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Ecuador

The caudillo and the class struggle

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Former army colonel Lucio Gutiérrez was elected as president of Ecuador on November 24, 2002. The following statement was adopted by the Corriente Democracia Socialista (Ecuadorian section of the Fourth International) following the first round of the elections on October 20, 2002.

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Lucio Gutiérrez

The triumph of Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez in the elections of October 20, 2002 has placed at the forefront the demands for which the popular movement has been fighting in recent decades.

1 The candidacy of Gutiérrez has been sustained by three political forces: his own party, the Sociedad Patriótica 21 de Enero (January 21 Patriotic Society) made up fundamentally of rank and file soldiers and non-serving officers, in alliance with the Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutic Nuevo país [Pachakutic Movement of Plurinational Unity New country] and supported by the Movimiento Popular Democrático [Democratic Popular Movement]. The most important forces of the popular movement also endorsed this candidacy: CONAIE, FENOCIN, CEOLS, UNE, Seguro Campesino. This allowed a united front electoral force to be constituted in this first round.

2 This political and social support confers a clear class character on the vote for Gutiérrez - his votes came from workers, farmers, Indians, small retailers, retired soldiers, craftsmen, teachers, students in universities and schools, employees, small proprietors in the countryside and the city, in sum, from the length and breadth of the world of work.

3 This electoral United Front is socially and politically dispersed, it lacks a revolutionary and popular leadership, it does not have a single political leadership, is not hegemonised by indigenous peoples or workers but is under the leadership of a military caudillo who affirms that he has no other ideology than his military training, and therefore who is located in a tradition of popular democratic nationalism

4 The most important decisions taken by the leadership of the Patriotic Society are presided over by Lucio Gutiérrez, with his advisers on image and close allies. This gives the electoral movement a hierarchical, none too democratic character and limits its possibilities of consolidation as a mass political movement with a democratic and revolutionary perspective of greater reach.

5 The electoral Program highlights as central elements production as opposed to corrupt banks, honest industrialists against the dishonest ones, and questions corruption and the system of political parties. But it does not touch on crucial questions like the FTAA and the foreign debt.

6 The vote for Lucio Gutiérrez expresses a broad amalgam of interests and feelings that are a clear rejection by the people of the traditional political system it holds responsible for crisis and corruption; the vote is also a reflection of the crisis in Argentina with the collapse of neo-liberal policies and the popular demand of 'out with the lot of them', the Venezuelan crisis and the rise of the popular movement in Brazil, Peru and Bolivia. Also it is an echo of the concern of the population about Plan Colombia. In this way, the electoral result reflects the range of resistance and the yearning for a life different from that being imposed by the ferocious dictatorship of financial capital.

7 In this sense, this democratic vote continues the democratic struggles which emerged from the victory of the 'No' camp in the plebiscite on privatization and political reform called by the government of Durán Ballén; the growth of

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Pachakutic; the overthrow of the government of Abdalá Bucarám in February 1997; the fight for the Constituent Assembly in 1998; the uprising and overthrow of the Mahuad government in January 2000.

8 The vote for Gutiérrez also expresses a vision of power of a layer of popular and indigenous leaders that does not follow in an unrestricted way a military caudillo but which sees in the conjuncture a possibility of power expressed in the phrase 'there are possibilities with Lucio'. This draws into the electoral struggle a range of participants and sentiments that have been maturing for more than a decade since the indigenous uprising of 1990.

9 The unsatisfied demands and the oppression of an economic crisis deepened by the imposition of almost three years of the dollarised economy are a very important component in the electoral support for Lucio Gutiérrez. This set of immediate questions are raised: house, prices, credit, jobs and fundamental necessities of the indigenous movement and farmer like the defence of the plateaus, water and the fight for land.

10 The influence and authority that the military maintain in Ecuadorian society has been capitalized on electorally by Gutiérrez. Nationalism is a significant ingredient in the consciousness of important sectors of a population that yearns for a strong leadership.

11 This was a vote of indignation, a vote against the conditions of life, a vote of anger against the political system. It reflects the radicalization of important sectors of urban and rural youth who are entering for the first time in the political life of the country.

12 It is important to note that Gutiérrez, in spite of a significant vote in the most important cities, had greatest support in the peripheral areas of the country and especially in the mountainous central provinces where the indigenous peasantry is strong, and in Amazonia.

13 We have witnessed an encounter between the spontaneous conscience of the masses and the organized sectors. The challenge is raised of how to deepen it, to develop it and to give it continuity in a situation of crisis, aggravated by the policy of the government of Gustavo Noboa and the ever greater social cost of dollarisation for an economy that incessantly buys more and sells less, that lacks internal and external productive investment and that maintains an increasing inflation and fiscal difficulties.

14 The elections have already appeared as a political and class confrontation in the first round. This character will be much more evident in the second.

15 Most of the traditional political forces have declared their independence from the two candidacies. It is said that neither of the two candidates could last in government for more than a few months, that there will be an increased regional confrontation between the coast and the mountains. Beyond the consciousness of Gutiérrez himself there is a confrontation between the dictatorship of financial capital and the big exporters and importers who are trying to impose a neo-liberal free enterprise program, and the rest of the Ecuadorian society. This is clear in spite of the moderation of Gutiérrez's discourse and his call to seek consensus. A more acute class confrontation is opening for which the popular movement is not prepared properly, neither in its base nor in its leadership. But neither can the bourgeoisie count on a national party that can articulate its demands.

16 Niches of resistance have been opened that will persist in the immediate future whatever the electoral result. The organized sectors are not going to be captives of a possible Gutiérrez government and are going to confront a presidency of Alvaro Noboa. It means we are going to witness a reactivation of the popular movement. In this struggle the possibility will exist of recreating and of extending a popular and revolutionary program

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17 Our task must connect with the level of present consciousness and advance it, link immediate and present demands with those that question the heart of exploitation, domination and oppression.

18 The more advanced sectors must insert themselves in the struggle for electoral victory without resigning their independence and contribute their own program, which cannot be left aside under the criterion of the search for consensus. The central elements of this program are those that allow an extension of democracy from the popular sectors; that confront the FTAA, Plan Colombia, the dictatorship of financial capital and neo-liberal policies; that place in the centre demands for the end of structural adjustment, the non-payment of the external debt, the closing of the US military base at Manta; along with this the struggle for water, land and natural resources.

Quito, October 22, 2002