



Newsletter, June-July 2017

## Latin America: Summing Up the Progressive Era



Álvaro García Linera

For over 10 years, Latin America has lived through a tremendous plural and diverse process whereas national and popular sovereignty gained strength.

### Changes

In this period, the rise of the popular forces organized through trade unions and social movements, took over State power. The slogan to “change the world without taking over power” was put aside. In Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, Nicaragua y El Salvador, an extraordinary redistribution of social wealth closed the gaps that in the last decades had open wide. We then witnessed a powerful process of wealth redistribution that took out millions of Latin Americans from extreme poverty. The third achievement is the fact that the state has become a strong protagonist, prioritizing the nation’s interests and those of the popular classes, through nationalisation of economic assets or a larger state participation in various economic sectors. Despite difficulties, South America has shown to the peoples of the world that there are other possible worlds, that neoliberalism is not the end of history, that wealth can be produced in another way.

## Sovereignty

The awakening of Latin America has also been defined by the consolidation of a sovereign continental foreign policy. During that period, the OAS, which previously decided the fate of our continent under the command of the United States, became an irrelevant institution. New continental organisations, such as Unasur and the CELAC, came into the picture, excluding the United States. Solidarity between nations appeared to resolve political conflicts, avoiding military intervention of the northern power. Just as it was with the 2002 coup against Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. During the 2008 civil coup against Evo Morales in 2008, the central state was unable to land in departments under control of the fascist right, which promoted, with their paramilitary gangs a sort of ‘dual power’. However, with Unasur and President Kirchner, Chávez, Correa and Lula, we were able to restore democratic order. These are not small things. Indeed, these last ten years were the most important for our continent in terms of regional integration, Latin American sovereignty and independence.

Álvaro García Linera<sup>1</sup>

## The NAFTA Challenge



Ethan Earle

Many on the Left have been deeply critical of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) since before it was fast-tracked into law by former President Bill Clinton in 1994. Now, President Donald Trump’s current plan to renegotiate NAFTA is poised to make the massive trade deal even worse. In late May, a loose coalition of civil society groups gathered in Mexico City to discuss this upcoming renegotiation. Participants included labor, environmental, and immigrant rights organizations from across Mexico, the United States and Canada. The group opposed a Trump-led NAFTA renegotiation and marked the kickoff of the latest international campaign against free-trade deals that benefit

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from Dawn News, June 27, 2017

corporations and political elites at the expense of workers, communities and our shared environment. While the people who gathered in Mexico City have long opposed NAFTA for its pro-corporate bent, a consensus emerged that President Trump and his team are cooking up something even worse.

### **The dangers of a Trump-led renegotiation**

Trump galvanized millions of voters for whom the considerable promises of globalization have long since given way to the stark realities of rising inequality and declining living standards. Trump is trying to use the same anti-establishment, pro-American rhetoric from his campaign to craft a neoliberal NAFTA renegotiation that would mean a strengthening of heinous Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms, which allow corporations to sue governments that “infringe” on profit-making opportunities, for example, by daring to introduce anti-tobacco legislation. It would mean stronger copyright and intellectual property laws, in case you’re not already spending enough on your medications. It will also mean further privatization of the internet, greater corporate control of e-commerce, and most likely a new broadside against net neutrality.

### **Throwing sand in the gears**

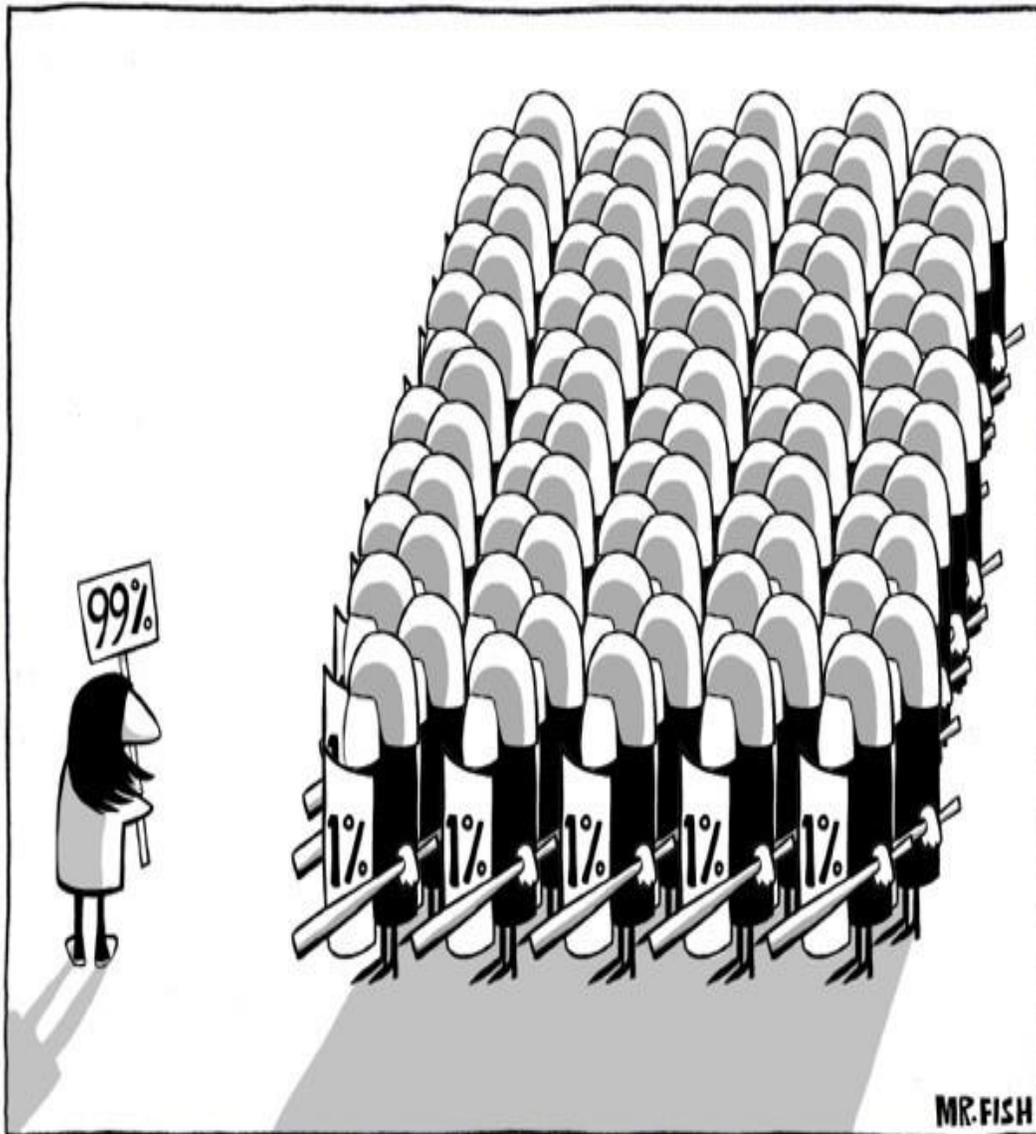
Mexican general elections are scheduled for July 2018. With President Enrique Peña Nieto’s approval ratings sinking below 20 percent, the position of his “institutional revolutionary” PRI, which has dominated Mexican politics for nearly 100 years, is considered vulnerable. The early frontrunner for the upcoming presidential race, popular former Mexico City Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has staked out a populist, anti-establishment position that places greater emphasis on labor and environmental rights, as well as national sovereignty. As his campaign advances, he is widely expected to take aim at a U.S.-led NAFTA renegotiation as a winning political wedge issue. In this context, progressive groups opposed to a corporate-led NAFTA renegotiation must adopt the same strategy that was so successful in the battle against the TPP: throwing sand in the gears. In Canada, a similar strategy can be pursued by emphasizing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s tendencies towards a politics of symbolic resistance and substantive acquiescence. Canadians have seen the material impacts of NAFTA on their country, and they now oppose the deal by a four-to-one margin. In the United States, the focus should be on the tremendous lack of transparency that has characterized early negotiations. 500 corporate trade advisors and TPP veterans are being actively consulted, while labor and civil society organizations remain completely shut out of the process. And of course, there is the historically unpopular figure of Trump himself.

### **Forging a new progressive consensus**

We must begin with a political frame that creates space for Trump’s supporters without making any concessions around the xenophobic rhetoric that the President has thus far employed. This is not about Mexicans, or anybody else, stealing U.S. jobs. It is rather about big corporations and political elites excluding the rest of us—from all three countries—from our fair share of the pie. To create this broad space for political convergence, we must demand an open consultation process. This requires that labor and climate justice groups, rank-and-file workers, immigrants, farmworkers, and small and mid-sized business owners have an opportunity to weigh in with their concerns. In addition to these formal

consultations, civil society should help to amplify these voices of concern through people's tribunals and other public hearings. And this input should form the basis of an alternative vision for cooperation between the three countries. We should not meekly request that NAFTA's unenforceable side agreements on labor and environmental standards be strengthened around the edges. Rather, we must demand that worker and climate justice in all three countries be built into the foundations of all subsequent commercial agreements.

Ethan Earle<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Project manager for the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—New York Office. This is an extract of an article published in *These Times*, June 28, 2017.

## Meanwhile on the Alter Planet ...

### **Bahia**

Since the last meeting of the IC in Porto Alegre last January, an intense process of consultation took place within the civil society of Bahia and Brazil, leading to the establishment of a Brazilian Collective for the WSF in Bahia during a national seminar organized in Salvador on 26 and 27 May 2017, where the consensus was to call the WSF for March 13-17, 2018. The central theme (to be finalized), will be around "Peoples, Territories and Movements in Resistance". The Brazilian Collective already has hundreds of organizations. It is facilitated by a group of 20 members, with the responsibility to lead and articulate this collective construction. In view of the decision of the Brazilian organizations and movements, we consider it necessary that the members of the IC reaffirm their support for this initiative to what we can formalize the launch of the 2018 WSF in March next year in Salvador.

[Damien Hazard](mailto:wsfic_fsmci@listas.tiwa.net.br) (wsfic\_fsmci@listas.tiwa.net.br)

### **Buenos Aires**

A coalition involving over 70 popular organizations and trade unions have met in Buenos Aires to prepare a week of action against the WTO that will culminate in a people's summit December 10-13, which will be preceded by mass actions and political pressures.

[Émilio Taddei](mailto:emiliot@fibertel.com.ar) (emiliot@fibertel.com.ar)

### **Anti-Nuclear Forum**

The event will take place in Paris on 2-4 November. It is particularly suite that it is held in France, the most nuclearized country in the world. All issues regarding civil and military nuclear will be examined with an emphasis on how to 'denuclearize' the world. More information at <http://fsm-antinucleaire2017.nuclearfreeworld.net/> and at <http://nuclearfreeworld.net/>

[Chico Whitaker](mailto:chicowf@uol.com.br) (chicowf@uol.com.br)

### **Budapest**

Today we see in Europe an enormous rise of nationalism, xenophobia, racism and right wing populism. There is a lot of fear in the societies and the far-right is using fear for its demagogy. Instead of going back in history, we have to look into the future: international solidarity, international cooperation, and support for the oppressed. The international network "Prague Spring 2" is are preparing with comrades from UE countries an "Assembly of Resistances" in Budapest, planned for next October

[Hermann Dworzak](http://www.transform-network.net/en/network/authors/author/hermann-dworczak/) (www.transform-network.net/en/network/authors/author/hermann-dworczak/)

### **Mexico**

A preparatory meeting took place in Mexico in May to plan a thematic Forum on migrations with several organizations and networks from Mexico, the United States and elsewhere. Mexico currently is in shaken by a tremendous social, economic and political crisis which is aggravated by the racist policies of Trump.

[Leo Gabriel](mailto:lgabriel@gmx.net) (lgabriel@gmx.net)

### **Hong Kong**

The Fourth South Forum on Sustainability will take place on July 3-6, with extended sessions on July 7-8, 2017. Please visit <http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/the-fourth-south-south-forum-on-sustainability-4-6-july-2017-2/> to see the updated Program,

Reader, and participant's profiles. After the Forum, we will edit sessions and upload online to the Lingnan University and Global University websites.

[Lau Kin Chi \(Laukc@ln.edu.hk\)](mailto:Laukc@ln.edu.hk)

## New York

The annual spring Left Forum took place 2-4 June and gathered about 3,000 different activists, academics and organisations of the US and international Left.



They met to discuss in panels, invited leading intellectuals to the plenaries and offered talk and information at various stands. Publishing houses and artists offered critical literature and art. This year's Forum in the John Jay College of Criminal Justice (a public police college) had the slogan "The Resistance: Strategy, Tactics, Struggles, Solidarity and Utopia", in the focus stood of course the protests against Donald Trump, his government and politics. In the conference call the protests against the "the highly organized, racist, misogynist right" in power is seen as a chance to broaden the protest movement addressing the very system that produced this right. These past few years have seen the rise of major protest movements. Examples are the "direct action among the brave fighters at Standing Rock", Sanders, a democratic socialist who got very close to the White House, young Americans favouring socialism over capitalism, the Black Lives Matter movement, the many becoming politicised and people are talking general, also the Women's Marches have been recently examples of gigantic mobilisation. The call stated that the establishment's opponents of Trump also stand for the same system, be it the anti-Russian right or the Democratic Party, whose decision against Bernie Sanders, "a popular socialist who could, no doubt, have beaten Trump at his own game" is being criticized. This has been reflected in the Forum's discussion. Beneath the condemnation of Trump's politics and a drastic evaluation of the present situation, the anti-Russian resentments and critique of the democrats, being seen as neoliberal, have been mentioned a lot. There is unanimity concerning the need for a united left alliance. It is being discussed, whether Sanders' strategy, to change the Democratic Party from within with his movement "Our revolution" or whether it needs a party of the Left outside of the Democrats.

[Barbara Steiner](#)

### **WSF: Changing the formula?**

A promising avenue for the WSF is taking shape under thematic forums. The "Thematic Forum" has as a starting point, like the other "Social Forums", the character of "open space", created from the ground up by "Facilitation Committees" (and therefore with self-organized activities) and not from the top down by "Organizing Committees" (which decide who speaks what). In truth, it's an option due to the fact that, focusing on specific struggles, we go directly to concrete proposals and actions. The multiplication of Thematic World Social Forums could in addition support the expansion and the interconnection of all these other forums, in the construction of the great planetary networks required for an effective confrontation with the global capitalist monster. And it would expand the knowledge of one of the most important WSF proposal, which is the need to build a new political culture – horizontal networks, respect for diversity and cooperation, In this perspective, we leave could aside the need to perform periodic world events, as we started from 2001, and imagine a whole new future for this process. In fact, the WSF is running the risk of being emptied, as a "more of the same" from time to time, competing with one another to see which of them can attract more participants. This will finish by meaning nothing, being bureaucratized as an administrative obligation to fulfil, or, what's worse, being "taken" and abused by specific interests, losing their free space character, as well as losing completely the role they play to make possible the meetings in the diversity.

Chico Whitaker

## **Idle No More' and colonial Canada**

Canada's colonial reality is now in the spotlight, as Idle No More protests voice the struggles of indigenous people against sustained political and economic oppression. Thousands are joining historic actions to call for fundamental changes in Canada's relations to aboriginal people. Central to Idle No More are longstanding indigenous demands for justice around land rights, economic resources and self-determination that rest at the heart of both Canada's history and future.

### **Canada's broken treaties**

Beyond contemporary extremes in inequality for aboriginal peoples in Canada, increasingly labelled "Canadian apartheid", Idle No More actions sound the alarm on questions of colonial injustice that reach to the political depths of Canada's existence and national character. Today, most of Canada falls under signed treaties, agreements between First Nations and Canadian settler society, outlining bilateral obligations in regards to political relations and land rights. Central to the Idle No More movement is a call for all Canadians to respect treaty rights, highlighting the constant refusal to acknowledge treaty obligations by successive Canadian governments over the past century. "The spirit and intent of the Treaty agreement meant that First Nations peoples would share the land, but retain their inherent rights to lands and resources," outlines the Idle No More manifesto. "Instead, First Nations have experienced a history of colonisation which has resulted in outstanding land claims, lack of resources and unequal funding for services such as education and housing."

Beyond treaty areas, large sections of Canada's north and the majority of British Columbia remain unseeded indigenous territories, lands where no signed treaty is in effect. Legally speaking Canadian society exists in colonial limbo on these lands, outside the framework of both Canadian and indigenous law, areas including major urban centres like Vancouver. Despite this legal reality, Canadian political and economic power rigorously avoids recognising the fundamentally colonial character to large territories in Canada that today can be understood as Canadian settlements in occupied indigenous lands.

### **Apartheid economics**

Recent changes to Canadian law, introduced by the Conservative government, in relation to aboriginal rights, are directly rooted in Canada's growing economic dependence on natural resources. Today, Canada's economy is often highlighted as an example of relative stability amidst global financial turmoil. "The Canadian economy is still performing relatively well, despite the challenges in Europe and elsewhere," outlines a major Canadian bank official, "we're continuing to see demand in interest for the resource sectors in Canada, both mining and oil and gas." Canada's major mining and oil and gas sectors are largely wired to totally ignore and undercut previously signed treaty agreements and Canada's international legal obligations to aboriginal people. In Attawapiskat First Nation, Chief Spence declared a state of emergency in 2011, to draw focus to serious poverty on the isolated reserve, where many families live in wooden sheds, without running water or adequate insulation to face Canada's northern winter winds. Only 90km away from Attawapiskat is Victor Diamond Mine, operated by De Beers, that according to reports is extracting around 600,000 carats of diamonds per year. "Great riches are being taken from our land for the benefit of a few, including the government of Canada and Ontario, who receive large royalty payments, while we receive so little," outlines Chief Spence. Today the annual median income for aboriginal people is 30 percent lower than the Canadian average, according to recent national census data.

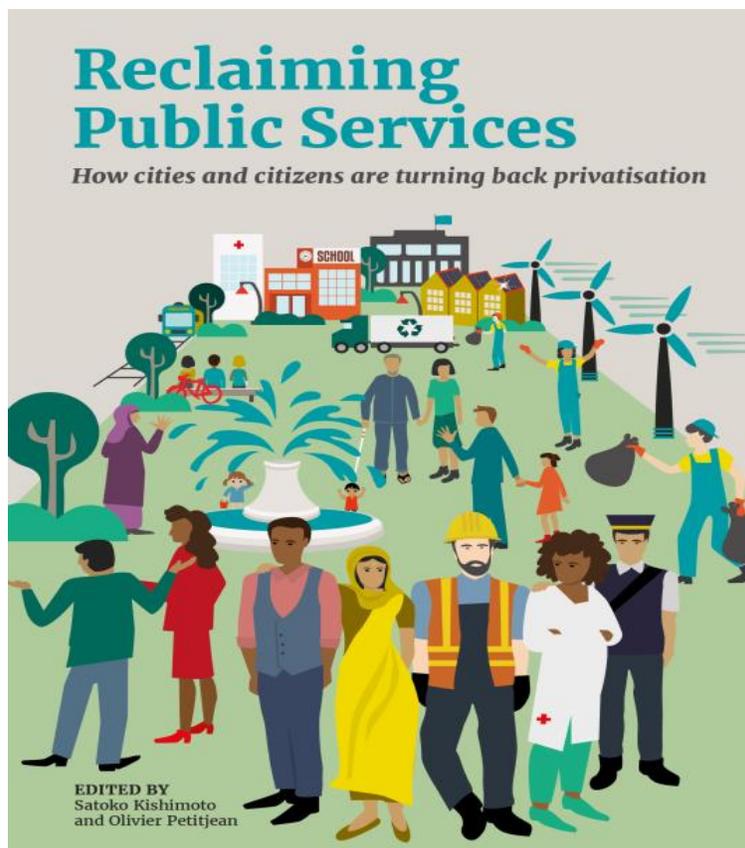
### **Decolonising Canada**

Central to understanding this current winter unrest, sparked by Idle No More, are the urgent calls to revise Canada-aboriginal relations against the backdrop of persisting colonial injustice. Canada's political landscape now faces an alarm on colonial questions commonly evaded in the halls of power. Idle No More presents an incredible opening to collectively reenvision Canada, to finally address Canada's unjust past and present policies toward aboriginal people. A call to collectively explore a new social contract, rooted in indigenous traditions and contemporary conceptions of social justice that can unravel the violent colonial roots to current economic modes that are destroying mother earth.

Stefan Christoff

## Reclaiming Public Sectors in the Municipal Sector

Why are people around the world reclaiming essential services from private operators and bringing their delivery back into the public sphere? There are many motivations behind remunicipalisation initiatives: a goal to end private sector abuse or labour violations; a desire to regain control over the local economy and resources; a wish to provide people with affordable services; or an intention to implement ambitious strategies for energy transition or the environment for example. There have been at least 835 examples of (re)municipalisation [1] of public services worldwide in recent years, involving more than 1,600 cities in 45 countries. Remunicipalisation is taking place in small towns and in capital cities across the planet, following different models of public ownership and with various levels of involvement by citizens and workers. Out of this diversity a coherent picture is nevertheless emerging: it is possible to reclaim or build effective, democratic and affordable public services. Ever-declining service quality and ever-increasing prices are not inevitable. More and more people and cities are closing the chapter on privatisation, and putting essential services back into public hands.



[www.tni.org/reclaiming-public-services](http://www.tni.org/reclaiming-public-services)

## Strategic imagination and party



Josep Maria Antentas

### **Movement Party**

After decades of crisis of left-wing political forces and of activist refuge in social movements, the current rebirth of the political-electoral combat and the building of new political tools is happening together with the need to rethink and renew the very notion of party. As a result of a long decline of the political left since the late 1970s, the (uneven) crisis of the parties has been a crisis of content (program), form (organization), and practice. The notion of movement-party sums up well the vocation to undertake a movement-inspired renewal of the party, as a certain analogy of the concept of social movement unionism. A movement-party takes on several simultaneous meanings: party as a movement (movement features), in movement (action-oriented and in continuous transformation), part of the movement (part of social struggles), and debtor of the movement.

### **Strategist-party**

Addressing reality strategically is a precondition for victory, although there is no guarantee of it. Planning a strategy does not mean that it is correct. Or that it is useful for advancing the cause of emancipation. Or that its implementation is tactically correct. A strategic view of the world is, therefore, a helpful starting point, even though it does not ensure the destination will be reached. This is done on the basis of working hypotheses, as provisional road-maps for political action that will need to be contrasted and to pass the test of a never conclusive practice. Strategic imagination needs a similar mentality. It means thinking strategically from a self-reflective and permanently innovative point of view, and having an indomitable and insatiable will to search for new possibilities to transform the world. In that sense, all strategy for revolution also has to be a revolution in strategy. The space-time perspective, that is to say, having both the historical and geographical scope to draw lessons from failed and successful past and contemporary experiences, is always a fundamental basis for strategic learning – a basis for the expansion of the imagination's frontiers.

### **State and powers**

The deployment of a comprehensive strategy means adequately synthesizing the relationship between the political and the social, as a kind of 'politicization of the social

and a socialization of the political' Not all politicization of the social or any socialization of the political is useful, but only those that seek to break exploitation and oppression, to weave alliances between the subalterns of all conditions, and to foster a culture of struggle and antagonism. The political and the social work with specific logics. Between the two there is desynchronization and misalignments and a path full of bumps, bends and bifurcations, which indicates a chaotic and stormy relationship, with explosive outcomes.

### **Democracy and militancy**

A necessary but insufficient condition, internal democracy is essential for reaching a destination without the horizon of emancipation being sabotaged by a “bureaucratic gremlin” whose growth is directly linked to the fall of social struggle and the institutionalization of any party. Bureaucratization implies the autonomisation of the apparatus and the formation of an internal stratum (“caste”?) whose interests are partially differentiated from rank and file membership. Internal democracy and the exorcism of bureaucracy require not only a culture of participation and mechanisms to control the leadership, but also an unceasing struggle against the social and sexual division of labor and against any form of inequality that inevitably penetrates any organization. The old world is always embedded in all the seeds of the new, whether the new refers to instruments of struggle or to experiences of change. At the same time, democracy presupposes management of the irremediable contradiction between the demands of external temporality, pressing and plagued with urgencies, and the internal, marked by the slow rhythms of deliberation and discussion. The broken and syncopated time of politics comes into tension with that of democracy and organization. The militancy of democracy is the other side of the democracy of militancy.

Josep Maria Antentas<sup>1</sup>

**Intercoll** is an open space for the development and confrontation of social and citizen movements. It is run by individuals linked to those movements, and by anyone who is involved in social struggles and mobilizations. Intercoll aims to contribute to the gradual emergence of a new "international collective intellectual" from the reflection of movements and networks of research and public education. Intercoll aims to create an international and multicultural space. The website operates in six languages.

<http://intercoll.net/?lang=en>

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from an article written for the special issue 150 of the journal *Viento Sur*, “1917-2017 Rethinking Revolution” 8 May 2017.

## Our Friend and Comrade François Houtart



I thought you were immortal, indestructible. I saw you already at one hundred years old, this is what I hoped, and I was sure it would come true. It took me several hours and several messages of confirmation to really believe you passed away. Qué pena ! Your immense light of hope for the world was dimmed. For me, you have been the most human of human beings I ever knew. No one will ever convince me that you did not die of exhaustion. You were fighting and spending all your energy to relieve the misery of others, to protect the damned of the earth from the cruelty and the egoism of their likes. Always listening, always working, always in solidarity with the oppressed, in all corners of the world. Your commitment has been for half a century the example that I obviously was never able to follow, though it has always inspired me and given me courage. I thank you for this and I promise I will always follow the road you have shown us, as best as I can, for the time allotted to me before I will join you.

Guy Bajoit, president of CETRI

**Peter Waterman (1936-2017)**  
**Romantic rebel and eternal dissident and internationalist**



Peter Waterman was born into a middle-class London Jewish Communist family, his father being at one time general manager of the major UK Communist bookstore, his mother the eventual author of two semi-autobiographical novels. Following compulsory UK military service (1959-60) he became a student at the union-identified Ruskin College, Oxford (1961-3), and then did a bachelor's degree at the university itself (1964-5). Now with a wife and two small children, he worked as a labour educator for the World Federation of Trade Unions, again in Prague (1966-9). After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968, he 'left both the Communist World and the World of Communism'. From then until 1998 he taught at The Institute of Social Studies, in The Hague, first on Third World unions, later on labour and other social movements, their internationalisms and on (computer) communications in relation to such. He played a major role in exchanges on 'social movement unionism' and the 'new labour internationalisms'. More recently he had written his own autobio and had been involved with DemocraciaGlobal in Peru (where his long-time compañera, present wife, the international feminist writer/activist Virginia Vargas lives) with the free, online, social movement journal, *Interface*, and had been trying out the new online social movements project, Intercoll.

Harsh Kapoor

# Food for Thought

## The Left and Venezuela

Claudio Katz<sup>1</sup>

The big bourgeoisie in Venezuela has been inciting a coup with the regional support of Macri, Temer, Santos and Peña Nieto. But it has failed to get results in that area. If the diagnosis of a reactionary coup is correct, the position of the left should not give rise to disagreements. Our main enemies are the Right and imperialism, and to crush them is always a priority. Whatever our criticisms were of Salvador Allende, our central battle was against Pinochet. The errors committed by Maduro are both numerous and unjustifiable, but those guilty of the present damage are the capitalists. Those who commit the monumental error of drawing a line of identity between both sectors confuse responsibilities of a different nature.

### **Social-democratic positions**

In recent months, there has been an increase in views that blame Maduro for Venezuela's agony. These opinions repeat the old social-democratic posture of joining with the reaction at critical moments. Instead of accusing the CIA, the escuálidos [the squalid ones, a Venezuelan phrase for the filthy rich], or the OAS, they concentrate their objections against Chavismo. The social-democrats point to the authoritarian Maduro as the main cause of the current situation. They object as well to the extractivism, indebtedness and contracts with oil companies. But they do not explain if they are demanding anticapitalist and socialist alternatives to these obvious failings of Maduro. The social-democratic viewpoint characterizes the urgent call for peace signed by numerous intellectuals. This statement promotes a peace process, rejecting both the authoritarian turn of Chavismo and the violent attitude of right-wing sectors. The sole logic of this presentation is to downplay the seriousness of the current conflict, to interpret it as a mere inter-bourgeois fight over the appropriation of the rent. That is why Maduro's totalitarianism is seen as a danger equivalent to (or worse than) the opposition. That equivalence is obviously false, however. The clash between Capriles-López and Maduro resembles the confrontation of Pinochet with Allende, of Lonardi or more recently of Temer with Dilma. Similarly the triumph of the Right over Maduro, far from an engagement between equals, would entail a terrible political regression. Confronted with this alternative, neutrality is a synonym for passivity and represents a huge degree of impotence in the face of great events. It means renouncing participation and commitment to genuine causes.

June 12, 2017

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<sup>1</sup> The full text is available at : <http://marxmail.org/msg145698.html>