exposed before the eyes of millions as a class war machine directed against the struggling youth and working class.

Petro’s election is a distorted reflection of this mass experience and rejection of the Colombian bourgeois regime. The national strikes were diverted by the National Committee at its leadership from a direct clash with the Duque government and the capitalist system. Instead, the union federations, student and farmers’ organizations at the head of the Committee promised an electoral solution through the candidacy of the Historic Pact.

At the same time that the campaign of Petro, an ex-member of the 1980’s M-19 guerrilla group, sought to channel the sentiments of the masses behind abstract slogans like “defense of life” and “politics of love,” it moved ever further to the right in search of a “national agreement” to save Colombia’s crisis-ridden capitalist system.

In his last week of campaigning, Petro published an open letter to the “soldiers and police of Colombia.” He proclaimed that one of the central points of his government program is “the strengthening of the public force and the welfare of its members ... to achieve total peace in the national territory.”

This nod to the repressive forces was interpreted in the media as a response to opposition and public attacks by military personnel against Petro, which were never challenged by the candidate. The most notable of these came from the Army’s command, Eduardo Zapateiro, who tweeted threats and accused Petro of being corrupt, and demanding his respect for the military.

The president-elect’s speech at the Movistar Arena in Bogotá, only confirmed that Colombia’s “first left-wing government” will actually have quite a right-wing character. At the climax of his speech, Petro answered the “campaign of lies” that claimed his government would “destroy private property,” by announcing: “We are going to develop

capitalism in Colombia. Not because we love it, but because we first have to overcome pre-modernity in Colombia.”

Petro’s reactionary speech reinforces what had already been demonstrated by his peers in the region, from Fernández in Argentina to the newly elected Boric in Chile. In a period of crisis for Latin America’s commodity-based economies, their new “leftist” leaders openly assume the task of deepening capitalist adjustment policies and escalating repression against an increasingly explosive social opposition.

In his assurances to preserve private property and stay within the framework of capitalism, Petro is openly seeking to dissociate himself from figures as Hugo Chávez, who haunted him throughout the campaign. The late Venezuelan president, the most emblematic leader of the original Latin American “Pink Tide,” sought to cover up the bourgeois nationalist character of his government with limited policies of expropriation and the promise of “21st century socialism.”

At the same time, in his claim that Colombia needs to overcome “pre-modern,” “feudal,” and “slave-owning” remnants, Petro seeks to revive the bankrupt justifications used by Stalinism for its support for bourgeois regimes in Latin America and other economically backward countries. The Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution (preaching that a bourgeois-capitalist stage should precede socialist revolution in backward countries) served to disarm the Latin American proletariat in successive pre-revolutionary situations throughout the 20th century, paving the way to bloody military dictatorships.

This argument by Petro is a nefarious attempt to disorient the Colombian working class and youth. The social inequality, bloody state repression, homicidal herd-immunity policy in response to the pandemic, and the environmental crisis confronting the Colombian masses are not expressions of “pre-capitalist” remnants. Rather, they are the direct products of the domination of society by the capitalist profit system, which proves that it urgently needs to be abolished.

It is still unclear how the new Colombian government will develop its relations with the United States, which has in Colombia its main strategic base in Latin America. Shortly after his victory speech, Petro spoke on the phone with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Blinken later tweeted, “We discussed the longstanding U.S.-Colombia partnership and how we can work together to enhance inclusive economic prosperity, combat climate change & further deepen our relationship.”

Harassed by the explosive crisis of world capitalism, the constant threat of intervention by US imperialism, and in its quest to maintain a “grand agreement” with the national bourgeoisie, the Petro government is on a collision course

with the Colombian working masses. Not only will he and his Historic Pact be rapidly exposed, but also the corporatist trade unions and pseudo-left middle-class organizations that promoted them.

Among the latter are the Colombian Morenoites of the Socialist Workers Party (PST), a member of IWL-FI. Hypocritically declaring that its vote for Petro was “critical,” the PST has for years fostered illusions in the progressive character of a Historic Pact government. This time, they have fervently promoted Francia Márquez since she ran in the Pact’s primaries. Based on the fact that she is a black woman and social activist, the PST declared, “We recognize in Francia the personification of the need for change felt by millions of Colombians who have protested against the Duque government and Uribeism since November 2019.”

This opinion about Márquez is shared by broad sections of the Latin American and world pseudo-left. An article published in the Latin American edition of *Jacobin* claimed that “Márquez, besides embodying the qualities of the women of the Colombian people, as well as the resistance to the different racist, classist and misogynist oppressions suffered by the vast majority, has managed to articulate an emancipating discourse that embraces all the popular struggles, all the excluded and oppressed people of our people, achieving that, in her face, we can see ourselves reflected, the ‘nobodies.’”

Despite the pseudo-radical slogans against structural racism and machismo, the vice president’s “emancipating discourse” does not propose any confrontation with capitalism and imperialism. On the contrary, as she claims on her website, Márquez has worked since 2020 to implement programs in Colombia funded by the USAID, a CIA-linked agency of the US government.

The development of genuinely socialist politics in Colombia and throughout Latin America requires the construction of a revolutionary leadership that fights for the political independence of the working class, and its unification across borders under the program of international socialist revolution. This means building a Colombian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (CIQI).



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