

The reshaping of Latin America by the new imperialist war

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The following speech was given by Tomas Castanheira, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Group in Brazil, at the International May Day 2024 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 4.

We are holding this May Day event at a turning point in the world political crisis. The imperialist bourgeoisie has plunged fully into the maelstrom of war and is dragging the whole world into catastrophe with it.

The development of this world war has immediate and explosive repercussions in Latin America. Two years ago, at the 2022 May Day rally of the ICFI, which was dedicated to formulating a strategy to fight the imperialist war, we declared, “A new world war will necessarily put Latin America on the map of conflict on a scale incomparable to the two previous wars.”

This prediction has reached an immense degree of concreteness. The contours of the map of war in Latin America are already being drawn. A series of events in the last month have marked a qualitative leap in the US offensive against China, Russia and Iran on South American territory.

This militaristic escalation was announced by Gen. Laura Richardson, head of the US Southern Command, in an inflammatory speech to the US Congress in March. Richardson warned that Russia, and particularly China, are “laying claim to the abundant food, water, and critical earth minerals” present in Latin America, and she made it clear that this represents an intolerable challenge to Washington.

For US imperialism, the strategic resources in this region, historically seen as “America’s backyard,” are rightfully theirs. The fight for these vital interests of decaying American capitalism is justified by increasingly hysterical propaganda against the “evil agenda” of Washington’s “strategic competitors.” Peaceful operations, such as China’s construction of a commercial port in Peru, are fraudulently presented as military maneuvers in disguise.

At the beginning of April, Richardson made a crucial trip to Ushuaia, in southern Argentina, where Argentina’s fascist

President Javier Milei announced the construction of a joint naval base with the United States.

The geographical point in the South Atlantic is considered a “global strategic chokepoint.” Next to the Panama Canal, it is a necessary route for transporting tons of goods from South America to Asia.

At the same time, the Argentine Navy inaugurated a joint patrol program with the US Coast Guard of Argentine seas, ostensibly aimed at countering the presence of clandestine Chinese fishing vessels that allegedly threaten regional security. Washington has sent the destroyer USCGC James for this purpose, which could lead to direct confrontations between the US armed forces and Chinese civilian vessels.

The abrupt turn of Argentina’s foreign policy towards Washington and its war aims is not merely a political choice by Milei’s fascist regime. It is based on fundamental objective relations between Latin American national capitalism and imperialism.

In Brazil, governed by Lula of the supposedly left-wing Workers’ Party (PT), the military increasingly echoes the bellicose pro-imperialist rhetoric. Supported by the Lula government, the armed forces have systematically bombarded the Brazilian population with a campaign to increase the country’s military budget.

Similar to the Milei government’s accusations, the commander of the Brazilian Navy has made repeated public warnings about the “presence of extra-regional powers in Brazil’s strategic surroundings,” referring to Chinese ships, and the need to “build a defense mentality” among the Brazilian population, that is, to prepare them for war.

In this context, hours after Richardson’s visit to Argentina on April 4, the United States announced the deployment of the nuclear aircraft carrier USS George Washington for joint military exercises with South American countries.

Military personnel from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Ecuador and Peru and from NATO countries will be instructed onboard by professors from the US War College.

Symbolically, the aircraft carrier will anchor in Brazil,

Peru and Chile. The latter, as Argentina, integrates the so-called Lithium Triangle, which holds 60 percent of the known reserves of the mineral, which is crucial for producing electric vehicles and modern weapons.

The third tip of the triangle, Bolivia, which has the largest lithium reserves on the planet, is outside the exercises. The country governed by Luis Arce, of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), has signed contracts with Chinese and Russian consortiums to boost the extraction of this strategic mineral in the coming period.

Explosive geopolitical movements are developing rapidly in these places. Imminent direct military confrontations in the region came to the fore recently with Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro's claim upon the oil-rich Essequibo region, now belonging to Guyana.

The bourgeois nationalist regime of the Chavista Maduro, supported by the country's immense oil reserves, has strategic commercial and military relations with China, Russia and Iran, which it uses to counterbalance the weight of imperialist pressures.

Maduro's claim on Essequibo provoked a unified offensive response from the imperialist powers. Reaffirming the basis of its old colonialist policy, the United Kingdom sent warships to the region to curb Maduro.

Acting as a regional mediator for imperialism, a role it is playing more and more openly, the Lula government has sent military forces to Brazil's borders with Venezuela.

The historical delineation of the borders of Venezuela and Guyana was based on treaties overseen by imperialism, which by their very nature are unjust. Dozens of other borders across Latin America have been defined in a similar way and could become regional flashpoints for war.

But the redivision of these territories by bourgeois nationalist regimes like Maduro's—similar to Putin's invasion of Ukraine—cannot assume the slightest democratic or progressive character.

The problems that confront humanity—social inequality, the outbreak of war, pandemics and natural disasters—are rooted directly in the incompatibility between a world divided into national states and the globally integrated nature of the economy and social life in the 21st century.

When they came to power at the beginning of the century, Lula, Chavez and the other governments of the so-called Pink Tide defended the possibility of regional economic and social development through the bourgeois Latin American Union, in harmony with imperialism.

These reactionary illusions have definitively collapsed. Along with them, the illusions of a new multipolar order supplanting US imperialism in crisis have been exposed.

Lula, chosen by the international pseudo-left as a central protagonist of this political perspective, is a paradigm of the

reactionary character of “multipolarity.” While hypocritically condemning the genocide in Gaza, Lula desperately seeks the support of the imperialist powers, promoting as the champions of democracy and peace figures like “Genocide Joe” Biden and Emmanuel Macrón, who advocates sending NATO troops into Ukraine.

In the imperialist and backward countries, there is no possible alternative for the working class within the bourgeois national state and its political systems. Under the impact of the crisis of capitalism and the war, the ruling classes in Latin America—from the fascist parties and military camarillas that have emerged at the center of politics in all their countries to the old representatives of the official “left”—are all advancing against the working class.

The universal experience of the Latin American masses is one of growing impoverishment and job destruction, the dismantling of the most basic social structures, leading to devastating epidemics of dengue fever and other diseases, as well as illiteracy.

But while the surface of political life, dominated by the bourgeoisie, is one of growing reaction, further down, the working class is moving politically to the left, towards socialist revolution.

This is the case even in countries where far-right governments have recently been elected. The rise of Milei in Argentina, the result of the deep discrediting of Peronism after years of capitalist adjustments, has been accompanied by an explosive movement of strikes and protests, which continue unabated.

The fundamental political question is one of political leadership. In no country is it possible to take a political step forward without mobilizing the working class on the basis of a directly internationalist strategy and practice.

In Brazil and in all the countries of Latin America, we call on young people and workers to build the Socialist Equality Party based on the program and international direction of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

There is no time to lose.



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