

## **Latin America and the Paradoxes of Anti-Imperialism and Class Struggle**

**James Petras**

The complexities of the new political relations in Latin America require that we breakdown what previously was the unified components of anti-imperialist politics.

For example in the past, anti-imperialist regimes pursued policies which opposed US military aggression and intervention in Latin America and throughout the third world; opposed foreign investment especially in extractive sectors; and, not infrequently, expropriated or nationalized strategic sectors; opposed joint military exercises and training missions; supported nationalist liberation movements and extended political – material support; diversified trade and investment to other economic regions and countries; developed regional political organizations which opposed imperialism and formed regional economic organizations which excluded the US.

Today, few if any of the anti-imperialist countries fit these criteria. Moreover, some of the countries ‘favored’ by Washington fit all the criteria of an imperial collaborator.

For example, among the most prominent ‘anti-imperialist regimes’ in Latin America today, Bolivia and Ecuador are big promoters and supporters of a development model which relies on foreign multi-national corporations exploiting mining and energy sectors. Moreover both regimes, in pursuit of extractive capital accumulation have dispossessed local Indian and peasant communities (the so-called Tipnis reserve in Bolivia).

In line with the ‘double discourse’ of these contemporary ‘anti-imperialists’, the Bolivian Vice President chaired a meeting in Cochabamba by a prominent anti-imperialist academic critic, David Harvey, to expound on the issue of ‘capital accumulation by

dispossession'. Needless to say Professor Harvey ignored, or chose to overlook, the pervasive extractive practices of his generous hosts.

On the other side of the ledger, several Latin American regimes which are in favor with Washington and have embraced the Trans-Pacific Alliance namely Peru and Chile, have diversified their trade away from the US and have turned to China, Washington's leading global competitor.

The lines separating the critics and backers of Washington, the nationalists from the neo-liberals are not as clear as in the past. There is a great deal of overlap, especially with regard to the extractive model of capitalist development, the presence and dependence on foreign multi-national capital and the pursuit of orthodox fiscal policies.

The sharpest distinction between the anti-imperialist and neo-liberal regimes revolves around foreign policy, but even here, there is some overlap. Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba and to a lesser degree Brazil and Argentina condemn the so-called 'US war on terror', its pretext for launching wars and military intervention in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. Washington's favored regimes, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay and its Central American clients, support US global militarism. Colombia offers troops or maintains a discreet silence. Yet in Latin America, even Washington's favored regimes support exclusive Latin American organizations, Mercosur, Alba, CELAC; opposed (temporarily) the US backed coup in Honduras; reject the US blockade of Cuba and interference in Venezuelan politics. Even Colombia which has allowed seven US military bases, has signed off on several military understandings and economic agreements with Venezuela – even as the US heightens its hostility to the Maduro government in Caracas.

The theoretical point is that in the present conjuncture we need to work with a revised conception of what constitutes a pro and anti-imperialist political framework. We will be looking at the specific economic relations and linkages, the divergences between specific public pronouncements on foreign policy issues and the long term, large scale economic strategies. At the 'extremes' ,for example Mexico and Venezuela, the differences are significant.

Mexico is the most favored imperial client in both foreign and economic policy. It supports NAFTA (integration with the US); its security forces are subject to US oversight; it has the lowest minimum wage in Latin America (even below Honduras); it is privatizing the strategic petrol sector firm PEMEX; it is a major 'labor reserve' for cheap manufacturing workers (especially in the auto industry); it has the lowest effective tax rate; it has joined the US war on drugs and war on terror by militarizing its domestic society. Few countries in Latin America can match Mexico's submission to Washington and few regimes would want to!

In contrast, Venezuela is the US bête noir: Washington has been engaged in permanent war with the democratic governments of Chavez and Maduro because they oppose the US wars in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. They nationalized select enterprises; financed large scale long-term social welfare programs that reduced unemployment, poverty and inequality. They imposed controls on financial transactions (rather weak and ineffective). They offer generous aid programs to Caribbean and Central American countries, enticing them out of the US orbit. Caracas has ended US military training and indoctrination programs and encouraged the growth of nationalist consciousness among officers. Venezuela has increased economic ties with US adversaries (Iran and Russia) and competitors (China).

The rest of Latin America falls somewhat in between these two polar opposites, overlapping with each or developing their own combinations of pro and anti-imperialist policies. This makes it difficult to generalize and create ‘typologies’ ,as many of the contrasts and similarities overlap.

However, there are two good reasons to make the effort. First of all with all the complexities, specific politico-economic configurations are evolving which are determining the correlation of forces in the Hemisphere and over time will decide whether the region will take an independent role or fall back under US hegemony.

Secondly, and equally important, the ‘external relations’ or international relations of the regimes are playing out in the context of a new set of class relations and social conflicts, which do not necessarily correlate with the degree of pro or anti-imperialism of the regimes. For example both the Bolivian and Ecuadorean regime, which are considered leading anti-imperialists have repressed, co-opted or denied legitimacy to class organizations.

For both these reasons we will now turn to classifying the pro-imperial and anti-imperial regimes, in order to then proceed to analyze how these regimes face up to the emerging class and social conflicts.

### **Classifying pro-Imperialist and anti-Imperialist Regimes**

The key to the classification of Latin American countries is the scope and depth of land grants which regimes have made to large foreign and domestic multi-national corporations. Over the past two decades Latin America has experienced re-colonization by

invitation: government grants of millions of acres of territory under the quasi-exclusive jurisdiction of giant mining and plantation consortiums. These land grants are accompanied by mineral exploitation and water rights, license to contaminate and the free use of the state to evict local inhabitants, to repress rebellious communities and to construct transport grids centered in the colonial land grant. The phrase ‘capital accumulation via dispossession’ is too narrow and vague. The concept ‘recolonization’ captures more accurately the large scale long term transfer of sovereign wealth, natural resources and special ‘colonial’ laws and regulations, that exempt this huge holdings from what previously passed for ‘national sovereignty’.

In other words when we speak of imperialist and anti-imperialist regimes, we are really writing about the scope and depth of re-colonization (populist rhetoric notwithstanding).

What we have in contemporary Latin America is a new combination of seemingly contradictory features: greater diversification of international markets, the emergence of an affluent ‘national bourgeoisie’ and the granting and recolonization of vast sectors of territory and resources by imperial capital.

This is clearly the case with a cluster of states which have forsaken regulatory controls, denationalized key mining sectors and adopted a “Big Push” strategy directed to the ‘extractive sector’. This is clearly reflected in the accentuated colonial character of their trade relations: large scale long-term exports of raw materials and imports of finished goods, (machinery, intermediary and consumer goods.

### **The Colonial Extractive Regimes**

The leading colonial-extractive regimes are found in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay and Central America. This cluster conforms to the all-around criteria for a pro-imperial regime: closely integrated to the US centered geo-political order, as well as containing vast colonial agro-mineral enclaves.

Mexico under President Enrique Péna Nieto, Colombia under Presidents Uribe and Santos and Peru under President Ollanta Humala have granted millions of acres to giant mining corporations and savagely repressed and dispossessed communities, farmers and local enterprises to “make room” for the colonial mining operations.

These regimes compete to lower labor costs – with Mexico heading the list with the lowest minimum wage, the most repressive anti-trade union practices and the weakest regulations of environmental contamination.

Peru under Humala, like Nieto and Santos, has worked closely with US “anti-terrorist”, “anti-narcotics” military forces to savage any popular insurgency, any economic activity which conflicts with the “Gran Minería”.

The troika have moved decisively to privatize major resource industries and in general, lowered taxes below even “First World”, levels. The ‘Colonial Clusters’ are solid supporters of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and have bilateral free trade agreements with the US and in practical terms, have downgraded “Latin American” integration.

The class struggle in ‘the pro-imperialist cluster’ is evidenced at the sectoral and regional levels, varying in intensity and consistency over time and place. In both Peru and Colombia, intense struggles have involved displaced peasants and to a lesser degree miners and the adjoining labor force. In Colombia large scale marches by the rural poor have

crisscrossed the country, demanding the return of their land, a greater allocation of state aid (a reallocation from agro-mining). Under Santos selective assassinations have replaced the massacres of the previous Uribe regime. In Peru, large scale community rebellions have confronted the Humala regime, who has done a complete about face, from social-reformer to free market advocate. Civic strikes, community and region-wide protests have confronted military occupations directed at facilitating massive foreign mining colonization and enrichment. These pro-imperial regimes, especially Peru under Humala, faced with massive opposition, have embraced a policy of ‘inclusion’, combining the extractive colonial regime to “trickle down economics” – allocating a fraction of the mining tax toward social welfare.

### **The Eclectic Cluster: Colonial Economies and Anti-Imperialist Foreign Policy**

There is no sharp break between the extractive colonial economies of the pro-imperial cluster and the moderate ‘anti-imperialist’ grouping. In fact in some cases the distinction hardly can be made. The moderate anti-imperialists include Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile.

Chile and Uruguay both have embraced free trade models, depend heavily on mining and agro-exports and have pursued free trade agreements, Chile more than Uruguay. Yet there are some key differences with the imperial cluster. Neither Chile, Uruguay, nor Brazil or Argentina support and collaborate with US military and counter-insurgency forces in policing their country as is the case with Colombia (seven US bases) Peru and Mexico. Nor have they actively contributed to overseas occupations, with the notorious exception of Haiti.

What is pre-eminently clear however is that the ‘moderate countries’ have not prioritized their relation with Washington over their regional associations (with the exception of Chile). They have diversified their trade and investment partners and in some key instances

have taken positions strongly opposed to Washington. In particular the countries have multiple relations with Cuba, Venezuela, Iran and other US adversaries. Their ties to China are expanding at the expense of Washington. Their policies oppose 'US centered' integration schemes. All the countries have opposed the US judicial process favoring the New York speculative hedge fund and support Argentina's offer to settle on the terms of the original bondholders.

However the 'moderate grouping' at no point has ever considered a 'rupture' with imperialism – a sharp break in relations, an adversarial political alliance. Its brand of anti-imperialism is more a gradual, an incremental shift of economic ties, a firm opposition to US interventions and military coups. They favor a growing regional identity and a weakening of engagement with highly militarized programs such as the 'antiterrorist', "antidrug" crusades which place their security services and military under US tutelage. The highly militarized global direction of US imperial policy has contributed to the weakening of ties with the moderate grouping, whose prime concern is driven by an economic developmentalist agenda – namely greater trade, increased investments and wider markets.

The 'moderate group' has adapted to the rise of large scale national and foreign private agro-mineral elites to power. They have played a major role, with greater or lesser success, in coordinating their accommodations with the entry of large scale foreign multi-nationals.

Their 'nationalism' or 'anti-imperialism' is mostly directed at managing these mix of enterprises, regulating the operations of both and securing taxes to subsidize moderate welfare programs, under the rubric of 'inclusive development'.



The key issues for Washington is the lack of automatic submission on foreign policy, the presence of a national option with regard to access to resources and the lack of support for US centered hemispheric integration.

It appears that Washington's frame of reference in dealing with the moderate group is still embedded in the 1980's and 90's when debt leverage secured compliance with the Washington Consensus; when neo-liberal regimes engaged in wholesale privatization and denationalization of entire economic sectors; when the Latin American regimes were embedded in the imperial state structure.

The moderate countries have moved to a new type of relation with the US in which, relationships and agreements are negotiated, taking into account national capitalist interests, diverse extractive export markets regional economic ties and residual, but occasionally important, nationalist and democratic pressures from leaders with a radical past.

Most of the moderate anti-imperialist leaders in an earlier period, were active in revolutionary or radical social and national liberation movements. Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, President Bachelet in Chile, President Mujica in Uruguay, President Ceren in El Salvador, all were engaged in revolutionary anti-capitalist struggles. They have broken decisively with their revolutionary past and embraced electoral politics but still retain the legacy of popular commitments, of being 'on the Left'. This allows them to secure the backing of plebian electoral sectors. While their past has not in any way influenced their pursuit of foreign capital and their promotion of agro-mineral extractive economic growth, still their past experience reminds them that they need a "social dimension" and anti-imperial symbolic action to retain strategic mass support.

#### **Anti-Imperial Quartet: Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and Ecuador**

The centerpiece of US imperial hostility focuses on four countries, which have consistently opposed US efforts to re-assert dominance in the region. While, in themselves, the four are not major powers, they exert a direct and especially indirect impact on the rest of the continent especially among the ‘moderate group’. Moreover, even in this anti-imperial grouping, there are important departures and inconsistencies especially in the realm of policy to foreign direct investment agreements.

The four countries which form the quartet, are in different degrees in opposition to imperialism. They also share a common platform of support for a greater degree of regional integration, opposition to US military interventions and economic sanctions, and an ideology which proclaims some variants of ‘socialism’ – whether ‘21<sup>st</sup> century socialism’ (Ecuador), Bolivarian Socialism (Venezuela), Martian Socialism (Cuba), or “communitarian” or “Andean Socialism” (Bolivia).

All four countries have faced and defeated recent US sponsored subversion and coups in recent years: Cuba uncovered a US Aid financed plot to recruit agents (2009-11). Venezuela defeated a coup (2002), a lockout (2003), a violent destabilization campaign (2014). Ecuador defeated an abortive police uprising (2009). Ecuador’s President Correa partially defaulted on dubiously incurred foreign debt. Chavez ‘renationalized’ the oil and other industries, transferring oil revenues from overseas operations to domestic welfare programs. Bolivia claimed to have ‘nationalized’ its oil and gas industry, when in fact it raised royalty payments and state ownership shares. Cuba has operated a planned collectivist economy up to now.

If we go beyond the common political and ideological anti-imperialist practices of the quartet, to examine the dynamics of economic policy and the structure of ownership of strategic economic sectors, the notion of anti-imperialism becomes very fuzzy and elusive.

Bolivia is a case in point. Evo Morales' ardent political attacks on imperial wars, needs to be balanced by his welcoming embrace of foreign multi-national corporations in every sector of the strategic mining sector: iron, gold, petrol, zinc, lithium etc.

Similarly Ecuador, while condemning US imperialism, terminating the US military base agreement in Manta and denouncing Texaco's pollution of its oil site, has signed off in multiple oil agreements with Chinese and other foreign multi-nationals. It has signed off on an IMF loan and retains the dollarization of the economy.

Venezuela which has consistently challenged US dominance in the Caribbean, Central America and elsewhere with aid programs, still depends on the US oil market for most of its exports and US food imports for most of its foodstuffs. In addition the great bulk of its non-petrol economy is directly controlled by domestic and foreign capitalists.

Cuba's relationship to imperialism is a more complex and changing phenomenon. For nearly a half-century Cuba was in the forefront of global anti-imperialist struggles in Latin America, Africa and Asia backing their ideology with revolutionary volunteers, material and more support.

In recent decades, however, Cuba has shifted toward its domestic priorities, while retaining international solidarity in the areas of health and education. In line with its attempt to overcome bureaucratic bottlenecks and economic stagnation, the Cuban government has

adopted a new economic strategy based on attracting foreign investment and gradually liberalizing the economy.

The problems facing the collectivist economy are real; the needs for investments, markets and technology are great. But so are the political consequences resulting from adapting to the needs of foreign capital as far as the idea of sustaining an international anti-imperialist policy. The accommodation with foreign multi-national capital in Cuba means that criticism, let alone opposition elsewhere will be diluted.

### **Anti-Imperialism, Yesterday and Today**

The notion of anti-imperialism that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and reached its peak in the late-middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, combining political (anti-colonialism) and economic (anti-foreign capital control) policies, has been ‘redefined’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Today the practice of the ‘anti-imperialist quartet’, combines powerful opposition to military and political imperial expansion and collaborative association with the major foreign agro-mining multi-nationals. While denouncing the most extreme forms of US centered integration proposals and favoring regional integration and diversified trade agreements, the quartet has pursued a colonial style development strategy, emphasizing the export of primary commodities and the import of finished goods. “Anti-neo-liberalism” the battle-flag of the quartet, revolves around a more equitable distribution of the revenues from . . . free trade!

Thus the differences between the ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ anti-imperialist regimes are greatly diluted when we consider the realm of international economic relations and policies. And the differences between the moderate nucleus and the pro-imperialists in the realm of political alignments become blurred.

The blurring lines and overlap have two effects. One involves weakening the alignment of the pro-imperialists regimes with Washington especially on economic issues. The second involves weakening the anti-imperialists, especially, but not exclusively, the ‘moderates’ support for anti-imperialist struggles. There is a tendency to converge and redefine ‘anti-imperialism’ in political terms and to line-up with the pro-imperialists with the economic demands for greater trade, investment and growth. This is the framework in which we now turn to examine how the contemporary ‘anti-imperialism’ relates to the class struggle.

### **Class Struggle and Anti-Imperialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The nature and scope of the class struggle has changed dramatically over the course of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The revolutionary struggles characterized by large scale worker occupation of factories as part of a political offensive have virtually disappeared. The general strike as a weapon to block anti-labor legislation, austerity programs, welfare cuts and the onset of authoritarian regimes has become a rarity.

The decline of traditional industrial workers centered mass direct action is not wholly the result of diminished militancy. Part of the reason is that ‘times have changed’ with the onset of center-left regimes. In the aftermath of earlier popular upheavals during the previous decade, industrial workers have secured incremental steady and persistent wage increases and access to tri-partite negotiations.

Secondly, with the shift to primarization of the economy, the manufacturing sector has ceased to be the dynamic center of development. It has partially given way to the agro-mineral export sector. Hence it no longer is numerically or qualitatively in a position to leverage power.

Thirdly, the center-left regimes in particular, have fostered mass consumer borrowing via easy credit terms, turning workers toward individual consumption over collective struggles for social consumption.

However, the diminution of the role of the industrial working class does not mean class struggle has been eliminated. Moreover, new class forces, ‘working peoples’ movements have burst upon the scene, engaging in new forms of class, national and ethnic struggles against the new model of extractive capital and its backers, including in many cases the ‘anti-imperialist’ regimes.

This new ‘class struggle’ or more accurately popular social struggles, more frequently than not, revolves around economic relations; more specifically, the dispossession of land, the uprooting of communities, the colonization of land and resources by large-scale multi-national corporations and the destruction and contamination of water, air, crops and fish.

Major conflicts involve direct confrontations with the state – and pit the popular classes, including peasants, workers, local artisans, small businesspeople against the local and national repressive apparatus.

Unlike early ‘economistic’ struggles between workers and capital, the struggles today are directly political; popular demands are directed against state policies, development agencies and economic strategies.

The shift of the epicenter of class struggle has evolved over time, but has come to the fore over the past decade. The historical change is necessary to understand the current configuration of class forces.

In contemporary Latin America, we can identify (three) types of class- social struggles : the moderate, the militant and the radical.

### **Moderate Class Struggle**

Moderate class-social struggle largely involves little mass involvement and direct action. It is largely a process of elite negotiations between labor (union) officials, employers and the Labor Ministry. It operates largely within the wage and salary framework (guidelines) established by the Finance Ministry.

This type of institutionalized class struggle paradoxically is a result of earlier militant class struggles in which regime change (the rise of the center-left) resulted in a ‘historical’ compromise in which labor was recognized as a ‘legitimate’ interlocutor, and wage and salary raises were granted in exchange for renouncing anti-capitalist struggles and challenges for state power. The regime’s subsequent shift to extractive capital and neo-colonial land grants, has not evoked any sustained struggle from the organized urban working class, encased in the tri-partite framework.

### **Militant Class Struggle**

The struggles within and over extractive capital involves new classes and social movements.

This second type of social struggle involves militant mass direct action by classes and communities and takes place in and around the centers of extractive capital. The large scale colonization by invitation of land and minerals by multi-national corporations, aided

and abetted by military and paramilitary forces, has provoked major confrontations throughout Latin America.

The protagonists of this militant form of class struggle involve provincial, semi-rural and rural community based organizations with ethnic, class and ecological driven agendas.

### **Radical Urban Class Struggle**

The third type of social struggle revolves around mass urban based movements, demanding a massive reallocation of economic resources from corporate subsidies and tax exonerations to social spending on education, health, public transport and housing, increases in public social service employee salaries and the minimum wage.

### **Armed Struggle and Direct Action**

The fourth type of social struggle includes armed rural struggle as in the case of the Colombian guerrillas, land occupations as in the case of the Rural Landless Workers movement in Brazil (MST) and the selective occupation of factories in Venezuela. This form of class conflict is on the decline. The Colombian guerrillas are negotiating a peace accord. The MST land occupations have diminished. The Venezuelan labor movement is too fragmented and economistic to move toward a general offensive featuring factory occupations.

### **Types of Class Struggle: According to Country**

Latin America exhibits all four types of class- social struggle, but in varying degrees of prominence. No single form of class conflict exists independently of other types. However, we can identify the most prominent and dynamic forms which are most closely linked to the possibility of structural changes and which are linked to the dynamic extractive



imperial sectors. We will identify countries where one or another type of struggle predominates and then proceed to analyze the relationship between ‘anti-imperialist countries’ and types of class struggle in the context of the growth of the extractive capital model.

### **Institutional Class Struggle: Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela and Mexico**

The major urban trade unions, in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela and Mexico are by and large engaged in collective bargaining mediated by the state, over wages, salaries, pensions, etc. The behavior of the trade unions is dictated by an ideological affinity with the regimes in power (Center-Left) in the case of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela and Bolivia. In other countries, repressive action by the state (Mexico, Paraguay) enforces conformity. Struggles are limited in scope, duration and frequency. More often than not the trade unions’ do not question, let alone challenge, the extractive imperial economic model. In most cases the trade unions are not engaged with other popular movements involved in more consequential forms of class action in the agro-mineral sector or even in urban mass actions demanding changes in state budgets.

### **Mass Direct Action against Extractive Capital**

Mass direct action against extractive capital is most intense and widespread in regions and sectors associated with the dynamic expansion of agro-mineral extraction. With few exceptions, the greater the scope and expansion of extractive capitalist exploitation, the more likely there will occur large scale clashes, not only between capital and the popular classes, but with the state.

Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil have all been sites of conflicts between expanding extractive capital and the local communities, farmers, peasants, popular and civic organizations. Provincial-wide strikes, road and transport blockages, occupations of work sites have led to the state intervening and military repression: the killing, wounding and arrest of numerous protestors.

The radicalism and militancy of the popular movements is a direct result of the material stakes which are involved. In the first instance, local producers, whether farmers or artisan miners and households, are dispossessed, uprooted and abandoned. Theirs is a struggle for the survival of a “way of life”. Unlike other forms of struggle, urban or trade union, theirs is not over an incremental gain or loss in salary or wages. Secondly, the struggle is over the basic necessities of everyday life: clean air, unpolluted water, uncontaminated food, health and mortality. Mining and agro-chemical export economic activity, absorbs irrigation water, pollutes drinking water, fills the air with deadly fumes. Toxic chemicals, pesticides and herbicides are sprayed constantly, undermining the local economy and making the region unlivable. Thirdly, local cultural and community customs and practices are eroded as large scale mining organizations draw the riff-raff of the world- prostitutes, drug dealers, smugglers. In addition corporate-centered diversions erode class-community solidarity.

The extreme and pervasive erosion of social and personal relations, the radical uprooting and deterioration of everyday life provokes wide-spread and sustained militant social action which is directed at the state which promotes extractive capital as well as the foreign and national owners. These struggles are political as well as economic and social, unlike the trade union ‘peso and centavos’ centered demands.

## **Mass Urban Struggles over Social Expenditures**

During the World Cup extravaganza in Brazil, multi-million person mass demonstrations occurred demanding a massive shift in state priorities toward education, health and public transport. In Chile for the better part of 2011-14, hundreds of thousands of students demanded free, public, quality higher education with the backing of community groups and teachers' unions.

In Venezuela mass urban protests organized by rightwing parties and violent social movements, backed by Washington, attacked the national populist government, exploiting popular grievance against shortages of consumer goods, induced by corporate hoarding and contraband gangs.

Leftist trade unions engaged in counter-protests, as well as strikes over wages and in a few cases for a greater role in managing public enterprises. More significantly hundreds of elected community councils have emerged and have formed parallel administrations, challenging local municipal governments on the left and right. The demands for "popular power" include greater security and control of the distribution of consumer goods and prices.

In Argentina the mass urban struggles of the unemployed which led to successive regime changes in 2001-02 have practically disappeared, as has the factory occupation movement. Dynamic growth led to a sharp reduction of unemployment and pension and wage increases. As a result the axis of social struggle has turned to the growth of movements protesting the depredations of extractive capital – in particular agro-toxic exploitation led by Monsanto. This 'struggle', however, has little resonance in the large urban centers and among the trade unions,

## **Armed Struggle, Land Occupations and Revolutionary Transformation**

The only regime changes through extra parliamentary means have been engineered or attempted by US backed military-oligarchical elites. In Honduras a US backed junta overthrew the elected Center-Left Zelaya government; in Paraguay an oligarchical palace coup ousted the elected President Fernando Lugo. Unsuccessful and aborted US backed coups took place in Venezuela 2002, 2003 and 2014; Bolivia in 2009; and Ecuador 2010.

In contrast social movement backed leftist parties pursued and secured power via the electoral process throughout the continent. In the course of which they played down class struggle and harnessed the movements, trade unions and political activists to their electoral machinery. As a result the advent of the Center-Left to power was accompanied by the decline of class struggle. The opening of the electoral route eliminated the revolutionary road to class power. The armed struggle movements in Latin America declined or demobilized. Revolutionary mass uprisings have led to changes and popular demobilizations.

The remaining center of armed popular action is Colombia, where the guerrilla movements (FARC, ELN) are currently in negotiations with the Santos regime over the socio-political and economic reforms which should accompany their incorporation to electoral and mass politics.

Nevertheless, land occupation movements in Honduras, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Colombia, persist even as their scope and intensity varies between countries and time frames. Today 'land occupations' are tactic to block the expansion of extractive, agro-toxic – export corporations and a vehicle to pressure for land reform, repossession of land and a key element in a strategy for 'food security' based on non-GM crops.

With the exception of the ‘institutionalized class struggle’, the other three types of class struggle clash with the dominant extractive imperialist development model pursued by both pro-imperial and anti-imperial regimes.

### **Continuing Class Struggle: In the Name of Anti-Imperialism and Imperial Centered Free Trade**

The key to the growth of extractive imperialism has been the abilities of the regimes to contain, fragment, co-opt and/or repress the class struggle. The reason is because extractive capital concentrates wealth, enriches the multi-national corporations, pillages wealth, reproduces a ‘colonial style’ trade relation and pollutes the environment.

Paradoxically the most successful extractive regimes, in terms of growth , stability and in containing the class struggle and attracting and retaining extractive capital, are the Center-Left regimes. ‘Anti-imperialism’ has been a useful ideological weapon in securing legitimacy even as the regimes hand over vast territories for foreign capitalist exploitation.

Secondly, the incorporation of social movement and trade union leaders and former guerrilla militants to the center-left regimes creates a political cushion, a layer of savvy, well connected quasi-functionaries who set the boundaries for class struggle and adjudication of grievances. Moreover, the center-left, use their “anti-imperialist” posture to disqualify class struggle activists as ‘agents of foreign powers’. The center-left regimes then feel justified in repressing or jailing class struggle practioners as part of their mission of defending the “Nation”, “Change” or the “Revolution”.

Pro-imperialist regimes, like Peru, Mexico and Colombia rely to a greater extent on physical repression, less on co-optation or more likely a combination of both. Large scale

grants of land, are accompanied by regional or national militarization. For the pro-imperialist right, anti-drug and anti-terrorist campaigns serve to justify their defense of the extractive capitalist model.

The anti-imperialist regimes speak of extractive capital with ‘social inclusion’ – the transfer of a fraction of extractive revenues to poverty-reduction – not to well paying jobs in industry or to reducing pollution or increasing spending on health, education and welfare .And certainly not to financing any consequential land reform or increase in workers management of natural resource exploitation.

In sharp contrast to the past, contemporary anti-imperialism is also profoundly hostile to the politics of class struggle. The key to the success of their extractive model is class collaboration: between the center-left regime , the multi-national corporations and the leaders of the co-opted class organizations.

### **Conclusion: Wither the Class Struggle?**

Building from the core struggles today, organized against the dynamics of extractive imperialism, there are clear signs that the regional struggles can expand beyond the agro-mineral sectors.

For one, the urban popular struggles over state expenditures, though anchored in a different set of priorities, pursues the same enemy: a state which allocates most resources to infrastructure designed to facilitate extractive revenues over and above the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the urban middle and working class. Secondly, the struggles against the extractive sector have secured important victories against Monsanto in Argentina and the mining and oil companies in Peru, Ecuador and Mexico. These are partial and

limited gains, but demonstrate that the ‘extractive model’ is vulnerable and susceptible to challenge by unified mass based community movements.

Moreover, the entire structure of the extractive imperial model is based on vulnerable foundations. The rapid growth and rise in revenues is based in large part on world demand and high commodity prices.

China’s growth is slowing. The European Union is in recession. The US has not demonstrated any capacity to return as the ‘locomotor’ of the world economy. If and when the commodity mega boom collapses, the capacity of the regimes to contain the class struggle by co-opting the urban trade unions and social movement leaders will wither. The current alliance between “anti-imperialists” and global extractive capital will splinter.

If and when that occurs, the real anti-imperialist struggle combating the imperial firms as well as the state will once again converge with the class struggle. In the meantime, the epicenter of class struggle will be found in mass movements, not in guerrilla detachments; in the agro-mineral regions and not in the urban factories; in the struggles over allocations of state budgets and the quality of life and not merely in wages and salaries.

The specific extractive character of imperialism suggests that the previous undifferentiated view of ‘imperialism’ and “anti-imperialism” is no longer relevant: the distinctions between progressive and reactionary regimes need to be re-conceptualized.