

# *The Left must seize the moment with a comprehensive proposal for people's socialism*

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The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates the inadequacy of the national health care systems of the world as well as the insufficient voice of scientists in influencing social policies. As a result, Covid-19 could be the death blow to neoliberalism, which weakened states in order to increase profits and speculation, leaving such matters as health, education, and the development of a comprehensive approach to scientific knowledge unattended.

It is likely that many will advocate a return to social democracy, which was the prevailing form of Western representative democracies from 1933 to 1979. However, social democracy was disbanded because historic conditions made it no longer sustainable, and it is not today a viable option. When we look at social democracy in the context of the world-economy, we see that that the higher standing of living in the

core, resulting both from higher wages and state-funded social programs, was made possible by unequal exchange with the periphery and semi-periphery zones of the world economy. In other words, the higher standard of living in the North was funded by the superexploitation of labor in the South, making raw materials cheap. In addition, the economic development of the core was enabled by its access to markets for its surplus manufactured goods in semi-peripheral and peripheral zones, as a result of the control by the global powers of the political-economy of the world-system. Social democracy, therefore, was possible in the context of a particular phase in the development of the world-system.

The modern world-economy could attain economic expansion and a degree of political stability as long as the system could continue to expand geographically. But when it reached the geographical limits of the earth, its primary motor for economic expansion was taken away. The costs of the system became too great. The high level of profits for the corporate elite, the relatively high standard of living of the working and middle classes of the core, and modest concessions to states in semi-peripheral and peripheral zones could not be maintained. And this occurred precisely when the colonized peoples had reached a zenith in their political power, increasingly demanding a different kind of international economic order. When these dynamics were combined with the stagflation of the 1970s, the global elite turned to the neoliberal project, beginning in 1980, reducing the role of the state, creating more possibilities for profits and financial speculation, and less possibilities for protecting human needs, such as health, education, nutrition, housing, and transportation. Such a global political agenda generates resistance and global conflicts, deepening the inattention to fundamental human needs, the results of which we see today, with climate change, wars, uncontrolled international migration, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The colonial foundation of the modern world always has been denied in the North, but it is the key to understanding why social democracy is no longer possible. Social democracy was a product of colonialism, and once colonialism encountered obstacles, because all lands and peoples had been conquered and because the colonized arrived to new capacities for resistance, the global elite became more aggressive, abandoning social democracy for neoliberalism.

The historic moment calls not for a return to social democracy, but for a turn to socialism. With both social democracy and neoliberalism having reached their limits, the Left must seize the moment with a comprehensive proposal for people's socialism. Popular consciousness, of course, is full of misconceptions of the meaning of socialism, which are not based on actual observation of the characteristics of the nations that have lifted the socialist banner, such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, as well as Chile, Ecuador, and Bolivia, prior to the fall of these socialist projects before U.S.-supported coups d'état.

In observing these actual examples of socialism, we see that the essence of socialism is not state ownership of economic enterprises nor the control of the state over the individual, but rather, the collective control of the state by the people, in which there are established structures to ensure that the delegates and deputies of the people, rather than representatives of the corporate elite, have control of the state. There is in this regard a tremendous game played by the representative democracies, where representatives are elected by the people, but the candidates are limited to those who have considerable financial support, and they are obligated to represent the interests of those who finance their political careers. In representative democracies, politicians develop a rhetoric that pretends to represent the interests of the people while in fact they support the interests of wealthy campaign contributors, thus giving rise to cynicism and new forms of fascism among the people. An example of an alternative to this electoral farce is found in Cuba, where candidates that emerge from neighborhood nomination assemblies are elected as delegates of the people, who in turn elect the deputies of the National Assembly of People's Power, the highest constitutional and legal authority of the nation, which elects the executive branch of government.

Societies in which the political process is controlled by the people's delegates and deputies develop common-sense intelligence with respect to the role of the state in the economy. They have a practical

need for the economy to work well, and they are freed from the ideological distortions generated by a privileged class that has a particular interest in a reduced role of the state. Armed with their accumulated common-sense intelligence, one can see that in modern nations, states must play a role in formulating, coordinating, and regulating a national plan for economic development. Generally, such state-formulated national plans include the state as owner of the principal economic enterprises in strategic industries, but in all socialist societies other forms of property have existed, including national private property, foreign private property, cooperatives, and joint ventures with foreign property. So, socialist economies tend to be state controlled mixed economies, with the amount of space allowed for each form of property depending on the conditions in each country, as interpreted by the deputies of the people.

Capitalism thrives on ahistorical consciousness, so the Left must formulate in each of the nations a manifesto that explains key dynamics in the history of the nation, placing them in the context of universal world history. This includes such themes as the role of conquest in human history, giving rise to the great empires and civilizations; the role of modern conquest and colonialism, giving rise to the capitalist world-economy and the modern world system; the emergence of anti-colonial social movements, giving rise to a transition to neocolonialism; the emergence of anti-neocolonial movements, giving rise to neoliberalism; the emergence of anti-neoliberal movements, giving rise to new wars of aggression and new forms of imperialism; and the persistence of dignified alternative socialist projects in the world today.

Based on the actual observation of the socialist projects of the world, the Left should explain the characteristics of socialism to the people. In addition to a state controlled by the delegates and deputies of the people that formulates a plan for the economic development of the nation, other principles include: respect for the sovereignty of nations, in opposition to the practice of imperialism by the global powers; cooperation among nations and solidarity among peoples; the protection of the social and economic rights of the people with respect to health, education, housing, and nutrition, through the implementation of necessary programs and interventions in the economy by the state; expansion of public ownership of the media, necessary as a result of the evident ideological distortions disseminated by corporate controlled media; gender equality; and ecologically sustainable forms of production and distribution. In addition, socialism involves a philosophical reorientation to human life, in which the good life is not defined by the possession of things, but by making a meaningful contribution to the common good.

The Left must explain to the people that the present historic moment demonstrates the need for a transformation from a world-system based in conquest, domination, and superexploitation to an alternative world-system characterized by cooperation and mutually beneficial trade among nations; and that this is not an idealist vision, because such an alternative world-system is being constructed in practice by China, Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, among others. The alternative world that is emerging is there for all of us to see, if we were to take a moment to observe it.

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