

Gustavo Petro praises capitalism, military and right wing in inauguration as president of Colombia

Tomas Castanheira
12 August 2022

Last Sunday, Gustavo Petro, elected by the pseudo-left coalition Pacto Histórico (Historical Pact), was sworn in as president of Colombia. Unlike previous years, the inauguration ceremony attracted crowds to the center of Bogotá, in a celebration of Colombia's first "leftist president."

Also attending, as guests of honor, were politicians from the Colombian right wing, major businessmen, and international bourgeois political leaders. Among them were Rodolfo Hernández, the fascistic candidate defeated by the Petro, King Felipe VI of Spain, and "leftist" Latin American presidents Gabriel Boric of Chile, Luis Arce of Bolivia, and Alberto Fernández of Argentina.

Petro assumes the presidency of Colombia amidst a worsening political, social and economic crisis. He will take the helm of one of the most socially unequal countries in the world, marked by decades of bloody state violence, where class relations have reached a state of tension that threatens the continuity of bourgeois rule.

As a candidate, Petro sought to respond to the massive rejection of Colombia's corrupted political system, which led to a wave of national demonstrations and strikes throughout the terms of right-wing President Iván Duque.

When Pacto Histórico coined the slogan "politics of love," its voters understood it as a promise to end the intolerable violence and austerity policies. Surely, they recalled the "false positives," the more than 6,000 citizens murdered by the state during the administration of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) and falsely presented as "guerrillas" killed in battle, as well as the hundreds of protesters killed by the military while participating in demonstrations against Duque's government.

But they hardly thought that Petro's "love" would in fact be substantially directed to the old right-wing politicians and the military, the hated enemies of the

working class. His inauguration speech on Sunday, as well as his preparations to begin his government, make clear the fundamentally reactionary content of the "Great National Accord" he is pursuing.

In the weeks since his victory on June 19, Petro has given an important signal to the Colombian ruling elite by meeting with Rodolfo Hernández and Uribe. About the meeting with Uribe, the pseudo-left president declared on Twitter that "We found the differences and the common ground." And as he posted a photo shaking Hernandez's hand, he announced, "We are sure going for a national agreement."

The new cabinet was chosen according to the same principle that the right-wing parties and politicians massively rejected by the Colombian people have the unquestionable right to take part in the decisions of the elected government. Key positions, starting with the finance minister, José Antonio Ocampo, were appointed because they are the consensus candidates within the Colombian bourgeoisie.

In Petro's inaugural speech, he was forced to address problems central to the Colombian masses, such as social inequality, state violence, the environmental crisis and the corruption of the political system, but the president made sure to clarify that solutions should not involve any challenge to the capitalist system and its state.

Denouncing as "nonsense and immoral" the fact that "10 percent of the Colombian population holds 70 percent of the wealth," Petro insisted that "equality is possible if we are capable of creating wealth for everyone." In his capitalist fiction, "wealth distribution" means "simply the solidary payment that someone fortunate makes to a society that allows and guarantees his or her fortune."

Petro, who has set himself the task of "developing capitalism in Colombia," founds his "progressive"

rhetoric on a myth disproved time and again by history: that the accumulation of wealth by the capitalist class leads to the rise of the economic levels of the whole society.

Karl Marx concluded 150 years ago, “Accumulation of wealth at one pole is therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its product in the form of capital.”

This quintessential truth about the capitalist mode of production is more visible today than at any time in history. Brutal social inequality is not a Colombian “aberration,” as Petro characterizes it. In a world where the 10 richest individuals doubled their income amid a deadly pandemic, while 160 million were thrown into poverty, the Colombian reality is increasingly the general rule.

Petro’s speech was unequivocally identified by the corporate media as a signal to big business. In a Sunday editorial, *El Tiempo* highlighted as key “the promise of no confiscatory taxes and his insistence on the importance of society generating wealth by ‘working and producing’.”

Moreover, the “tax reform” drafted by Ocampo and presented by Petro earlier this week attests that his campaign promise, that his reform would hit only the richest 4,000 Colombians, was utterly false. The tax increase will hit those who earn from 10 million pesos a month (just over U\$2,000), that is, sections of the working class and lower middle class, and consumer goods such as food and fuel.

The bankruptcy of Petro’s pro-capitalist program, restricted to the limits of the bourgeois national state, is bluntly revealed by his approach to international politics.

Claiming that climate change is an “urgent reality” that demands the world “find a model that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable,” Petro points to international finance capital as the agent of this transformation. “If the IMF helps to exchange debt for concrete action against the climate crisis, we will have a prosperous new economy and a new life for humanity,” he stated.

Besides his friends at the IMF, Petro called for Latin American leaders—including fascistic politicians like Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro—are “to leave behind blocs, groups and ideological differences to work together.”

Petro’s project to maintain the foundations of capitalist exploitation in Colombia demands the complete disarmament of the working class in the face of immense

dangers posed by its class enemies. Among the most nefarious passages of his inauguration speech is the one in which he addressed the armed forces.

He declared: “Army, society and production can unite in a new indestructible social ethic. Helicopters and airplanes, frigates, not only serve to bomb or shoot, they also serve to create the first preventive health infrastructure for the Colombian people.”

This criminal complacency has the unequivocal role of opening the path for the ruling class offensive against the working class. As numerous examples from Latin American history attest—first and foremost, the coup in Chile in 1973—as Petro bows more and more to the military, the generals are waiting for the best moment to impose a ruthless dictatorship and unleash a wave of violence against the working class.

Petro’s first days in the Colombian presidency already confirm the essentially reactionary character of the so-called “left-wing” Pink Tide governments. While their promises to represent a “new road to socialism” quickly wilted in the face of the crisis of commodity prices, in their renewed form these governments have lost even the slightest hue of “pink.” From Boric in Chile to Pedro Castillo in Peru, they have taken upon themselves the task to implement capitalist attacks and escalate repression against the working class, strengthening the fascist forces preparing to seize power.

The commitment to these governments by the pseudo-left organizations—like *Jacobin*, aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America, which claimed that under Petro “Colombia will be more fair and more peaceful”—underscores the necessity of establishing the political independence of the working class and building its revolutionary leadership in Latin America, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact