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Memory and history: centenary of a massacre



Sources: Rebellion

Ecuador is preparing to commemorate the centenary of the workers' massacre of November 15, 1922, an event that has gone unpunished.

In the book *Massacres of workers and people in Latin America during the 20th century* (2021), coordinated by two historians, the Chilean Sergio Grez Toso and the Colombian Jorge Elías Caro, several cases are studied: the revolt of the Río Blanco of 1907 in Mexico, the massacre of the Santa María de Iquique school of 1907 in Chile, the week of massacres that took place in Argentina in 1919, the massacre of artisans of 1919 in Colombia, in Patagonia between 1920-1922, the workers' massacre of Guayaquil, in Ecuador, on November 15, 1922, the massacre of La Coruña of 1925 in Chile, those that occurred in Cuba during the decade 1925-1935, that of 1928 in the banana zone of Magdalena in Colombia, the ethnocide in El Salvador of 1932, the repression of the sugar strike of La Romana in the Dominican Republic in 1946, again in Cuba, during the

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"Bloody Easter" of 1956, also in Colombia against the strike of workers in Cairo and Santa Barbara in 1963, again in Chile in 1966 and 1969, the various bloody repressions in Bolivia against the miners, the genocide in Guatemala during the 1980s, and the Carandiru massacre in Brazil in 1992.

They have always been massacres against workers and residents who demanded their labor and social rights, among others: compliance with the maximum working day, payment of wages, safety at work, attention from the State. From official ranks, movements were also always accused of being subversive, anarchic, violent, against institutions, the State and democracy; or it was argued that vandals, looters and criminals had been shot. In Latin America, a region backward and underdeveloped until the mid-twentieth century, repressions and massacres guaranteed the power of the big landowners, miners and agro-exporters, of the incipient bourgeoisies of merchants, bankers and industrialists and, without a doubt, of the occasional foreign companies that settled in different countries to exploit resources and workers.

In the second half of the same century, in the heat of the Cold War, the massacres had an additional component: from power the social movements were seen as "communists" and "guerrillas" or simply as "collaborators" of communist movements or organizations. It is true that during the 1960s several guerrilla movements emerged in Latin America, which were inspired by the successful process that Cuba experienced until the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista. But the armed forces, prepared and trained to fight them, finally managed to defeat them in almost all countries. However, the fight against "communism" went much further in the Southern Cone. Since 1964 in Brazil a long dictatorial era was installed that only ended in 1985. In Chile, the military coup against Salvador Allende aimed to annihilate "communism" and established a ferocious dictatorship under the command of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Also in Argentina, "state terrorism" was installed with the military dictatorship (1976-1983) presided over by General Jorge Videla. The same type of military anti-communism was reproduced in Bolivia with General Hugo Bánzer (1971-1978) and Uruguay with the civic-military dictatorship (1973-1985), because Paraguay already had the tyrant Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989). In Central America, other dictatorships of the same sign were also installed. It was a continental mobilization sponsored by the CIA and the monroist vision of the United States, to have allied rulers in the defense of their geostrategic interests against the

socialist bloc. Paradoxically, Peru and Ecuador did not follow the same path. In Ecuador, the military dictatorship presided over by General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara (1972-1976), proclaimed "Revolutionary Nationalism" and was inspired by a "Philosophy and Plan of Action" quite advanced, anti-oligarchic and reformist character. It was a developmentalist government and, fortunately for the country, it did not reproduce what was happening in the Southern Cone. The Supreme Council (1976-1979) that followed him, abandoned nationalism and was authoritarian and repressive (in 1977 the massacre of harvesters occurred in AZTRA), although without reaching State terrorism. In Peru, on the other hand, the government of Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975) inspired "Peruvian socialism", executing an anti-oligarchic program, which did not have continuity in his successor, General Francisco Morales Bermúdez (1975-1980).

In any case, what impacted especially hard in Latin America was what was happening in Chile and Argentina, where the liquidation of "communism" extended to all progressive and democratic positions, causing thousands of murders, forced disappearances, torture, prisons and persecutions. The "internal war", in accordance with the principles of the "National Security Doctrine", became an ideological justification for the systematic violation of human rights and crimes against humanity. This doctrine prevents understanding the social confrontations in civilian life and the nature of political plurality, so the military claimed to define what should be the politics of their countries and assumed, without any constitutional or institutional control, to be called upon to decide on the life, integrity and conscience of citizens. It was an unprecedented phenomenon in Latin American history.

With the return to democracy, there were attempts to prosecute crimes. However, Pinochet managed to circumvent an international trial promoted by the Spanish lawyer and jurist Baltasar Garzón in 1998. In Uruguay, it was not possible to abolish the "Expiration Law" (1986) that prevented the prosecution of military and police officers, although several processes were promoted. While in Argentina it was possible to open, in 1985, an unprecedented trial against the unpunished dictators of past years, which was described as the "Argentine Nuremberg". There stood out the team of prosecutor Julio César Strassera, who achieved the sentence of life imprisonment for Videla and five other high officials of the dictatorship. Videla died in prison. That judicial process is the one that takes the film "Argentina 1985", with the interpretation of Ricardo Darín as a prosecutor and that has

become one of the films of wider repercussion and success in Latin America. It is a film that cultivates the collective memory so that the events that occurred do not return "Never again". In addition, that trial has a historical impact, since it showed that the actions of the military dictatorship, which thought of ending communism through extermination, have no justification before contemporary humanity. The names of the repressors inevitably remain for history, without dignity or honor, but as criminals of the "dirty war" they led. In Latin American studies on that dark era, it has also become clear that state terrorism was the instrument to affirm the neoliberal, which consecrated the domination of business elites, at the expense of the suffering of society.

On the other hand, Ecuador is preparing to commemorate the centenary of the workers' massacre of November 15, 1922, an event that has gone unpunished, although the direct responsible for that crime was the government of José Luis Tamayo (1920-1924), which sustained the plutocratic regime of the time. But the acts that have been prepared by different groups and social organizations, have acquired unusual relevance. Here, too, historical sensitivity has been strengthened so that the memory of that event, which marks the presence of the country's working classes, remains, in the hope that these massacres will never happen again. In addition, the memory of the working class, its struggles and conquests for the benefit of Ecuadorians is timely, in the midst of serious conditions of deinstitutionalization and hegemony of a neoliberal-oligarchic business bloc, which continues to seek ways to destroy the labor and social rights achieved for decades and that have served to overcome old miserable living conditions in the country.

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