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news

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At the beginning of April, the Ecuadorian armed forces stormed the Mexican embassy in order to arrest Jorge Glas, the former vice-president of the reformist president Rafael Correa [1]. This event was presented by the international media as an excessive measure in the midst of an escalating war against drug gangs, despite the fact that the former vice president has not been accused of drug-related crimes. Of course, the case against Glas and the increase in violence in Ecuador are not random events; they have deep causes and raise some suspicions about the character of the current president, Daniel Noboa.

Rafael Correa was president of Ecuador from 2007 to 2017. He was originally an economist and consultant who espoused 'Christian left' ideas in opposition to Marxist-inspired reformism. His government's policies focused on reducing poverty, building infrastructure, renegotiating oil contracts and opposing US intervention and military presence. Although he enjoyed broad popular support, the monopoly press was one of his main opponents [2]. He also had acute conflicts with school teachers and indigenous communities.

After Correa, his last vice-president, Lenin Moreno, was elected president of the country. Although he came from the same party, Moreno tried to reconcile with the traditional bourgeoisie by moderating his reformist tone and promoting a referendum to reverse most of his predecessor's policies. Among the most eloquent policies of Moreno's government were the abolition of real estate regulations, the abolition of labour benefits and guarantees, the privatisation of electronic finance, and the expulsion of popular organisations from the Council for Citizen Participation and Social Control (a state auditing body) [3]. Moreno also tried to reconcile Ecuador with the USA by handing over Julian Assange to the British authorities to be extradited to the USA, after being protected by the Ecuadorian embassy in London for several years.

Then, in 2021, Guillermo Lasso, a conservative banker, became Ecuador's president. Lasso first accused Moreno of being too soft on the Correa supporters, and then he increased the violent repression against protesters and the liberal policies of Moreno [4]. It's telling that all three presidents have branded the indigenous and peasant anti-oil movements as terrorists and drug criminals [4]. In this respect, Lasso was just another step on the ladder of increasing state violence against the workers. In the middle of his term, Lasso provoked a human rights crisis with his violent response to protests [5] and was about to be impeached by parliament for authorising a fraudulent oil transport contract [6]. In order to avoid impeachment, he dissolved the National Assembly so that new presidential and legislative elections could be scheduled to elect a transitional government and parliament for the remaining two years [6].

The presidential elections last October were won by Daniel Noboa, the son of one of the country's largest banana exporters [7]. The elections were heavily influenced by the assassination of one of the candidates by one of the country's largest drug gangs [8], and soon after Noboa took office these gangs took control of several prisons and attacked hospitals, universities and a national television station. Noboa's first response to the crisis was to declare a state of emergency, but a key sign of one of the aims of this action is his accusation against Correa of being responsible for the creation of drug trafficking groups [9].

The banana sector is the most involved in cocaine trafficking, with around a quarter of all shipments having been inspected and found to contain the drug [7]. Knowing this, it's not surprising that the city of Guayaquil, the main banana shipping port, is now the epicentre of gang violence [8]. It's only natural, then, to be suspicious of the true intentions of Noboa's militarisation of the country. As in other countries, organised crime has forged close partnerships with the monopolists and other layers of the capitalist class; they depend on each other for logistics and funding, and the supposed hostility of the capitalist state to the mafia is only a pretext for mass repression.

It is in this context that we should analyse the arrest of Jorge Glas. Rafael Correa and many of his officials have been accused of corruption, while the supporters of this liberal reformist proposal have been brutally persecuted by the state, including illegal arrests, torture and the use of live ammunition against their mass protests. The monopoly media, as it did during the Correa government, supports this persecution, accusing the protesters and alternative media organisations of attempting a coup d'état [10]. Despite this, the reformist movement remains popular among the masses and is the largest party in parliament with 48 out of 137 seats [11]. Given the accusations of complicity with the gangs against Correa, the reasons for the attack on the embassy are clear, and it's obvious that the repressive campaign is not only directed against Correa supporters but against the entire opposition.

This shows us some basic facts about how politics works in liberal republics and, consequently, how we, the communists, should develop our struggle in this context. First, the moderate character of the Correist movement and project isn't a guarantee against violent persecution. Monopoly capital, whether nationalist or subordinated to a foreign imperialist centre, would impose its interests through state violence and crush any opposition in its way, no matter how moderate it might be. What is more, getting into government and keeping it for many years in no way guarantees the continuity of the reforms; just when they become an obstacle for the big bourgeoisie, they are reversed by all means. Secondly, the desperate situation of the working masses is the main resource of reformism; they want to remain popular with small improvements that don't touch the causes of the impoverishment of the working masses. This popularity allows the petty bourgeoisie and small capitalists to use their working-class supporters as cannon fodder in their struggle to oust the established big capitals. Only with an independent class organisation would we save our class from being sacrificed under the banner of changing the faces of its oppressors. Only by fighting for our own interests in the building of socialism could we guarantee long-term, meaningful improvements in our lives, which would then be truly ours.

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