

Jacobin, Morenoites foster illusions that incoming Colombian government can be pressured to defend workers

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Pseudo-left organizations of the middle class across the Americas have transitioned from backing the candidacy of Gustavo Petro in Colombia and glorifying his running mate Francia Márquez into fomenting deadly illusions that these new occupants of the Casa de Nariño represent democracy and can be pressured into defending workers and the oppressed.

Most shamelessly, Jacobin magazine, which is associated with the Democratic Socialists of America, a faction of the Democratic Party in the US, eagerly campaigned for Petro and Márquez as “the progressive ticket” and “the only democratic alternative.” They wrote that Francia Márquez, who is black and built her name demanding that the mining industry consult with communities, “has managed to articulate an emancipating discourse that embraces all the popular struggles, all the excluded and oppressed of our people, achieving that, in her face, we can see ourselves reflected, the ‘nobodies.’”

Jacobin then turned Petro’s electoral victory into a reason to vote for the candidates they endorse in the Democratic Party. It affirms that Colombia shows it is possible to “begin reverting America’s imperial policy and begin a more equal continental dialogue. A triumph of progressives in the U.S. would be key to begin walking the true democratic road of the entire continent.”

The claim that the Democratic Party, which has brutally secured Wall Street’s hold over Colombia and repeatedly raped the country—from Kennedy’s anti-Communist rampages in the 1960s to Clinton and Obama with Plan Colombia—can be swayed to defend democracy in Latin America is ludicrous. This imperialist party is responsible for killing tens of thousands of left-wing workers, peasants, youth and intellectuals and countless other crimes against humanity at the hands of US soldiers and the Colombian police and military that Washington created, armed, and trained.

On the same spectrum but short of calling for a vote for Petro, La Izquierda Diario of the pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party (PTS) in Argentina presented the decision a couple of days before the second round as one between “The candidate of the right, Rodolfo Hernández, and the lesser evil Gustavo Petro.” They wrote, “For those who choose Petro as the lesser evil, we can only tell them that it’s not just a question of punishing the right and Uribismo at the polls, but of enforcing their own interests on the streets.” With the “Historic defeat of the right,” in other words, workers can

advance their interests by pressuring Petro.

The Socialist Workers Party (PST) in Colombia cynically called for a “critical vote” for Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez after writing that the latter “genuinely represents a candidacy by the poor and oppressed.”

After succeeding in getting them elected, the PST wrote that “The 2021 strike taught us that the only effective way to defeat the plans of the capitalists is to fight on the streets... for the Petro government to go beyond... and apply a program with radical changes that defend the interests of the downtrodden against the interests of those above, that expropriate the expropriators...”

This last statement is particularly significant. In 2019-2021, Colombia was shaken by its largest wave of demonstrations ever, involving millions opposed to social inequality, the homicidal response to COVID-19 and the brutal repression that killed at least 80 demonstrators and disappeared hundreds. These protests were part of a global wave of “leaderless revolutions” involving hundreds of millions across the Americas and the world. But these “revolutions” changed nothing and were ultimately channeled, as in Colombia, Chile, Honduras, and Bolivia, behind the election of pseudo-left governments.

Petro called repeatedly to stop the strikes and roadblocks, but in a leaked May 5, 2021 audio he summed up today’s fundamental political need for the ruling class. In a call with the trade union and political bureaucrats in the National Strike Committee, which claimed to lead the protests, Petro stated: “There is a distance between the National Strike Committee and the people on the streets. Let’s say they don’t know each other. The people on the streets are the popular youth, the youth from working-class neighborhoods who want to keep fighting.” In other words, the political establishment seems unable to rein in the young workers in the streets, who are as politically and socially distant from them as the moon.

That is why the intervention of organizations claiming to be “socialist,” “revolutionary,” and even “Trotskyist” to feed illusions in this rotten political system and its trade union allies provides such a crucial service to imperialism and its minions in the Colombian ruling elite. The ruling class has thoroughly drawn the lesson that its rule will again depend on such pseudo-left forces to politically disarm the working class while it prepares for a return to military dictatorships.

The claim that Petro and Márquez can be pressured to represent the interests of workers holds no water. The illusions advanced by the PTS, PST and Jacobin are all based on the Stalinist conception that sections of the national ruling elites need to be supported to carry out the bourgeois democratic revolution as a precondition for socialist revolution.

However, their champion Francia Márquez exploded this argument during one of her repeated visits to the US Institute of Peace in Washington D.C., an agency of the US federal government with close ties to the Pentagon. In May, after being asked specifically about the status of Colombia as a NATO strategic partner, she promised to “strengthen this alliance with the U.S. government” and made no mention of imperialism or national oppression. After protesting that the US ambassador insinuated that their campaign was being financed by Russia and Venezuela, she said, this “breaks with the history of relationships of the United States, which doesn’t intervene in politics and has respected the democracy of electoral processes.”

She stressed several times that her administration would not intend to “expropriate” the “landowning oligarchy,” including the “Uribistas,” who use their landed estates as the economic basis for funding fascist paramilitary squads that regularly massacre social leaders, workers and peasants.

By dismissing the two main democratic tasks in Colombia and all backward countries—the liberation from imperialist oppression and the abolition of the special feudal privileges of the landed oligarchy—Márquez showed that all her talk about democratic rights, social justice, dignity and peace are verbiage. Most importantly, as the hegemony of US imperialism relies increasingly on its control of regional militaries and direct military presence to counteract its relative economic decline, Márquez assured that their administration will “not be a threat to America.” That is, Washington’s main bastion in its “own backyard” is safe.

Any regime that was only slightly sensitive to the interests of the working class would have immediately implemented vast public health measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, which already killed 180,000 Colombians in 2020-21. It would have renounced its association with NATO and condemned the drive to war against Russia in Ukraine which threatens the nuclear annihilation of human civilization. And it would have imposed aggressive price controls against the highest inflation in over two decades.

But Petro began his administration by promising “austerity” and filling his cabinet with stooges of imperialism and the far right. To name only a few, the new US ambassador, Luis Gilberto Murillo, who joined Márquez during her forum in Washington, was an adviser for USAID, the World Bank and other imperialist agencies. The Minister of Defense is Iván Velázquez, who was designated as the head of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, a UN-backed organization financed by the US to use corruption allegations as a tool to dictate pro-US policies. As Minister of Transportation, Petro chose Guillermo Reyes, who was a vice-minister under far-right president Álvaro Uribe.

Jacobin, the PST, and the PTS have been thoroughly exposed as anti-worker representatives of the upper middle class, building their careers in politics, the trade unions and academia by offering

the ruling elite to help protect the status quo. In the case of the PTS and PST, these elements put down their political roots in the legacy of Nahuel Moreno, the most notorious renegade of Trotskyism in Latin America.

In the early 1970s, amid a pre-revolutionary crisis, Moreno formed the Argentine PST openly stating, “Our main political goal is to build a centrist party of the legal left. We know consciously that this organization is the opposite of a Bolshevik proletarian organization.”

Amid coup threats by fascist military officials and attacks by fascist Peronists in the trade unions, not only did the PST meet several times with Juan Domingo and Isabel Perón but claimed repeatedly—like the Morenoites today regarding Petro—that the government offered “democracy” and could be pressured to defend workers. This helped disarm the radicalized workers and opened the door for the US-backed installation of a military regime that killed over 30,000 people, including many PST members, while Moreno escaped safely to Colombia to create the PST there.

As the ICFI wrote in its analysis of Moreno’s role: “In such a situation, the ‘left’ party which appeals to the bourgeois state to protect the workers—rather than calling upon the workers to arm themselves and crush the fascists and the state which sponsors them—is itself part of the whole reactionary bourgeois order.”

Imperialism and its closest allies among fascists and the military are by no means invincible or untouchable. The working class has been fighting with its hands tied by pro-capitalist and nationalist unions and politicians who are hostile to any affront to profit-making like strikes and, above all, the unity of workers’ struggles across borders. Imperialism would be powerless against an independently and internationally organized movement of billions of workers globally, such as the one being built through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Workers must conclude that fulfilling their democratic and social aspirations depends on intransigently opposing every section of the bourgeoisie and its underlings in the trade unions and pseudo-left and orienting their struggles internationally. This is only possible by building the only internationalist, socialist and revolution-making party, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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