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people are demanding. And in the light of the enormous challenges this fight for peace will be nothing less than an openly revolutionary struggle. It is time to speak clearly about the revolutionary nature of this struggle, which is committed to confront the model based on exploitation, destruction, death and exclusion, with one which grows in the heart of the people, based on inclusion, on respect for communities and the environment, of sustainable character, protecting the live dignity and self determination of persons. No more and no less than what kind of Colombia the people wish to construct is at stake.

The people must be involved in these negotiations although it upsets the oligarchy to see such a rabble coming into political debate, territory reserved for the two hundred years of the republic by a gilded élite of decadent moribund lineage, whose surnames are repeated over and over occupying all the positions of power. The aim is to take this space to bring the political debate about war and peace, about the economic and political model to all the public squares of Colombia, to all the faculties and schools, to all the places of work, to the mines and the country lanes. **To use this debate to promote a project for the country which would put together the most strongly felt demands of all the popular sectors who are fighting today against the economic system of death and destruction imposed on them by those above.**

The announcement of the beginning of this new direction in the search for a political solution must not mean that the people should demobilise. Very much to the contrary it shows that **this is the time for the people to come out more decisively, to deepen the social mobilisation and strengthen the unity of the people in struggle**. There is more than ever a need to rally around organisations like the Marcha Patriótica to prevent a new genocide and protect those spaces where the people, mobilised, can make their voice heard in their support for a new society. Also for support for the struggles of the peasants, the workers, the political prisoners, now engaged in disobedience and strikes throughout the country. To demand an end the stigmatisation, persecution and jailing of those engaged in the social struggles. To top referring to the insurgency as "terrorist organisations" so as to guarantee optimal conditions for a frank and free dialogue. We must demand that this initial agreement lead to a cease fire and the dismantling of paramilitarism to protect the lives and integrity of the people. The people must become a protagonist in this process.

Only the mobilisation of the people can guarantee that this peace process which has emerged on the horizon can conclude with the structural transformations which wide sections of the Colombian

Once again talks of peace have been placed on the political agenda in Colombia, with the goodwill of a significant section of the establishment. A tantrum from Uribe, who denounced the government's meetings with the FARC-EP in Cuba, seeking to use it to channel support for his ultra right project[1], backfired on him, only helping to generate a climate of opinion favourable to these meetings. Santos maintained silence on this theme, but today, (Monday 27th August) TeleSur gave out the news: the FARC-EP had signed an agreement to initiate a peace agreement with the Colombian government[2]. There are great expectations, since, only a few days ago Gabino, the commander in chief of the ELN declared his willingness to join in talks in which the FARC-EP participated[3] — a pronouncement of great importance since among the lessons of the past is that it is not possible to proceed with parallel negotiations with the different expressions of the Colombian guerrilla movement. As I write these notes, we await the official statement of Juan Manuel Santos on the subject.

This development in not a free gift nor does it come from the good will of the president: it is obvious that the thesis of "the end of the ending" lacked substance, and that the "Plan Colombia" has reached its limit. The insurgency has risen to the challenge presented by the advance of militarism. A new cycle of of social struggles threatens the aggravation of the political situation in the medium term to a level which would be difficult for the oligarchy to control. The political situation appears to be dangerously volatile. On the other hand, there is nothing surprising about the willingness of the insurgency to engage in negotiations: one the one hand, since it is they who have proposed, for the past thirty years, a political solution to the social and armed conflicts; on the

[1] www.elespectador.com

[2] www.telesurtv.net See also www.caracol.com.co and www.semana.com

[3] www.semana.com

other hand, because the insurgency has strengthened its position in recent years, not only militarily, but above all, politically.

Beware of false illusions

Although this agreement is a positive development, we cannot be excessively optimistic, even less so, triumphalist, considering that "peace", in itself, would represent a triumph for the popular classes and their historic demands, blocked by fire and blood for more than half a century, by the State. We must bear in mind that the road towards an eventual negotiating process is full of difficulties, since there are substantial and basic differences between what the different parties expect from the negotiations and what the understand by the word "peace". We must bear in mind that this oligarchy is the bloodiest on the continent and that it hasn't entered into negotiations because of a sudden change of heart.

While the coalition of social organisations insist that peace is much more than merely a ceasefire, but must consist of a resolution of the structural problems which gave rise to the violence in the first place, the state pursues only the theme of demobilisation, reinsertion, and a discussion of related legal formalities[4]. Santos seeks an "*'express peace' summary and mechanical. He wants it secretly, without the presence of the multitude, without civil society, without the people's organisations. He wants it without reforms, without any kind of social change in the country. The recently adopted legal framework is sufficient for him along with the regulations which he would have some difficulty getting through a hostile Senate, which is quick to avoid it, facing an imminent electoral process.*"[5]

Santos has maintained an ambiguous position on the subject of peace, on the one hand he claims to hold the keys to peace, one day

[4] An article which reflects the mainstream view from the State perspective on the limited agenda they want to negotiate, check www.elespectador.com

[5] www.rebelion.org-

> *Marcha Patriótica could be a protagonist. It is proposed to create a space so that the discussion is not limited only to that between the government and the guerrillas. (...) On the subject of Cauca the FARC has a clear position: if the succeed in establishing a peace process with the government the indigenous people of that department must have their own representation at the table*".[14]

It is essential that the people claim and demand their right to take part in this process and convert it into a national dialogue in which they can discuss the projects for the country which would confront the conflict, which is not only military but above all social. On the political solution the same reply of Comandate Timoleón Jiménez establishes that this

> "*can only be understood as a reordering of the existing society. We are not talking about repentant guerrillas, already extremely discredited, hand over their arms, and submit to the taunts of the press and the judiciary so as to later, with the sword hanging over their heads,, enter into the market of party politics, joining the chorus of official lies. What we propose is to reconstruct the rules of democracy so that ideas and programmes are debated with equality of opportunity. Without the risk of being assassinated when you arrive home. Or disappeared and tortured by a mysterious black hand which has already announced its existence, like those dark forces which exterminated the Union Patriótica under the undisturbed gaze of the Colombian political class. It is right to open a free public debate on these matters, so that we can talk about these themes without being immediately rolled over by the information monopolies*".

[14] www.elespectador.com

ple parties" in the peace process. That is, he wants to exclude the people from the resolution of a conflict which affects them directly, leaving intact the conditions for the eruption of further violence, as those which chronically scourge the post-conflict societies of Central America. And while the guerrilla movement is a part of the important accumulation of popular movements in Colombia, and while it enjoys a high level of legitimacy in many regions of the country, it is clear that neither it nor any one organisation can claim the exclusive representation of of the people's movement as a whole.

The insurgency itself has shown itself on numerous occasions to be in agreement with this position, which is entirely consistent with its statements in the past. In his reply to Professor Medófilo Medina, the commander in chief of the FARC-EP, Timoleón Jiménez, explained the sense of the political struggle "for power to the people" of this communist guerrillas "*Not in our agrarian programme, nor in any past document of the FARC up to today, have we ever maintained that as a military and political organisation our aim would be the seizure of power by defeating the Colombian army in a war of position, as is repeated over and over again by all those who insist on telling us that that objective is impossible. From our foundation the FARC has conceived of the conquest of power as a question of multitudes in agitation and movement*"[13]

On this matter, the article in El Espectador puts it clearly, as a problem for the negotiation, that

> "*we already know that one of the difficult aspects is the agenda of the FARC. In this respect, it is clear that from the start the effort of the guerrillas is to put civil society in the frame. That is to say, that the social movements, academe or the political minorities would have the same voice as the economic organisations. So the*

[13] prensarural.org

he loses them and the next he finds them again in a strong box, on the other hand he intensifies the dirty war, through the strengthening of the militarisation of the rural communities (the so-called plans of territorial consolidation), blows aimed at the leadership of the insurgency, and a strategy of legally pursuing the "networks of support" for the guerrilla movement, involving the courts in counter insurgency project (essentially the Sword of Honour plan), and lastly through the strengthening of the impunity enjoyed by the armed forces within a systematic strategy of State terrorism (the resurrection of the so called military authority which Santos recently implemented with Uribe) .

From Santos' perspective war and peace are nothing other than strategies for imposing an unsustainable social-economic neoliberal project, based on the National (Under) Development Plan, whose pillars are agribusiness and big mining. If this opportunity to open negotiations can be made into a space from which to promote the social transformations which the Colombian people demand. This depends on the capacity and mobilisation of the people, and will happen in spite of the state not thanks to it.

Peace? What peace?

There is something which the dominant bloc doesn't lose sight of. That is, **negotiation with the insurgency today is not the same as the negotiation of 1990–1994**. Here there are no organisations whose ideological perspective is a radicalised liberalism, reformist groups in arms, whose leadership is mired in social ostentation, neither will the political demands of these insurgent organisations be satisfied with promises of cosmetic constitutional reforms, nor with generous guaranties for demobilisation, nor will they accept a "restricted agenda". We are dealing with guerrilla movements which represent the poorest of the poor, which repre-

sent the historical aspirations of the peasantry which was always left outside of every "peace initiative". These are insurgents whose feet are made of the ground they walk on, who never had anything and who deserve everything.

Neither are we dealing with militarily defeated groups such as those which demobilised in 1990–1994, but with organisations firmly rooted in wide regions of the country, with the capacity to operate in nearly all the national territory, with a renewed ability to strike at the armed forces of the state; In large parts of the country, the insurgency is an inescapable political reality, an authentic dual power, which is legitimated in other communities under the territorial consolidation of the army or the paramilitary scourge. Whatever certain commentators may say[6], if the insurgency is negotiating today it is because it can, because it has the strength and capacity to do so. And they well know in the presidential palace that the demobilisation and surrender sought by Uribe are not a political option.

An article in "El Espectador" of Aug. 25th recognises this

> "*It is clear that the FARC is not easy to negotiate with. It wants agrarian reform as it might be based on the Law of the Land and the Law of Victims, it wishes to debate the form of the contracts with the multinational petroleum and mining companies, it requires political space to advance a more democratic context, and believes that today peace moves also towards the optimal management of the environment. The rest is details of form, like the essential one that in order to finalise the negotiation it must be completed in the national territory.*"[7]

[6] See, for instance, the latest column of opinion of Humberto de la Calle www.elespectador.com or the following article hwww.elespectador.com Check the following reponse to such ideas from a previous article of ours www.anarkismo.net

[7] www.elespectador.com

(nor the interests which he represents, nor the imperialism which backs him) will accept that Uribe becomes an agent of destabilisation. They all supported Uribe as long as he was useful to them, and he helped them reconstruct the damaged hegemony of a decadent oligarchy. But neither the imperialists nor the oligarchy have friends, only interests. As soon as he ceases to be useful, Uribe is discarded.

In this context, we see the corralling of the intimate circle of Uribe being carried out by the courts, with the conviction of Rito Alejo, the increasing attention being paid to paramilitaries like Mancuso for his ties to the AUC, the affairs of the ex-president's drug trafficking relations, the deportation of General Santoyo. Of course we knew all along how putrid is the entourage of Uribe, but now the context is different. The Santoyo case appears to be a particular problem for Uribe, if anyone can connect him to paramilitarism and drug traffic, it is he. He has already begun to talk about certain generals, including Uribe's right hand man, Mario Montoya, and has threatened to "sing" about politicians[12]. Could Santoyo be Santos's card to try to put Uribe under control? We shall see Uribe's reaction to the peace announcement, which he will probably do by Twitter. But if he decides to play at destabilisation his fall will be only a matter of time.

Involving the people in the negotiation

When we look at the negotiations without naivety, and with sufficient realism, there is no doubt that the present situation brings an enormous opportunity to overcome the structural conditions which gave rise to the social and armed conflict in Colombia, and which has fed this model of mafia capitalism which accumulates by means of violent robbery and plunder. Santos, like the businessmen, rejects, or is unwilling to accept, the participation of "multi-

[12] www.elespectador.com

Security" (which Santos continued) is affected not only by the growing mobilisation and popular discontent, but by the erosion of its unity. We see ever more frequent clashes between Uribe, entrenched among the most fanatical elements of the armed forces, cattle ranchers, narco business and political bosses, all of whom see war as their business, and Santos, who represents the interests of big business and transnational capital, who seek "peace" to open the way for their businesses and investment in agro-extractive industry. Although these sectors have also had recourse to paramilitarism to ensure "investor confidence" and violent plunder in order to enrich themselves, they prefer a less costly way to guarantee their profits, which puts them in a situation which is quite different from those sectors of the bourgeoisie which are structurally dependent on direct violence to accumulate capital.

The columnist Alfredo Molano, some months ago, analysed this contradiction and the effect it might have on the negotiations:

> "*it may be easier for the president to negotiate with the guerrillas than with the military, the businessmen and the political bosses so as not to end up defeated in another Caguán. That was what was missing, the real obstacle to the negotiation between Pastrana and Marulanda. The president's mistake was not the ceding of 30,000 sq. km. It was not having negotiated previously with the establishment and with the military the price which these powerful forces were prepared to pay.*"[11]

While the crisis of hegemony deepens among the ruling circles, and while the while the popular struggles advance as does the insurgency, it would be foolish of Santos not to react to the agitation which Uribe's followers are promoting in the barracks and their work of polarisation within the establishment. Neither Santos

[11] www.elespectador.com

Obviously the description of the FARC-EP as a "terrorist" organisation "banditised" turned into a "drug trafficking cartel", "lumpenised" etc. is unsustainable, pure propaganda. Nobody in his senses could deny that all the aspects advocated by the insurgency (land, natural resources, democracy, environment, social security etc.) are themes of of crucial importance, where government policies have utterly failed and which need the widest social participation. That the insurgency takes these themes and makes them into indispensable elements of any attempt to overcome the social and armed conflict in their roots is a real nightmare for the most stubborn elements of the oligarchy. It is not the supposed banditry of the insurgency, so noised about by the official media, which terrifies the oligarchy, but its political and revolutionary character, as its capacity to articulate the demands of different social sectors

That is why the dominant bloc knows that the great battles which are coming in the future are on the political plane rather than the military. Spokesmen for business have pronounced in favour of a restricted negotiation modelled on the negotiation with the M-19, that is to say, without any structural changes[8]. They hope to come out of the negotiations with the least possible number of reforms or concessions, and they know that this puts them in conflict not only with the insurgency, but with an important sector of the organised people. For that reason, we need to watch out for any new resort to the dirty war and attacks on popular organisations, which have traditionally accompanied processes of dialogue in Colombia.

[8] verdadabierta.com

The military strategy reaches momentarily its limits...

But although this oligarchy is very nervous of opening the doors to negotiations which , for sure, will lead to a national debate about conflicting projects for the country they also know that persisting with the war puts a rope round their own necks: the insurgency is growing stronger and the social conflict is intensifying with a popular mobilisation throughout the country, which, persisting, could seriously threaten the hegemony of the dominant bloc. The country is on the verge of a new cycle of violence precipitated by forced displacement, the violent eviction of peasants and communities, to facilitate the penetration of big mining and agribusiness throughout the country. The violence imposed according to the model blessed by the National (Under) Development Plan of Santos necessarily meets with resistance. And the resistance, in a country like Colombia will take many forms, producing a potentially explosive situation

Negotiating with the insurgency could serve the interests of the oligarchy, in its most optimistic scenario, to achieve a neoliberal peace which will permit the advance of the agro-extractive neoliberal project, at least reducing the level of resistance, at least of the insurgency. In a survey of Colombian businessmen conducted by the Fundación Ideas para la Paz. "the great majority made it clear that they rejected an agenda which included structural reforms with many participants , such as happened in Caguán. They would prefer it to be restricted to demobilisation and reintegration in which the state could be 'generous'"[9] Peace, that is, the better to exploit the people and the environment of Colombia.

In the less optimistic scenario, the negotiations would serve at least to gain time, and prepare, in a more efficient and lethal manner, the following cycle of violence, which is hovering just over the

[9] verdadabierta.com

horizon. Such was the real intention of the Pastrana government in the negotiations at San Vicente de Caguán. Pastrana himself, while talking peace, was negotiating the Plan Colombia and giving a free rein to the the paramilitary arm of the state. He cynically admitted this in an article , twelve years after breaking off the dialogue in Caguán.

> "*Plan Colombia permitted us to sit at the table, at an initial disadvantage, practically disarmed, with the assurance tht when it concluded, with success or failure, The state would be armed to the teeth, as never before, as well prepared for war as for peace*".[10]

In either case, whether the oligarchy seeks the pacification of the country without significant changes or whether it wants to gain time so as to continue with the business of war, whichever peace it might achieve would only be the calm before the increasing storm, from the from the excluded, the dispossessed, the victims of violence, the oppressed. And they are the ones who need to mobilise to impose the necessary will for fundamental structural change; The wind is in their favour at the moment, as the popular mobilisation gets stronger and there is a healthy tendency towards the unity of all those who are struggling. These two elements favour the possibility that the popular bloc will become a weighty factor in the negotiations, even more so as there are contradictions within the dominant bloc, which without being antagonistic are nevertheless sufficiently sharp and generate a crisis of hegemony.

The (not so) hidden enemy. Santoyo and the contradictions among the bourgeoisie

The hegemony of the dominant bloc, consolidated over almost a decade of the Plan Colombia and the misnamed "Democratic

[10] www.eltiempo.com