

A letter from Colombia on the national strike

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I have not written to you for a long time, but I need an urgent favor: that you find out what is happening in my country, Colombia, and that you tell your neighbors. I don't know what it's for, but please do. It's about the national strike.

Here, on this side of the sea, all the bad numbers have skyrocketed. There are 21 million people poor; the pandemic has been treated in the worst way; and peace, that which you supported, is mortally wounded more than 270 of the signers have been assassinated.

The issues of this unfulfilled agreement continue to be our daily pain: agrarian policy, lack of political participation, violence against millions of people, the absence of social justice and drug trafficking, which is what we are most known for out there, and what fuels a corrupt class that remains in power.

I think you remember; Colombia has been in war for decades; it is one of the longest armed conflicts in the world. Here they have killed many people, hundreds of thousands, in addition, they have displaced several million and have even murdered civilians to make them look like guerrillas, of the latter there were at least 6,402 during the Uribe government. 6,402!

The most moderate numbers speak of more than 85 thousand disappeared; In other words, if we added the cruelest dictatorships in Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, we would beat them in number and level of brutality.

The pandemic didn't work to unite us. Here, as in other parts of the world, the rich are richer and the poor are poorer. The health system can't offer justice because it is following a market logic.

Just look! In November 2019 we took to the streets against the current government and there were at least 3 dead, hundreds of injured, and a lot of pain, but we woke up as a country. The optimism, the "cacerolazos" (banging on pots and pans), the creativity, the music, the protest, then led us to carry out a national strike to say NO MORE to a government that increased once more time the taxes against the poor.

As far as I remember, in Colombia, we had never had a national "cacerolazo" or a protest with so many people taking to the streets, but then Christmas came, a waiting time and finally the covid-19 arrived.

Since 2019: from strike to strike

The pandemic showed the worst of the Government: police abuses, lack of economic aid for poor people, prioritization of support for banks, obstacles to access health services, and a great amount of pain in the poorest neighborhoods of many cities.

People began to set up red rags in their windows, to indicate that they were already without food, and during such drama, the police beat a lawyer to death in Bogotá. This event served as a trigger for a social outbreak.

I tell you that between September 9 and 10, 2020, people burned dozens of police stations (which we call here CAI) and it wasn't in a vandalism plan or an urban guerrilla action. They were people tired of abuse, mistreatment, and disrespect by the police, which in turn symbolized the abuse, mistreatment, and disrespect of the elites towards poor people. In those events, there were 13 dead and more than 400 injured.

Now, on April 28, 2021, we returned to the streets because the Government has tried to introduce us third tax reform, to continue squeezing us, taking away from the poorest the little they have with the excuse of the pandemic and without impact to those who have almost everything. But the people were not listened to, but busted, beaten, outraged, and raped.

Every moment, videos come to me where policemen without any justification shoot at civilians, attack them, or capture them randomly. As if that were not enough, this corrupt government has decided to spend 263,163,000 dollars on warplanes.

Here we have some institutions of the Public Ministry to precisely control the Government, such as the Attorney General's Office, the Comptroller's Office, and the Ombudsman's Office. But these institutions, like the Prosecutor's Office, are in the hands of the president's friends and there is no hope that they will act fairly.

Namely, so as not to get you bored more, this is the sum of a clientelist policy of some elites that feed on paramilitary groups and gangsters against a people that suffers one of the largest social gaps in the world, as economic reports say. There is not an iota of exaggeration in saying that there is a clear class struggle in Colombia, but as one billionaire in the United States said, the rich are winning it.

And the war against the people continues

Now, at this very moment that I am writing to you, you can hear the sirens in the streets, from the ambulances, from the police cars, the blades of the helicopters, the screams in the streets, the casseroles in the windows. I do not know if you can imagine it, it is like a military coup without the facade of a military coup.

The violence is not just from these days, only this year there are 32 massacres throughout the country and during the first two years of the current government, 573 social leaders and human rights defenders had already murdered.

In Pasto, for example, they converted a sports center into a detention center. There is at least one woman who has been raped by the police and numerous cases of people who have lost their eyes as a result of the police actions, were wounded by gunshots, and countless people who are disappearing.

Here we are alone, the international community, like the Lima Group, which is so concerned about what is happening in Venezuela, has not said anything about what is happening in Colombia and is not going to say it either. The United States, which believes itself to be the guardian of the world's democracy, has also kept silent and Joe Biden, who for many naive people was hope, doesn't speak out.

The European Union and other countries that helped secure the signing of the Peace Agreement today are limited in their calls for implementation, and they fall short compared to what is happening.

I confess that I do not know what will happen tomorrow, everything may return to calm as it happened in November 2019 and in September 2020 or that things continue to grow. The country's truckers have already decided to block roads, the indigenous people are marching towards Cali and it seems that the country is about to explode.

This government may invent a self-coup to recycle itself and stay in power for many more years. The military may try some maneuver, although here there is no militarist coup tradition. The same elites may burn Duque's cartridge and present themselves as saviors of what they have caused.

The Government just decided to take the Army out to the streets. Every day Uribe and Duque take another step to set the country on fire and then, cynically, present themselves as the option to save us.

We are waiting for what the opposition leaderships say, those known here as the Coalition of Hope and the Historical Pact, which are the ones called to promote a change, of course, with the rest of the country such as the brave indigenous people of Cauca, among many other communities.

Many of us already think that the tax reform took a back seat, what needs to be discussed is where the country is going, and not simply return as if nothing had happened to the day before the protests began.

But any decision that is taken cannot ignore the tax reform, nor the police abuses, nor the social inequity, and above all the deaths and injuries that are adding up. It is not about calling for calm so that everything is as before, that would be a terrible betrayal. It is about calling the country right now so that there is a real change, if not now, it won't be in decades.

I do not know why I am telling you all this, why I am sending you this letter, but you or your neighbors may know it can give us a hand so that there they know why our national strike continues. I send you a big hug.