Two, Three, Many Transitions To 21st Century Socialism in Latin America

By Roger Burbach

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Something remarkable has taken place in Latin America in the new millennium. For the first time since the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, radical left governments have come to power in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, raising the banner of socialism. The decline of the US empire, the eruption of anti-neoliberal social movements, and the growing integration of the region on its own terms have created a space for the rejuvenation of socialism after the dramatic setbacks of the last century. Cuba is part of this transformative process as its leadership moves to update the country's economy while the Cuban people experience new freedoms.

In what follows, the theoretical debates and the praxis of socialism in the twenty-first-century socialism will be explored. The intent is not to provide a singular theory of the new socialism, but to put forth some of the interpretations of the contemporary struggles that are taking place in Latin America.

Theories of Twenty-First-Century Socialism

Drawing on the wide-ranging discussions of twenty-first-century socialism taking place in the hemisphere, political theorist Marta Harnecker, who served as an informal adviser to Hugo Chavez, outlines five key components of what constitutes socialism. First, socialism is “the development of human beings,” meaning that “the pursuit of profit” needs to be replaced by “a logic of humanism and solidarity, aimed at satisfying human needs.” Secondly, socialism “respects nature and opposes consumerism – our goal should not be to live ‘better’ but to live ‘well,’” as the Andean indigenous cultures declare. Thirdly, borrowing from the radical economics professor Michael Lebowitz, Harnecker says, socialism establishes a new “dialectic of production/distribution/consumption, based on: a) social ownership of the means of production, and b) social production organized by the workers in order to c) satisfy communal needs.” Fourthly, “socialism is guided by a new concept of efficiency that both respects nature and seeks human development.” Fifthly, there is a need for the “rational use of the available natural and human resources, thanks to a decentralized participatory planning process” that is the opposite of Soviet hyper-centralized bureaucratic planning.(1)

To construct a socialist utopia along these lines will be a long endeavor, taking decades and generations. Today different explorations, or counter-hegemonic processes, are at work throughout the hemisphere. As Arturo Escobar – a Colombian-American anthropologist known for his contribution to post-development theory– writes in ‘Latin America at a Crossroads’:
“Some argue that these processes might lead to a re-invention of socialism; for others, what is at stake is the dismantling of the neo-liberal policies of the past three decades – the end of the “the long neo-liberal night,” as the period is known in progressive circles in the region – or the formation of a South American (and anti-American) bloc. Others point at the potential for un nuevo comienzo (a new beginning) which might bring about a reinvention of democracy and development or, more radically still, the end of the predominance of liberal society of the past 200 years founded on private property and representative democracy. Socialismo del siglo XXI, pluri-nationality, interculturality, direct and substantive democracy, revolución ciudadana, endogenous development centered on the buen vivir of the people, territorial and cultural autonomy, and decolonial projects towards post-liberal societies are some of the concepts that seek to name the ongoing transformations.” (2)

Orlando Núñez, a leading Marxist theorist from Nicaragua, amplifies our understanding of the long transition to socialism with a more orthodox approach. Rejecting 21st century socialism as a concept to describe what is occurring in Latin America today, he asserts that the region is in a very preliminary phase of “transitioning to socialism in which we should not pretend we are constructing socialism.” Rather we are confronting neoliberalism and each country in Latin America is “facing different conditions.” He adds, “new flags are appearing in the social struggle against the dominant system that cannot be resolved by the logic of capitalism.” It is “a post-neoliberal or post-capitalist struggle” against woman's inequality and patriarchy, racial and ethnic discrimination, and the degradation of the environment. More fundamentally it is against “savage capitalism,” and “neo-colonialism,” both internally and externally. (3)

The Brazilian political scientist Emir Sader, in The New Mole: Paths of the Latin American Left, argues that the setback for socialism in the 20th century was so severe that it is still recuperating to this day. Socialism can be part of the agenda, but the priority must be on forming governments and political coalitions to dismantle neoliberalism, even if that means accepting the broader capitalist system for the time being.(4) This in part explains why the construction of socialism in the coming years and decades will be a diverse process – differing widely from country to country. There is no single definition or model--we are indeed witnessing, two, three, many transitions to socialism.

Part 2: Rise of the Social Movements and New Theories of Social Struggle

The origins of twenty-first century socialism are found in the wave of social movements led by peasants and indigenous organizations that swept the rural areas of Latin America as state socialism was collapsing. By the mid-1990s they had assumed the lead in challenging the neoliberal order, particularly in Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, and Brazil. These new organizations were generally more democratic and participatory than the class-based organizations that traditional Marxist political parties had set up in rural areas in previous decades. In general, they came to fill the gap left by a working class that was fragmented, disoriented, and dispersed due to the assault of neo-liberalism. With a broad range of interests and demands, including indigenous and environmental rights, these
new social movements transcended the modernist meta-narratives of both capitalism and
traditional socialism.

At the dawn of the new millennium, social struggles and popular rebellions irrupted
primarily in the cities that often overlapped with existing rural-based struggles. The
uprising in Buenos Aires and other major Argentine cities in late-December 2001, and the
popular rebellions in Quito, Ecuador in January, 2000 and then in April, 2005,
dramatically altered these countries histories. The urban organizations that participated in
these rebellions and mobilizations varied greatly, some with a distinct class basis and
others having a multi-class composition.

Post-Marxist philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri broke with classic Marxism
in their theoretical approach to the new social movements. In The Multitude they declare:
"Some of the basic traditional models of political activism, class struggle, and
revolutionary organization have today become outdated and useless." They add, "The
global recomposition of social classes, the hegemony of immaterial labor, and the forms
of decision-making based on network structures all radically change the conditions of any
revolutionary process ..." (5)

For Hardt and Negri, the Zapatista movement in Mexico—with its national and
international networking, democratic decision-making process, its horizontal forms of
organization, and its insistence on changing the world from the bottom up—is part of
what they call the multitude. Whereas older Marxist theories lumped all the groups
involved in global rebellion into one category called "the masses," the concept of "the
multitude" recognized the diversity of the groups involved. It also differs from the
classical Marxist belief that the industrial working class has to be the vanguard of any
revolutionary movement.

While Goan Therborn does not break as sharply with classical Marxism, in his article
"Class in the Twenty-First Century" in New Left Review, does see a new social and
geographic dynamic emerging that breaks with the twentieth century: “The red banner
has passed from Europe to Latin America, the only region of the world where socialism is
currently on the agenda, with governments in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia speaking
of ‘21st-century socialism’. Unlike the century past when the industrial working class
drove socialist politics, the new socialism “will find its base among workers and the
popular classes in all their diversity—the plebeians, rather than the proletariat.” He adds:
“The ‘socialism’ of Morales, Correa and Chávez is a new political phenomenon, which
stresses its independence from 20th-century Eurasian models of left-wing politics and is
itself quite heterogeneous.” (6)

Orlando Núñez takes a somewhat different tack in characterizing the current social and
economic struggles by using Karl Marx's concept of “freely organized associate
producers.” The term originally meant that the workers in a socialist society would run
the factories and work places as associate producers, setting the direction for the state and
the economy as a whole. Today Núñez argues that there is a “via asociativa hacia el
socialismo,” a path to socialism that is constructed by producers from below. (7)
Núñez points out that in most third world countries formal employment in large scale capitalist enterprises is being replaced and/or augmented by an ever increasing number of self-employed workers many of whom are part of what he calls “the popular economy.” It includes street vendors, micro-entrepreneurs, artisans, sellers in open air markets, fishermen, loggers, small farmers, bus and taxi cab owners, truckers and many more. This is the new proletariat that is being exploited in the realm of commerce and circulation. Most of its participants earn subsistence incomes as they sell their services and commodities in a market dominated and manipulated by big capital and transnational corporations.

Many in the popular economy become freely organized associate producers as they affiliate in credit and producer cooperatives, merchant and peasant associations, and transportation collectives. They pressure the government for resources and become conscious of their exploited role in society, demanding a more socialized state that provides universal education, health services, access to credit, etc. Núñez as well as radical theorists like Marcos Arruda of Brazil believe that a social solidarity economy is being constructed in Latin America in which networks of collaboration and equal exchange proliferate among the workers and independent producers at the base of the economy. (8)

Part 3: Contesting the State via Democratic Insurgencies

A groundbreaking perspective on how social forces and the popular movements maneuver and engage in a struggle for control of the state comes from Katu Arkonada and Alejandra Santillana in their 2011 article from *Le Monde Diplomatique*, "Ecuador and Bolivia: The State, the Government and the Popular Camp in Transition."

They assert that the state should be viewed as "an historic aspiration of the popular organizations and the indigenous peoples, and as a space open to political dispute." (9) In recent years the popular movements have sought to alter the state, to make it responsive to their interests and needs.

With the ascent of democratically elected new left governments, the contest over who will control the state is becoming even more intense. Arkonada and Santillana argue that "the construction of hegemony comes out of civil society," meaning that the "popular camp" in this period of transition is presenting its projects and interests, hoping to capture ever more space within the state. The popular forces will become hegemonic, they believe, as the state becomes an instrument of "collective interests," and "a universalizing political project."

A central question facing the popular forces is what type of democracy should be constructed. At present the political systems where the new left has come to power can be described as liberal in the classical sense. Broadly speaking, this liberal paradigm emerged with the philosophies of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. It consolidated in the eighteenth century with the American, French, and industrial revolutions, based on the
concepts of private property, representative democracy, individual rights, and the market as the organizing principle of the economy and social life. (10) With the rise of capital, the dominant economic interests have manipulated the state, resulting in controlled democracies where citizens are allowed to vote every few years for candidates that generally do not question the capitalist order or respond to the interests of the people. Today in Latin America there is growing disillusionment with this liberal form of government and representative democracy.

The popular forces are envisioning a democracy that is more substantive, integral, and participatory, starting at the local level. Like never before, communal self-rule is being embraced in Latin America. We see it taking hold in Bolivia’s indigenous communities and Mexico’s Zapatistas in the state of Chiapas. In 2006 the citizens of Oaxaca occupied the state capital and formed the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca that kept federal forces at bay for several months in a manner reminiscent of the Paris Commune of 1871. Over the past decade and a half, hundreds of Brazilian municipalities have launched participatory budgeting to engage local communities in the allocation of city funds. Venezuelan communities have founded over 40,000 neighborhood-organized communal councils. (11)

A central characteristic of the three countries in South America that have raised the banner of socialism is that they are deeply committed to democratic procedures. During the fourteen years of Hugo Chávez, starting with his first presidential election, there were sixteen national elections or referendums. Under Evo Morales there have been seven in seven years and during Rafael Correa’s six years in office eight elections and referendums have occurred.(12)

The commitment to democratic procedures means that twenty-first-century socialism in Latin America is tied to the electoral cycle. A likelihood exists that in Venezuela, Bolivia or Ecuador, the incumbent presidents or their designated successors will eventually be voted out of office. This will mark a new unpredictable phase in the struggle for socialism. Will the new non-socialist leaders seek to overturn the deep reforms of their more radical predecessors? Or will they have to accept many of the changes, particularly the social and economic reforms that have benefited the popular classes? Will new openly socialist candidates win back the presidential office in future elections? Given that Rafael Correa won a resounding reelection in 2013 and that Evo Morales will probably be victorious in 2014, the most immediate challenge is in Venezuela where President Nicolas Maduro is facing a renewed right wing offensive as the oligarchy moves to destroy the economy, using tactics and strategies reminiscent of those employed by the Chilean bourgeoisie and the CIA against the popular unity government of Salvador Allende (1970-73).

Part 4: Renovating Cuban Socialism

is important to discuss the trajectory of socialism in Cuba and its relationship to 21st century socialism. Aurelio Alonso, sub-director of the magazine *Casa de las Américas*, in
Havana, draws a distinction between socialism in the 21st century vs. socialism of the 21st century (socialismo en el siglo 21 vs. socialismo del siglo 21).

This difference in wording reflects the fact that the socialism being constructed in the rest of Latin America is unique to the new millennium whereas in Cuba it has a much longer trajectory. Alonso told me that “the 'punta de partida' (point of departure) is different for Cuba and the rest Latin America,” both in terms of time and politics: “The Cuban process today is an attempt to advance the socialism that triumphed in the 20th century while in Latin America at large the left is in a protracted struggle with the oligarchy to construct a new socialism of the 21st century.” (13) Socialism has very different protagonists and antagonists in each region. For Cuba the opposition is not the oligarchy, but the bureaucracy and elements within the Communist party that want to hold onto the old 20th century order with a centralized economy and an authoritarian state.

Cuba is also different from the Latin American continent in that its historic trajectory is related to the other surviving socialisms of the 20th century, particularly China and Vietnam. All three countries in their earlier stages adopted the Soviet model in one form or another with the centralization of their economies and state ownership of the means of production. The market played only a marginal role as the state set prices and issued five year plans to determine production goals.

The two Asian countries moved much earlier than Cuba to market economies; China beginning in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping with its “modernization” policies, and Vietnam in 1986 with its “renovation” program that it adopted in the face of widespread food shortages and famine. Both were largely rural societies at the time, and many of the early reforms were directed at the countryside and quickly succeeded in increasing agricultural production. Although only a quarter of the Cuban population is rural, the early economic reforms are aimed at unleashing agriculture by granting 10 hectare parcels in usufruct to small scale producers who sell a portion of their produce in the free market. And like China, the Cuban government is encouraging food processing and rural light manufacturing via municipal enterprises and cooperatives that also operate in the open market. Measures opening up the sales of houses and motor vehicles, along with the creation of 171 self employment categories, are designed to place many of the smaller enterprises and economic activities—ranging from taxis and barber shops to restaurants and produce vendors— in the hands of independent owners, merchants and producers who set their own market prices. (14)

China, Vietnam, and now Cuba share the belief that the market should not be identified exclusively with capitalism. The market functioned in feudal societies and it can help distribute resources in an efficient manner in a socialist economy. But free reign cannot be given to individuals to dominate and manipulate the market. The market place itself needs to be regulated.

The Cuban leadership does not express an official view point on the large scale accumulation of private capital and the emergence of a new bourgeoisie in China. However, Cuban academics and some party officials assert that their reform process will
be different from both the Chinese and Vietnamese experiences, because they are
“ Asiatic societies,” whereas Cuba is firmly rooted in the “Western tradition.” There are
critical differences in culture and history, perspectives on leadership, and the role of the
peasantry and the workers. Differences in geography and the size of the populations also
weigh heavily in determining what types of economic and political institutions evolve
under market socialism in each country. (15)

There are different schools of thought in Cuba on how to move the economy forward.
Camila Piñeiro Harnecker, in an essay titled “Visions of the Socialism That Guide
Present-Day Changes in Cuba,” describes three different visions: (a) a statist position,
largely reflecting the old guard, (b) a market socialist perspective, advanced by many
economists, and (c) an autogestionario, or self-management, stance that calls for
democratic and sustainable development primarily through the promotion of
cooperatives. (16)

The statists recognize that Cuba faces serious economic problems but argue that they can
be corrected through a more efficient state, not through a dismantling of the state. They
call for more discipline and greater efficiency among state industries and enterprises. A
loosening of state control, they contend, would result in greater disorganization and even
allow capitalist tendencies to emerge. This position points to the disaster that occurred in
the Soviet Union in the late 1980s after an attempt to end central control over state
enterprises.

The statist position is most deeply entrenched among midlevel bureaucrats and the party
cadre, who fear a loss of status and income with the end of direct control over Cuba’s
economy. Some heads of the Cuban military enterprises—which include food and
clothing factories, as well as hotels, farms, and telecommunication stores—also manifest
this tendency, although surprisingly many officers, including Raúl Castro, are in favor of
decentralization and a greater use of market mechanisms.

Those committed to a socialist market economy contend that only the market can unleash
Cuba’s productive forces. To increase productivity and efficiency, the state needs to grant
more autonomy to enterprises and allow competitive forces to drive the market. In the
short term, privatization is necessary, even if this means an increase in inequality, the
exploitation of wage workers, and environmental degradation. As the country develops,
the state can step in to level the differences and distribute the new surpluses to support
social programs.

The economists who argue for market socialism tend to be located in what is referred to
as academia—the research institutes and centers, many of which are affiliated with the
University of Havana. Academia looks to the Chinese and Vietnamese experiences,
particularly their appeal to foreign investment, although they believe that Cuba should do
a better job of controlling corruption. This position also finds support among state
technocrats and some managers who want to see their enterprises expand and become
more profitable as they are privatized. There is also significant support for the market
economy among self-employed and working people who feel that they can enjoy the
material prosperity of China or the Western world only through more individual initiative and private enterprise via the market.

The autogestionario position, which Piñeiro advocates, has a fundamentally different view from the economists over how to break with the old statist model. Instead of relying on competition and the market to advance productivity, the democratic socialist values of participation, association, and solidarity should be at the heart of the workplace and the new economy. Control should not come from the top down but from the bottom up, as workers engage in self-management to further their social and economic concerns. As Piñeiro writes, “The autogestionarios emphasize the necessity of promoting a socialist conscience, solidarity, and a revolutionary commitment to the historically marginalized.” These principles can be practiced in cooperatives and municipal enterprises, leading to increased consciousness and productivity in the workplace.

Piñeiro admits that support for the autogestionario position is less consolidated, coming from intellectuals, professionals, and those involved in the international debates over 21st-century socialism. One of the problems is that the old statist model used the terms participation, autonomy, and workers’ control to characterize the relations in the factories, enterprises, and cooperatives that operated poorly in Cuba, and this language has now fallen into disfavor. Today those who try to revive these terms are often seen as making a utopian attempt to resuscitate failed policies.

Ultimately, Piñeiro is optimistic, seeing “a new path for the nation.” It will be a hybrid composed of “a state socialism better organized, a market,” and “a truly democratic sector.”

While the debate within the government and the Cuban Communist Party over the direction of the economy is comprehensive, the leadership has made it clear that Cuba will remain a one party state. Here Cuba differs from the emerging socialist societies in the rest of Latin America that are committed to holding multiparty national elections. However, important changes are taking place within the political and state apparatus. With the demise of Fidel Castro and the limits of Raúl, who is now in his 80s, a new generation is coming to the fore that will act more collectively. Raul has announced he will be stepping down in 2018 and Miguel Diaz-Canal who is in his early fifties--with broad experience in the Communist party and the state, particularly at the provincial level--is Raul's apparent successor as the new vice-president. Legislation is being advanced in the National Assembly that limits all upper level government positions to two five-year terms. The National Assembly itself is also becoming more important as a center of debate and discussion over policies, while the election of delegates is more competitive than in the past.

**Part 5: Economic Challenge: Extractivism and Socialism in Latin America**

The Achilles heel of the counter-hegemonic and anti-systemic processes in South America is the difficulty of breaking with the old economic model.
The new left governments are heavily dependent on extractivist exports: petroleum in Venezuela, natural gas and minerals in Bolivia, petroleum and agricultural commodities in Ecuador.

The Uruguayan sociologist Raúl Zibechi argues that dependence on extractive exports means that countries like Bolivia and Ecuador are mired in a second phase of neoliberalism and have not escaped from dependent capitalist development. (17) But this criticism is too harsh and absolute.

The economies of Latin America have always been driven by extractive exports. To expect this to change in a decade or so is unrealistic, especially in a global system dominated by transnational capital. What we are witnessing in the short term is the determination of these countries to capture a much larger portion of the rents that come from exports and to use this revenue to expand social programs and to encourage endogenous development. Zibechi is tapping into the debate within the left over how to exploit these natural resources, with many indigenous and ecological organizations insisting that the earth should not be ravaged and that the environment needs to be respected.

In the sphere of international trade, the socialist oriented countries are promoting innovative policies. Venezuela and Cuba founded ALBA in 2004, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas, which encourages "fair trade" not free trade, and promotes integration through complementarity and solidarity. Bolivia joined in 2006 and later Nicaragua, Ecuador, and five Caribbean countries.

The exchange of Cuban medical personnel for Venezuelan oil is just one early example of the type of agreement reached under ALBA. Cuba and Venezuela have also collaborated under ALBA to provide literacy training to the peoples of other ALBA member countries, such as Bolivia. The key concept is to trade and exchange resources in those areas where each country has complementary strengths and to do so on the basis of fairness, rather than market-determined prices. (18)

Along with these state-level economic initiatives, a transformative and radical dialogue is taking place at the grassroots that may not be explicitly socialist but it is anti-systemic. Civil society and local movements are questioning the process of development itself because it harms the environment and is intricately linked to capitalism. Social movements and many of the new left governments have increasingly clashed with their governments over developmental projects. In Bolivia the dispute over a road that would link previously unconnected parts of the country, but which would bisect the TIPNIS Indigenous Territory and National Park, raised fundamental questions about issues of development, indigenous autonomy, and the rights of Mother Earth.

In Ecuador the social movements even after President Rafael Correa's resounding reelection in February, 2013 continue their criticism of his policies of exploiting the country’s petroleum and mineral resources at the expense of local communities. CONAIE, the major indigenous organization in Ecuador, is openly challenging Correa’s
developmentalist approach in mining, water rights, and the exploitation of oil reserves in one of the most biodiverse areas in the world.

Bolivian vice-president Alvaro García Linera puts a positive spin on these developments, asserting that these conflicts are inherent in a transformative process. The popular forces will have different factions that try to push their particular interests and visions of where they want the society to go. The vice-president calls these ‘creative tensions’ and even argues that they are essential for social and political progress to take place. (19)

Venezuela made significant advances during the eight years after Hugo Chavez' call for 21st century socialism at the World Social Forum in Brazil in early 2005. Later in that year he urged citizens to form communal councils. The Law of Communal Councils defined these councils as "instances for participation, articulation, and integration between the diverse community-based organizations, social groups and citizens, that allow the organized people to directly exercise the management of public policies and projects." To date over 40,000 communal councils have been formed. Cooperatives are also a major form of constructing socialism from below. Many factories are now administered by workers councils, particularly in the steel, aluminum and bauxite industries. Food distribution centers are also controlled by the workers. (20) The road to socialism, however is fraught with difficulties, as shortages and inflation have gripped the economy, undermining the stability of the government of Nicolas Maduro. Even Chavez acknowledged in his final days that Venezuela had by no means achieved a socialist utopia.

Part 6: Transitional Turbulence and the New Socialisms

This is a period of turbulence and transitions. It is not an age of armed revolution as was the century past.

Socialism in twenty-first-century Latin America is part of a complex process of change sweeping the region.

Cuba is striving to update its economy while on the South American continent the socialist banner is unfurling at very distinct paces. In Venezuela the quest for socialism is most advanced politically and economically while in Ecuador, although Rafael Correa proclaims he is undertaking a “citizens revolution” and is a twenty-first century socialist, his government has taken virtually no steps in the direction of a socialist economy. Bolivia occupies a middle ground in which innovative discussions are taking place within and between the government and social movements that relate socialism to the indigenous concept of buen vivir.

Socialism is making an appearance in other countries through a variety of social actors. In Chile the 2011 student rebellion ignited Chilean social movements, which are now rethinking the country’s socialist legacy. They have been instrumental in compelling the second presidency of Michelle Bachelet to call for a series of progressive reforms,
including a new constitution, that break with the neo-liberal agenda of her first term. In Brazil the MST, Movement of Landless Rural Workers, the largest social organization in the hemisphere, continues to espouse socialism in its platform and in the daily practices of its land reform settlements. It does not look to a paternalistic state, as demonstrated by its frequent criticism of the policies of President Lula da Silva when he held office 2003 to 2011. The MST seeks to maximize the participation of its own members in the running of their own cooperatives and communities.

While the wording is not explicitly socialist, the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador call for people to live in harmony with “Pachamama,” Mother Earth, and for buen vivir, or good living – a holistic cosmovision of the world where people strive for harmony. It is more than a hollow dream; it influences contemporary policies in opposition to capitalist development. For example, food sovereignty as it is conceived of in the Andean countries is adapted to buen vivir. It breaks with the traditional concept of development, asserting that food production should not be driven simply by the marketplace, especially the international market. Food sovereignty means that people have access to nutritious and sanitary foods that are produced at the community level by local producers in accordance with local needs and cultures, be they Andean or non-Andean. As Francisco Hidalgo Flor, an Ecuadorian sociologist, asserts in his October 2011 article ‘Land: food sovereignty and Buen Vivir,’ ‘the state has the responsibility to stimulate production … to provide support to small and medium scale producers,’ ensuring that they have adequate technical assistance and credit. (21) Land should be controlled or owned by those who work it. The promotion of cooperatives and a solidarity economy are part of the effort to construct a participatory society, be it in Brazil with the MST or in Bolivia with the indigenous communities.

Latin America is a cauldron of political and social ferment. There are no discernible laws of history driving this upheaval, but socialism is a central component of the brew that is being stirred up by the social movements and the popular forces. Rather than a lineal historic clash between capitalism and socialism that classic Marxism envisioned, we are now witnessing a plethora of struggles and confrontations that veer across the pages of history--between classic liberalism and post-liberal politics; extractivism and post-development; transnational agribusiness and food sovereignty; patriarchy and feminism; exclusionary educational systems and free democratic centers of learning; nation-states dominated by the descendants of the colonizers and the new plural-national states.

Francois Houtart, a leading organizer of the World Social Forum and the executive secretary of the World Forum of Alternatives, argues that it is not important whether we call this new project buen vivir, socialism of the twenty-first century or something else. What is important is that it is a “post-capitalist paradigm” that projects a new utopia. “We need it because capitalism destroys every utopia, it considers itself the end of history. If there is no utopia there are no alternatives.” (22)

A multiplicity of groups and movements are now imagining new utopias. ‘One world with room for many worlds,’ proclaim the Zapatistas. In the short term, twenty-first-century socialism could flounder or experience setbacks in any one of the countries in the
Americas where the socialist banner has been planted – Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, or less likely, Cuba. But it will not disappear. Socialism runs deep in the historic waters of the hemisphere, and the quest for a renovated socialism in Latin America offers hope to a world torn asunder by wars and economic crises.

Endnotes:


8. Also http://www.tni.org/users/marcos-arruda


12. Ibid., See Appendix: Nationwide Elections in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, pp. 159-60.


19. Álvaro Garcia Linera, Las Tensiones Creativas de la Revolución: la quinta fase del Proceso de Cambio (Vicepresidencia del Estado, 2010).


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