

Preface to the English Edition

It is a challenge to write a book that deals with current-day events. The first version of this work was presented to Ocean Press in February 2005, when George W. Bush's first term in office as president of the United States had just concluded; this appeared to be a reasonable cut-off date. While the text was being edited and translated into English, protest movements emerged that led to the resignation of presidents Lucio Gutiérrez in Ecuador and Carlos Mesa in Bolivia. The author and the publishing house agreed that these developments justified postponing the publication of the book in order to include them in our analysis, and with this in mind, the closing date for the first edition in Spanish was extended to June 2005.

Although the leading role played by Evo Morales in the social and political struggles in Bolivia is well known, and even though in June 2005 his campaign for the presidential elections of December of that year was fully underway, at that time it was impossible to foresee if Morales would be able to overcome the obstacles that US imperialism and Bolivian right-wing forces would place in his path. Fortunately, Evo overcame all obstacles, and his election as president of Bolivia posed the need to rewrite for the second time — in this case for the edition of this book in English — the two final chapters. This was due not only to the significance of these developments, but also because they contributed new elements to the general analysis.

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Until Evo's victory, the Bolivarian revolution appeared as a kind of historical accident, attributable to the exceptional intensification of the political and social crisis in Venezuela. This not only prevented imperialism and its local allies from blocking Hugo Chávez's victory in the 1998 elections, but also from thwarting the approval of a new constitution, the reform of the country's political and electoral system, the development of the social missions, and other structural transformations that have broken with the status quo of the system of continental domination. Until that moment, the efforts of Lula [in Brazil] and Tabaré [in Uruguay] to expand their respective governmental coalitions with center parties and their adherence to the policy of "democratic governance," gave the impression that this is what could be expected as the left political alternative in Latin America in the short and medium term. But, without resorting to generalizations, it is obvious that Evo's election more closely resembles the experience of Chávez than that of Lula and Tabaré, in the sense that it represents a break with the canons of "democratic governance." This development demonstrated that the Venezuelan experience was not exceptional, and that the differences between the governments of Chávez and Evo on the one hand and those of Lula and Tabaré on the other, correspond to the degree of intensification of the political, economic, and social crisis in which those electoral victories took place, a crisis which is much greater in the Andean region than in the Southern Cone.

In paying more attention to the sub-regional scenarios, not only do the features of the capitalist crisis in each of them stand out, but also the differentiated response of US imperialism, which has openly interfered in the electoral processes to try to prevent the victories of the left presidential candidates in the Andean sub-region, as well as in Central America, but has adopted a tolerant attitude in the Southern Cone. It should also be noted that it is not possible to speak only of a Central American sub-regional

scenario, but of a panorama for the entire Caribbean basin. Indeed, although this book does not include an analysis of the English, French, and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries, it is impossible not to mention the most flagrant violation of the sovereignty of a nation in the hemisphere since the US invasion of Panama in 1989, namely, the forced resignation of Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his dispatch to Africa, carried out by Washington's military forces in February 2004.

Barely a month after Evo Morales's victory at the polls new developments arose. These events involved the attempt to rob René Preval of his victory in the Haitian presidential election held on February 7, 2006, and the popular protests that frustrated this maneuver. This action by the Bush administration allows us to speak not only of differentiated sub-regional scenarios, in which imperialism more nakedly violates its own policy of the "defense of democracy," but also of the failure of the attempt to reform the system of continental domination initiated by President George H. Bush (from 1989 to 1993).

Historically, US imperialism has employed a supposed code of ethics, based on the "defense of democracy," to cover up or justify its interference and intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean. In accordance with that code, the US rulers classify as democratic the political forces that represent or bend to their interests, and brand as antidemocratic those they consider their adversaries. This double standard reached a new level during the Cold War, when "the threat of communism" was invoked as a pretext to impose the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (the Río Treaty) in 1947; a year later, the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS) was accompanied by the promotion of military dictatorships that served Washington and the US monopolies. The "defense of democracy" was also the argument used to justify the US invasion that overthrew Jacobo Árbenz's government in Guatemala (1954), and which, in turn,

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served to secure the right of the White House to interfere in the inter-American system.

Following the victory of the Cuban revolution (1959) and the subsequent rise of nationalist, democratic, popular, and revolutionary struggles in Latin America and the Caribbean, US imperialism reaffirmed the right to interfere in the region through the sanctions adopted against Cuba in the eighth Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the OAS held in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in 1962. However, given that the policy of aggression, blockade, and isolation against Cuba did not destroy the revolution or eliminate its example, US President Lyndon Johnson felt obliged to renounce, publicly and formally, the “defense of democracy” policy. The Johnson Doctrine proclaimed that the United States preferred to have secure allies rather than democratic neighbors. This policy was implemented in 1964, when the US government supported the coup d’état that overthrew Brazilian president Joao Goulart and created the prototype of military dictatorship based on “national security” considerations that devastated Latin America from that time up until 1989. During the intervening 25 years, military dictatorships imprisoned, murdered, “disappeared,” tortured, and sent into exile tens of thousands of Latin American men and women. It was not until imperialism had accomplished its objective of annihilating an entire generation of left-wing activists in order to establish the basis for neoliberal reform that Washington decided to renounce its tyrants, denying all responsibility for their crimes, and resuming its hypocritical stance of support for democracy and human rights, with a view to using it against the left and restricting its activity.

Amid the terminal crisis of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist bloc, US imperialism, through the military invasion of Panama in December 1989 and the dirty war that led to the “electoral defeat” of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in February 1990, liquidated the last supposed threats to its “national

security” in continental Latin America. It also accelerated the agreed-upon dismantling of Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship, the last remaining military dictatorship in the region, in order to give the Chilean “neoliberal miracle” a democratic face to make it an attractive model for the rest of the Latin American and Caribbean bourgeoisies. It was in this context that in 1991 George H. Bush imposed the defense of representative democracy as the political pillar of the reform of the inter-American system, which had fallen apart as a result of Reagan’s strong-arm policy.

Under the conditions of the then burgeoning “New World Order,” US imperialism thought it could impose a system of transnational domination on Latin America and the Caribbean based on the schema of “democratic governance,” which would allow it to expand and deepen its control over the region without utilizing the historical mechanisms of interference and intervention — such as military invasions, coups d’état, fraud, military dictatorships, murder, torture, etc. — which were so abused and so expensive for the United States in terms of international public opinion. Nevertheless, as we argue in this book, the domination intensified the crisis; the crisis stimulated the rise of popular struggles; and the popular struggles led to the search for left political alternatives. And this chain reaction, which occurred over and over again, forced imperialism to remove the kid gloves of “democratic governance” and resort again (or continue resorting) to the same open interference and intervention that it has practiced since time immemorial. This is the essential core of the failure of the current system of domination, and something that is much clearer today than when the first Spanish-language edition of this book was published.

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