

Interview: Rojava, Venezuela and South America

Between Imperialism and Revolutions

Internationalist Commune

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We need to apply the methods used by the Kurdish struggle and struggles in South America to actually start a revolutionary movement that is there for the people and not only for some abstract ideas.

At the 2nd Youth Conference of the Middle East we had the chance to discuss with Jose from Colombia who currently lives in Central-Europe about the political situation in Venezuela and South America, the revolutionary left and the relationship between the situation there and in Rojava.

How do you think the Middle Eastern Youth Conference can be related to the situation in South America and what do you think are the biggest problems facing South America at the moment?

So, basically we've been talking about imperialism throughout the conference. In particular, the way the world system is enforcing imperialist violence on the Middle East. Generally speaking, connecting the discussions here to the situation in South America is not hard as the discussions we are having are not unique, they can be applied to many other regions of the world, mainly in the global south. People on the left in Latin America are currently having very similar discussions to those being held here because of the similar situation. Right now there is a danger of a war in South America. If the war happens it will be between the US, its allies in South America and Venezuela. This is a particularly interesting discussion to be having in Rojava, as, the states acting, and producing a war in Latin America are pretty much the same state actors as we have here in Rojava, although the alliances vary a bit.

In the case of Rojava, the main actor that wants to start the war is Turkey, and we know that Turkey is a NATO member. However, in Rojava we have an unusual situation where the US is a major factor that is preventing Turkey from starting a war (for the moment at least) due to their presence here (which is of course related to their own imperialist interests). On the other side we have the Russian government, who are mainly supporting the Assad regime.

In Venezuela, it is the US who have the main interest in invading Venezuela for its oil resources, which are the largest in the world, even before Saudi Arabia. The US is allied with fascist regimes all over South America, mainly in Brazil (Bolsonalo) and Colombia (Duqoe). Duqoe is basically the puppet of Álvaro Uribe, who was the president in the early 2000's, a president who was infamous for his very close contacts to Colombian paramilitarism and Colombian narcotics trafficking. So while we are seeing this strong shift to the right in Europe and in many places all over the world, we see the same in South America in Brazil and Colombia (as we have already mentioned), in Chile under Piñera, in Argentina under Macri and Lenin Moreno in Ecuador. Because of this swing to the right, we now have a situation where many of these governments are supporting the will of the United States to invade Venezuela for many different reasons.

The first of these reasons is because they themselves are puppets of US imperialism, but their secondary objective is to capitalise on the opportunity to divert international attention away from themselves and the situations in their own countries. In Colombia there has been almost 500 comrades/social leaders from Afro-Colombian, indigenous and peasant communities, syndicates, human rights organisations, feminist organisations, lgbt organisations and so on who have been killed in the last year and a half. That amounts to roughly one comrade a day. In this case

we are talking about the systematic assassination of the social movements, especially after the Colombian state betrayed the peace process and the peace accords from 2016 and so we can see that this situation is really bad for people on the left and its getting worse.

A war that would start against Venezuela would first of all focus on Venezuela, but it would be a continental war, because the right wing actors within South America would support the US in this war, which would of course increase these states oppression of their own socialist, communist and anarchist movements, particularly movements lead by indigenous people. Moreover, the situation in Venezuela is often misunderstood by leftist groups, as just a war to oust the current president Nicolás Maduro and his government. Maduro's government is the successor of the government of Hugo Chávez and his revolution, the Bolivarian revolution, who came to power in 1998.

On one hand there is a very strong similarity between the struggle of the Kurdish people for freedom and for radical democracy and the struggles of leftist movements in Latin America. For example in Chile and Argentina there's the Mapuche people who are fighting against the states there, and who have their own martyrs regularly because of the violence of the Chilean and Argentinian states, also, the landless movement in Brazil, which is now under attack by the fascist state, and many other movements which are being oppressed all over South America. At the same time we have this danger of war, like imperialist war, so we can say this also creates a similarity between Rojava and South America, as we have the growth of mainly indigenous resistance, which is more and more being connected to Afro-Latin communities, student groups, feminist groups (the feminist movement has been really big right now, especially in Argentina, but also Peru and Chile. It's very big and very radical also. Not the type of liberal feminism that we have in Europe.) which are being threatened by the outbreak of war. But the growth of these radical movements is really positive.

On the other hand, as I've already mentioned, there is this increase in the number of right wing movements and unfortunately the right wing is winning right now, there is an increase of fascism and violence against the people. In Colombia, the peace accords that led to the disarmament of the FARC (the biggest guerrilla organisation in Colombia that led a 60 year war against the Colombian state) meant that they gave away their arms in order to start a political process because the Colombian people were sick of the war, there was more than 12 million refugees inside of Colombia because of this. The government completely betrayed this agreement and the territories that were emptied by the guerrillas were occupied by the Colombian paramilitary, so big multi-national corporations moved in and were killing people with capital from all over the world, especially from Europe and the US of course. There is also, a complete media blackout in Colombia about these things, as well as in the rest of the world, so there are many, many reasons why we should not just compare these struggles but connect the discussions we are having about different places in the Global South. Both the means that are being used against the people of the Global South as well as the means that are being used by the people to fight against imperialism and state violence are slowly, slowly becoming more universal and we are now at a point where this can no longer be ignored.

In Venezuela, the issue there is that there was the Bolivarian revolution in 1998. It wasn't a revolution in terms of full communism and destruction of the state, infact, its results were very similar to the results of the Cuban revolution. So there was lots of progress, in the fields of social benefits and education, these types of things. Many people don't know that the Bolivarian revolution was a revolution by the Bolivarian government, so you could say it's some form of state socialism, even though they themselves don't say that they are socialists. Of course the

inner contradictions of the state are causing them problems. There is corruption and dependency on the oil business (because that's where all of the money comes from that the Venezuelan state uses for its social programmes). Because of the economic war against Venezuela that has been waged for more than a decade now, the economy is really broken, there is really high inflation and for years there has been a lot of misery actually.

Unfortunately because of imperialist media, this is being portrayed as the true humanitarian crisis in South America, when actually the situation most of the countries of Latin America is no better. In some it is actually worse. For example, there is one region in Colombia, right next to the border with Venezuela, on the Caribbean, called La Guajira. It's a region that is very important for the Colombian economy because that's where most of the coal comes from that is produced and exported. Because of this industry, all of the water in that region is completely contaminated and cannot be drunk anymore. The indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities there are basically starving, because there is no access to clean water and food. People starve there every day and this is not being talked about. This is a humanitarian catastrophe that is happening and the US is sending humanitarian aid worth, I think, 50 million dollars to Venezuela, which is waiting at the border now, just to make a point about how bad things in Venezuela are and that aid could be used everywhere in Latin America.

Having said that, there's no comparison between the worth of the aid that is now being sent to Venezuela and the harm that the embargo did to the economy, especially as medical equipment could not enter because of the embargo. So, it's really like a big theater play. One big problem is that it's hard to access information about what's happening in Venezuela, even in South America this information is not accessible. In Europe even less, and in Rojava, I also feel like people are not aware of this situation, which is understandable, but I think it's the role of internationalists to make that connection and to talk about these issues to give the foundation for international solidarity.

Of course the question is kind of difficult what this international solidarity could look like, because in Rojava we are in a warzone and in Latin America there is war, or at least the threat of war, as well.

What do you think would be the most useful form that solidarity could take in Europe and North America?

I mean, the US is leading this aggression against Venezuela and Latin America, but also states within the European Union were really quick to side themselves with the right wing coup d'etat in Venezuela under Guaido so it's like a general imperialist aggression where the European countries are just as guilty as the United States.

In my opinion the role for leftists in the US, Canada and Europe is mostly the same. First of all people have to understand what is actually going on, like what the relations are between the different forces which are destroying South America, I can go onto that after this part. So people need to get this knowledge, pressure their own governments, and raise awareness in their own countries; most importantly we should try to understand the economic warfare that has been going on against Venezuela, which is the main reason (not the only one, of course there is state corruption, I don't want to deny that) why the Venezuelan economy has broken down. This has been completely neglected by the left in the last years, despite the fact that it may be more possible

tackle the question of Venezuela's economy in the places of capitalist modernity, as we're talking about a direct critique and direct action against the European and North American governments who have caused this economic crisis.

Besides this, we have to raise awareness of what a war would mean if it came to Venezuela, we have to make it clear that war there would not only be against the Venezuelan people, but a war against the people of South American in general, it's very probable that this war would spread to Cuba, to Nicaragua, to Bolivia, the other, let's say, leftist strongholds in the region, that have their own contradictions but still all the benefits that are the result of having a leftist governments. These benefits would be crushed completely if these countries were force into a system of neo-liberalism and sub-ordination to the imperialist system.

Despite this, we should not forget that these countries are not exempt from the imperial framework. We should always criticize US/American imperialism, but we should also not forget that the actual countries; the government of Venezuela for example, is heavily aided by the Russian government, which is obviously another imperialist player. This is also the reason why the US did not move into Venezuela in the last two years. Trump actually wanted to start a war in Venezuela sooner, but he was held back by his military advisors due to the fact that the power relations in Venezuela are not very favourable for the kind of warfare that the US would want to wage on the country. This is due to the fact that the Bolivarian revolution actually armed the people, so that's another thing that makes the situation similar to the situation here in Kurdistan, or to Rojava specifically. So it would not just be a war against a government and a military force (which is also very big, and aided by Russia) but actually a war against the people – people that are very much committed to the revolution. There has been many declarations by different groups in Venezuela, including the government, that a war on Venezuela would be a second Vietnam for the US. The geography of Venezuela and Vietnam is very similar, and the people will fight, and they will fight hard. It would be a very nasty war for the imperialists.

The US is currently aiding the right wing, the fascist opposition in Venezuela, which poses as a right wing alternative to the dictatorship of Maduro. This opposition has been heavily financed and raised by the US for more than 10 years, maybe 15 years. It is also well documented that these same forces have been very active in violent demonstrations that are explicitly racist against black Venezuelans and explicitly violent against anybody who is not on their line. This usually means there is a lot of violence against the poorest parts of the country who are actually supportive of the government. That support is waning slightly now, but still, most of the people are on the side of the revolution. From my point of view, I would say that even though many people now have critiques to the government of Venezuela (including people working within the government who want to have this traditional critique and self-critique. (I know this is also common practice in Rojava)) they would rather struggle against problems within their own movement than give up on the revolution all together. There are also people outside, just ordinary Venezuelan people, who will stick to their revolution and want to defend it. So there is this triangle situation, where it might happen that an invasion leads to a defeat both of the right wing and of the government and creates, like a return to the revolution. This is kind of the power relations we have in Venezuela.

Leftists everywhere should know that they should support, obviously the revolutionary people, the revolutionary councils of Venezuela that stand in opposition to the right wing, in opposition to the war, in opposition to the embargo, but also have their critiques of the Maduro government and its mis-management.

To connect this to the Kurdish case, it's very sad to see how the Maduro government, started to betray internationalism by building strong connections with Iran and Turkey, so today, Turkey is one of the supporters of the Maduro government against the US, when that obviously goes against all sense of international solidarity and awareness of struggles of the oppressed peoples of the world. That's why, it's very important to stress the point that, even though it's a difficult situation in Venezuela, we can sum it up by saying; critique to the government is important, but the benefits of the revolution need to be defended. The people of Venezuela will defend themselves anyway, and we have to stand by the side of the people, not by the side of the so-called democratic opposition, which is fascist in essence.

Just quickly, how do you feel about being in Rojava, how does Rojava feel to you as a space?

I mean, I have been aware of Rojava and the revolution here since the struggle for Kobane. In South America it's also getting more and more known, there's very interesting connections now slowly being made, particularly between feminist struggles who are becoming more aware of the women's revolution here in Kurdistan. Also there are a lot of cultural similarities that make it really easy to understand what the struggle in Kurdistan is about, even though it's far away and some people have never heard of the Kurds before. It's a beautiful thing that this awareness is being created; of struggles that are the same in essence, even though they are very far from one another, so being here, for me, it's like an affirmation of that, that the revolution here is a project that needs to be defended.

It's also a revolution that has a lot of similarities to some experiences we had in South America as well. It's so powerful due to the fact that the movement of Abdullah Öcalan was able to apply revolutionary theory to the regional reality in Kurdistan, and cultural reality and political reality. This is something that has happened in South America starting with Mariátegui and the Peruvian communist party at the beginning of the 20th century. This is also the way that lots of communist youth movements and socialist youth movements are being taken up again in South America. I believe this is a good example of how these movements should be taken up in Europe, not by just using Rojava or Latin America or anywhere else as a romantic idea of what could be achieved. People project a lot of hope into these revolutions, but we should actually learn that our task is to do the same, not the same like reproducing exactly the same thing, but applying the same method of actually studying our own reality, studying our own history, being aware of our own identity and overcoming these very liberal discussions of identity and internationalism, that are really on the surface in Europe. They don't go deep down to what the people need from the society, we need to apply the methods used by the Kurdish struggle and struggles in South America to actually start a revolutionary movement that is there for the people and not only for some abstract ideas that have been expressed by some old guys hundreds of years ago.

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