

Habemus pacem?

Challenges on the road from Havana to Colombia

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After three years of negotiations, a peace accord was signed in Havana, Cuba, between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP, while the process with ELN is bogged down and that with the EPL is not even on the political agenda. The forecasts that had feared the possibility of a breakdown in the negotiations have been proved groundless, and it completes the cycle of a struggle that should necessarily open new scenarios and possibilities. The decision of this insurgent movement to abandon arms seems irreversible and, whatever happens, it will keep on the path of what has been called its “reincorporation into civilian life”. Even while this accord does not generate structural changes, it undoubtedly represents a significant advance for the rural population which, though invisibilised, is a not-insignificant 34% of the country’s population and provides an opportunity for the popular movement to potentially articulate the big tasks that remain ahead. None of this is set in stone. It will all depend on the clarity and the organisational and mobilising capacity of the popular movement.

It (the agreement) is yet to be ratified by the Congress as also the final signing in Colombia, which will be towards the end of September. No great surprises are expected at the tenth conference of the FARC-EP, which should ratify the accord on September 19. The referendum, through which the agreements will be submitted for endorsement by the people, has been agreed upon for October 2. **In the referendum, these will have to obtain 4.5 million votes for a “yes” so that the agreements are ratified and it is for this that it is so important to motivate the people and close the doors to a return to total war between the state and the FARC-EP¹.** Despite the discursive poverty of the retrogrades who are campaigning for a “no”, it would be foolish to scoff at its appeal among many urban sectors still under the authoritarian spell of Uribeism². Even so, the biggest challenge is to reach the required target for the approval of this referendum.

Historic, but...

Even though the agreement is an historic occurrence, **the little enthusiasm that it generated with the announcement of the final signing, as well as during the entire process**, does not cease to surprise. Though there is no lack of reasons to celebrate, there is hardly any celebratory mood. There hasn’t been a general party atmosphere that accompanied other peace processes as in Northern Ireland or in El Salvador, to name a few, and it hasn’t even come close to approaching the democratising effervescence that was felt in 1990 for the peace process with M-19, the EPL, the MAQL and the PRT. It is painful to admit that, at least in the urban centre, there has been more enthusiasm in the marches against the FARC-EP than now that peace has been signed with it, which shows that the establishment’s media war against the rebels has had a toxic effect in great measure and has isolated it considerably from a large segment of the population which still thinks that the insurgents are responsible for all that is bad in Colombia.

¹ Sadly in the preceding months, sectors of the Left wasted too much ink and saliva attacking the idea of a referendum, which they saw as an option excluding their call for a constituent assembly, a constituent assembly which, in the current situation, would probably be unfavourable to the popular sectors and could even signify a step back from the 1991 Constitution. Good ideas aren’t enough, the context and circumstances in which they have to be carried out need to be understood.

² The media, once again, in its task of fabricating perceptions, bandy polls that at times give “yes” the victory and, at times to “no”, depending on the political agenda of the moment.

The predominant attitude of those calling to vote “yes” in the lead-up to the referendum seems to be a lukewarm “war is worse” or a sour “we’ll have to swallow some bitter pills”. Other voices calling to vote “yes” are not doing it so much in support of the contents of the agreements but to explicitly vote for the disappearance and disarming of the FARC-EP³, as a final coup de grace, a corollary to the mobilisations of February 2008 against the FARC-EP stimulated by the government of Alvaro Uribe. Very few sectors – the Left predictably – are calling for a vote in clear support for the contents of the agreement, though many sense that a triumph of “no” would be truly catastrophic. It is a disagreeable reality but one that we will have to understand to change it.

The difficult connection

Various factors would seem to explain this phenomenon. First, before everything else, it is a peace process that the majority of the Colombian population perceives as something that is happening in a distant country to resolve an equally distant conflict that is being played out in the pathways of a rural world unknown to this urban majority. To this has to be added the fact that during the process, the media did it no favour with its permanent attack on the insurgents. Neither has the tardy work of the so-called pedagogy of peace helped. The government’s efforts to popularise the contents of the agreements in Havana, or to stimulate debate around it, have been exceedingly poor when non-existent. In turn, the insurgency’s efforts to “involve the people” in the peace process have been unable to, or not known how to, extend beyond its traditional areas of influence or those political sectors who have always asked for a political solution to the conflict.

What does this peace process signify for a transvestite in the marginal slums of Bogota? What does peace signify for an indigenous woman migrant in a provincial capital? What does it signify for the sub-contracted and precarious workers? What does it signify for the multitude that survives on under-employment? For those who sniff glue because they can’t afford bread? To have to remind the people that “the peace is with you”, as the Left’s referendum campaign states, simply makes it evident that the links of peace with the common citizen are not evident, that the peace process is seen as something unconnected to them.

Neither fatalism nor triumphalism: An accord is possible with the current correlation of forces

It was known that Socialism would not be achieved through negotiations. Some basic reforms have been sought that help overcome the structural causes that gave rise to the conflict, but the agreement is not peace with social justice that the popular sectors engaged with the negotiations to the conflict sought. There is no peace either because the conflict with the ELN and the EPL continues, as also with possible dissidents, because paramilitarism goes on throughout the country, because the repressive structure that criminalises political dissent and social protest still exists, because the structural violence that kills with hunger and preventable illnesses persists – there is

³ Viewed in this sense, the editorial in the *Espectador* of August 25, “*peace understood as disarmament and the end of conflict with the different guerrillas has been the agenda of all the Presidents (...) [but] we have never before had a proposal so close to disarming the FARC. Whatever it is, the country for the first time has the opportunity of thinking without the existence of this guerrilla group*”.

no social justice. But this does not mean either that the agreement isn't a significant step or that there is no room for "moderate optimism" to use the jargon during the process. There should not be room here from the Left to shout "treachery", but neither should there be hallucinatory triumphalism. **The agreement is what it is: all that the FARC-EP could sign up to with the existing correlation of forces**, clearly favourable to existing bloc in power.

The verdict of history could be very harsh on the constituent parts⁴. A glance at what has been agreed to automatically leads us to question if, in reality, so much blood should have been spilled to achieve agreements that, in the bulk, mean that the government must comply with constitutional mandates that it already has beforehand, combined with the expansion of the existing political system, not to its transformation⁵. There have been some important achievements awhile, above all relating to the modernising of the countryside, but the agrarian programme of the guerrillas of Marquetalia, together with the minimum programme that inspired the FARC uprising for decades, remain an aspiration: the problem of the concentration of land is very much alive. Now it has been complicated even more with the boost that agro-industries will receive through the Zones of Interest for Rural, Economic and Social Development (Zidres). Perhaps this process could have had an agreement with greater transformative potential and could have generated greater popular enthusiasm. Perhaps.

The peace of... Santos?

The government promised not to touch the model and kept its word with the oligarchy. The ELN's opinion of the Havana agreement, according to a communiqué dated August 5, is compelling: it does not change the reality of the country and keeps "*intact the ignominious regime of violence, exclusion, inequality, injustice and pillage*"⁶. A communiqué of a dissident sector of Front 1 of the FARC-EP that opened up with the process refers to the agreement in similar terms⁷. But what has been agreed upon should not be judged excessively hard: achieving a different scenario or an agreement that would really exemplify this desire for peace with social justice was not something that would depend, naturally, only on the FARC-EP. It would necessarily have had to be **supported by a broad popular mobilisation in support of these transformations and to develop the transformative potential of some points on the agenda as also the political proposals presented by the insurgents in each of these**. But the possibility of generating a big alignment between this peace process with the wave of growing popular protest of 2008–2013 did not materialise. The government, through co-option, division and segmentation, halted this wave at the same time that it successfully isolated the peace process from the daily life of the population. The agrarian strike of 2013 was the key moment in unshackling this discussion and generating a massive public sympathy between the themes discussed in Havana and the daily

⁴ For a war to be considered "just", according to *Jus and Bellum*, one of the parts should demonstrate that it could not obtain what it obtained without recourse to arms. This will be the raging dispute for decades to come in Colombia, just as it continues to be in Ireland two decades after the peace process in the country.

⁵ Look up the complete agreement here static.iris.net.co

⁶ www.rebellion.org-

⁷ www.elespectador.com The FARC-EP communiqué that accuses these dissidents of having "economic" motivations (mining, narco-trafficking) is unfortunate because it ignores the reasons – mistaken or not – which are eminently political and these types of accusations hurled at a group that left from within it could easily come around to hurt it and perpetuate the dominant stereotypes about the Colombian insurgency which, like all stereotypes, tend to be mistaken.

reality of the country, a moment that generated a bridge between the countryside and the city where the interests of the popular sectors were sketched out in contradiction to the bloc in power.

After the strike, and faced with the breach of contract by the government, the popular mobilisation in the street was disincentivised, which some sectors considered “inopportune”, with the surprising excuse that “destabilising” Santos was to weaken the peace process (and strengthen Uribeism), aimed at an electoral strategy that was disastrous for the Left. In this context, **the peace process ended up fettering itself to the figure of Santos**, one of the most unpopular Presidents in history, who used it to be re-elected at the same time that he redefined the terms of peace and could pass on to the offensive. After insisting so much that the keys to peace belonged to the people, it was handed over to Santos on a silver platter. Such “recognition of the will for peace” of Santos, a President who started governing with the mandate to perpetuate “democratic security”, disfigured the reality that the peace process was achieved in a large part owing to the popular mobilisation, which had its climax in 2012–2013⁸. The peace process in the collective imagination was not only indissolubly linked to the figure of Santos but also moreover with the launching of the referendum by personalities of the old politics was associated with national politicking. Is there anything surprising then about the lack of enthusiasm?

New resistance post-conflict and the development of a social and political opposition

The chief government negotiator, Humberto de la Calle, claimed that this agreement was the “best possible”⁹, an ambiguous affirmation which shows that though they might have been able to impose many of the terms of the pact, neither were they able to impose everything. The agreements are like an open door, which the oligarchy as well as the popular sector can take advantage of. **The oligarchy will look at accelerating the penetration of inversion capital in agro-industry and mineral extraction. It will depend on the popular sectors, on their struggles and their organisation, whether this scenario materialises or not.** It will also depend on the popular sectors if the government complies with the agreement since – as the communities of Putumayo of Catatumbo and the country itself can vouch for – it specialises in laying snares and defaulting on those below, and those who think that international oversight of the U.N. or the guarantees is a guarantee that the government will comply are guilty of excessive naivety.

Unfortunately, there is still too much disorganisation and segmentation of the struggles. A new Left will have to be reconfigured and so too the creation of new collective leadership and a broad process of organisation and popular mobilisation. Despite the great insistence on Left unity, what is certain is that a great constructive effort is necessary before everything else to reach all the oppressed sectors, the excluded, and the hungry who need a new model. It needs audacity, vision, decisiveness, plenty of dialogue, listening to others and much organisation. Only basing on a broad organisation and the active search to create spaces in which the discontent can be expressed constructively, it will be possible to speak of a unity that is much more than the mere

⁸ We have written extensively on these themes at its time. Some of these articles are: “¿Tiene Santos las llaves de la paz?”, “Sólo la lucha decide”, “El proceso de paz ¿secuestrado por el miedo?” and Habemus presidente: mandato por la paz con injusticia social.

⁹ www.semana.com

sum total of the same old leaders. A unity has to form organically around the minimum axes of common action and from the proposals of the thousand and one struggles that the people develop daily. It also requires a new form of understanding and doing politics, truly from below, from the popular world, escaping the old vices of traditional politics like from pests, in place of accepting them little by little as if these were signs of maturity. For all this, **it is necessary to dissociate from the figure of Santos and reclaim the vocation of the Left (grabbing this political space of Uribeism which it occupies fraudulently) is a fundamental step** that could lead to seducing the people once again with the idea of constructing peace with social justice, linked to a process of mobilisation and social transformation.

An uphill struggle, a people with experience and perseverance

For now, the dice is loaded in favour of the dominant bloc. The triumphalism of these sectors is evident in the declarations of the Colombian army commander, General Alberto Mejia, who said the army was ready to guarantee the safety of the ex-guerrillas: *“For us it is not a humiliation, for us it is an honour because those who safeguard them are those that won the war, because those who safeguard them are those who remained with the arms, those who safeguard them are those dressed in the uniforms of the Republic”*¹⁰. Clearly, there could be a debate if FARC-EP is defeated or not, something that is open for discussion, or the pyrrhic nature (in the best of cases) of this supposed victory of the army, but it is necessary to recognise that, whatever this insurgent group thinks, the dominant bloc has the hegemony today, not the popular sectors. **The “monopoly of force” that the oligarchic state claims has to be opposed with an even bigger force than its army and its arms: that of an organised people.** Though much is said that politics will not be done without arms, as the African revolutionary Amilcar Cabral used to say, in capitalism all struggles are armed: the state always has the arms and uses it against the people when its interests and domination are threatened¹¹. When the people exercise their right to do politics on the streets, ESMAD, the police or the army will repress them politically, with force and with arms, supported in the restructuration that the USA (who else?) is implementing for the public security forces post-conflict and with the new police code and the law of citizens’ security.

The support for “yes” in the referendum should not obviate that this is neither the end of the process nor the start of the construction of a new society **but another step in a long history of resistance, in the long road towards the conformation of a new popular bloc capable of imposing on the oligarchic sectors an alternative mode, radically democratic, egalitarian and libertarian.** It is also necessary to recognise that beyond the debate about the nature of the peace or the intrinsic structural violence of the system, **without the ELN or the EPL it is not possible to speak of the construction of peace**, for which enclosing the political solution around these other insurgent expressions becomes a political, ethical and moral imperative. It is important to think critically today in the social forces and the political currents, the complicated

¹⁰ www.semana.com

¹¹ www.marxists.org It is important not to fall for an idealistic, liberal and bourgeois vision of the state as an embodiment of “social contract” or “common good”. The state is an apparatus of domination, of class, designed to serve the oligarchic sectors and exercise violence when the subaltern sectors rebel. Any conquest favouring the interests of the popular sectors is despite the state, not thanks to it.

territorial, national, regional and international context in which they have to operate¹² and to apply self-criticism to correct the mistakes and this way reverse this unfavourable correlation of forces for the popular sectors. Today, rather than being immersed in easy formulae, replacing the slogans for or against, it is more suitable **to apply Gramsci's maxim of pessimism of the intellect – the objective difficulties are so immense – but optimism of the will; we are conscious of the enormous potential of the struggles of the Colombian people as also the valuable experience accumulated in almost a century of resistance.** Only this way can a project that actually enthuses the ensemble of the Colombian people and gain their confidence be developed. And with an enthused people, the transformative forces will be unstoppable.

¹² Before initiating the peace process, there was controversy with a letter that Medófilo Medina had sent to then leader of FARC-EP Alfonso Cano, who was assassinated in a few months in an absolutely defenceless condition by the express order of Santos, at a time in which both were discussing about negotiating peace. On that occasion, it was said that one of the reasons for which the FARC-EP would demobilise was the regional context, in which the Left had come to power through elections. From that viewpoint, would the current scenario, marked by the destitution of Rouseff and the deepening of the Venezuelan crisis change the evaluation of these sectors regarding the political possibilities of the FARC-EP? To read the controversy, www.anarkismo.net

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