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Ecuador

Two projects confront each other once more

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We will not allow another October 19...Since the morning of Monday June 13, this has been the message from the Minister of the Interior, Patricio Carillo who, together with Fausto Cobo, the chief of intelligence, is a key piece in the government's repressive scheme.

Indigenous and popular mobilization and the state of emergency

Although in a more veiled tone, it is the same message from the Minister of Government, David Jimenez. It is also the cry from the business associations, from the banks and big media. After several days of silence Guillermo Lasso spoke of dialogue on Thursday 16 and on Saturday 18 he declared a state of emergency in the provinces of Imbabura, Pichincha and Cotopaxi, where the indigenous and popular mobilizations have been the strongest this week.

For several days social mobilization has been growing in Quito and on Friday afternoon it reached its highest level. The map of mobilizations in Quito lays bare the situation: they are the poorest peripheral neighborhoods in the south of the city and the social periphery of the north and the valleys, together with the center of the city, where the indigenous mobilizations and the presence of the urban poor has been stronger; as they were in October 2019. There have been no mobilizations directed towards the National Assembly, the objective of the protest is clearly the Executive Power and the figure of the banker Guillermo Lasso.

The declaration of the State of Emergency raises the level of confrontation from the Government, and is the response to CONAIE's announcement: yes to dialogue but without neglecting mobilization and with results.

The “Indigenous Narco-Conspiracy”

For the government, the businessmen, the chorus from the right-wing media, the political right that includes broad sectors of increasingly reactionary and racist middle classes, and that deep and dark State of the security services, the indigenous and popular mobilizations are seen within the framework of a macro conspiracy: it is correísmo [1], in conjunction with organized crime, who are trying to bring down Lasso; the indigenous movement is their tool for this purpose. That is the meaning of the statements on Friday the 17th from Bogotá to the Teleamazonas newsagency by María Paula Romo, former Minister of Government under Lenin Moreno, who was pointed out in the report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights as the main person responsible for the harsh repression of October 2019. In this explanatory framework, the message resonates that we need to work to get out of the economic crisis, whilst social struggle is disqualified as vandalism and barbarism.

The two options of the banker

There are two options. The first is to increase repression. Along these lines, the first big mistake was the arrest of the President of CONAIE on the night of Monday the 13th, which, in the best style of how Lasso's performance as President has been, was like shooting himself in the foot as it only served to accelerate the incorporation of new

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indigenous sectors, social organizations and popular sectors into the mobilizations. A second measure has been the immediate incorporation of the army against the mobilizations, although they are still in the second row behind the elite police troops. Like many similar bodies in Latin America, the Ecuadorian police have been advised by the Israeli government and, since the beginning of the mobilizations, they have used fast-moving motorized cavalry along with rubber bullets against the demonstrators. The third measure is the imposition of the State of Emergency and the announcement of the increasing, even lethal, use of force.

The State of Emergency entails the Metropolitan District of Quito being declared a security area under the control of the Armed Forces, a curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., the abolition of the inviolability of the home and the prohibition of public demonstrations and mobilizations. Guillermo Lasso thus takes refuge in the state apparatus.

The second path is the adoption of immediate measures, no longer repeating a dialogue without results in order to buy time as well as dilute social discontent. Only one measure has been announced by the government: the price control of essential products, however only intermediaries have been accused of speculation. But it has not been said which products will be controlled, whilst among those products that have risen the most, in addition to flour, is cooking oil at manufacturer prices, not intermediary prices. The oil sector, both palm growers and refiners, as well as agribusiness as a whole, are among those that have benefited most from Lasso's liberal policies.

These immediate measures have to do with the price of fuel; the extraordinary profits of financial capital that were maintained during the pandemic, drowning small and medium-sized bank debtors; the advance of mining on indigenous territories, which increased during the pandemic; the demands for fair prices by the producers of corn, bananas and rice, who are also drowned out by the banks and big capital; the supply of medicines for public hospitals; the increase in budgets for education that have been reduced since the end of Correa's mandate; a favorable and immediate line of credit for the popular and peasant economy.

That programme meets the demands of the majority of the population, but it is not Guillermo Lasso's. There are many voices that have long pointed out that this is possible, that it could be done with a change in the policy of submission to the IMF and by reducing the enormous rates of profit of big agribusiness, the big telephone companies and finance capital.

It means changing course, abandoning the dogma of neoliberalism and betting on another economic plan, and refusing to represent finance capital.

Two projects for the country

Conspiracy theories about what is happening in Ecuador crash into reality. None of the huge problems that were present in the great social outbreak of October 19, in which very broad popular sectors that were not part of the indigenous movement were mobilized, have worsened after two years of pandemic and one year of neoliberal government.

There is a project for a country of the majority, which in various ways organizes itself, expresses itself and resists. Then there is a country project of the great business elites, constantly plundering others and constantly failing. It is that of the sucretization of the businessmen's debt in 1982 and that of electoral fraud; of the Washington Consensus and of the bank holiday; of extractivism and the dictatorship of financial capital. [\[2\]](#)

The data presented by academic institutions, official bodies and social organizations are in plain view and show the

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confrontation between the two projects for the country: the country of capital accumulation through the dispossession of community territories, of the assets of small owners, and of the wages of the workers, the country of the order of savage capitalism; the other, a country based on the interests of the majority, on social and environmental justice, on the expansion and deepening of democracy, on the redistribution of wealth, a Plurinational and multicultural Ecuador.

On one side is the defense of the health of macroeconomic indicators, compliance with agreements with the IMF and international banks, and the increase in profit rates as an almost religious mandate; waste and luxury. On the other side, an immense and growing urban and rural poverty, the growth of homelessness, malnutrition, anguish and migration.

A statement by the University Council of the Central University of Ecuador on June 14 sets out the dimensions of the serious situation we are going through. There they state:

The recovery of macroeconomic indicators has not been reflected in an improvement of employment rates or in the standard of living of Ecuadorians, especially in rural areas. As of December 2021, according to the National Institute of Statistics and the Census (INEC), 4 out of 10 Ecuadorians in rural areas are poor and two out of 10 Ecuadorians are in extreme poverty. A situation that could be aggravated by the international context and the lack of appropriate government policy.

On the situation of higher education and public health, it added:

Public education at all levels has been affected by a sustained reduction in the budget, especially since 2019. Basic and secondary public education suffered a budget cut of 911 million dollars between 2019 and 2020 (source Ministry of Finance). Public higher education reductions totalled 326 million dollars in these years. In health, the reduction in 2020 was 227 million (source Ministry of Finance). The trend has not been corrected by the current government.

A government policy that favours resources obtained from increases in oil revenue and tax collection, in order to reduce the fiscal deficit and strengthen the international monetary reserve, is questioned.

The declaration of a state of emergency as a preamble to a possible dialogue aggravates the situation. With this, Guillermo Lasso has drawn a dividing line between the social organizations and the government, increasing tension even further, and has summoned the political class itself, which, in general, has been very harsh in its questioning of the presidential action: they are with me, or they are with me... It is a very high stake for such a weak government.

The State of Emergency and the increase in repression may yet be able to contain social struggle, but only for now. As long as the social organizations do not suffer a strategic political defeat that dismantles them, and as long as the causes of social discontent remain alive, the struggle will persist. The neoliberal programme, under way since the return to democracy, could only be imposed through an openly authoritarian and right-wing regime.

*Translated by David Fagan for **International Viewpoint**.*

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[1] Correísmo refers to the various forces that developed during and after the term of sometime populist Rafael Correa as President of Ecuador from 2007-2017.

[2] "Sucretization" determined that, as of 1983, most of the external debt of the private sector became indiscriminately public sector debt, that is, of the whole society.