

Open Letter to Editors of Jacobin and Monthly Review

March 2, 2021



Pachakutik supporters rally in Quito, Ecuador on February 3rd.

New Politics editor's note: Last month, grassroots Indigenous and youth-led movements helped the ecosocialist Indigenous candidate Yaku Pérez and his Pachakutik party make surprising gains in Ecuador's election. Pérez finished in 3rd place, narrowly missing the chance to participate in a runoff against the Pink Tide leader Rafael Corea's protégé Adres Arauz. In this context, the U.S. socialist magazines *Jacobin* and *Monthly Review* published spirited attacks on Yaku Pérez and the anti-extractivist views of his supporters. The *Monthly Review* article, republished from the website *Grayzone*, has since been removed but can be read through an archived version. In response to these articles, nearly 200 people have signed the following open letter to *Jacobin* and *Monthly Review's* editors. Signatories include many prominent scholars and activists with expertise in Latin American, Indigenous, and ecosocialist politics. We invite you to add your thoughts and comments below.

Open Letter

-Stop Racist and Misogynist Attacks on the Emergent Indigenous, Eco-Feminist Left in Latin America

-Address the Crisis in Today's Ecuador

March 1st, 2021

Dear Editors of Jacobin Magazine and Monthly Review,

We, the signatories of this letter, have to come together to demand the retraction or clarification of

two recent articles that smear political movements and leaders in Ecuador. The gains of Yaku Pérez and the coalition around the Pachakutik party in the 7 February 2021 elections represent an exciting and emergent new left comprised of Indigenous organizations, eco-socialist politics, feminist and LGBTQ+ activists, anti-racist movements, and anti-extractivist causes. On 24 February 2021, these movements came together in the streets of Ecuador, to demand that every vote be counted. Silencing and discrediting Ecuadoran voices as well as new popular movements—while demanding fealty to state capitalist leaders associated with the extractivist “left” in Ecuador and across the region—must end. Ben Norton’s “How Ecuador’s US-backed, coup-supporting ‘ecosocialist’ candidate Yaku Pérez aids the right-wing,” (republished by the Monthly Review on 8 February 2021) [1] and Denis Rogatyuk’s “Ecuador’s Election Was a Massive Repudiation of Neoliberalism” (published in Jacobin Magazine on 18 February)[2] do not reflect the traditions of Monthly Review—the “longest continuously published socialist magazine in the United States.” [3] Both articles contradict Jacobin’s founders’ goal to develop a “product of a younger generation not quite as tied to the Cold War paradigms that sustained the old leftist intellectual milieu.” [4] The editors’ openness to new generations is at odds with the sustained offensive against a new Indigenous eco-socialist and feminist political left in Latin America.

Rogatyuk’s article in Jacobin condemns the eco-socialist candidate Pérez and his partner, Manuela Picq, pointing out they “have for years attempted to portray Correa as an anti-Indigenous, anti-environment leader that pursues an ‘extractivist’ model of development.” Yes, they have, as have most independent social scientists who have looked at the wreckage of the Correa legacy. [5] There is a vibrant, Indigenous, and youth-led coalition of leftists who have critiqued Correa’s misuse of “el buen vivir” principles in his policies. These policies nourished new extractive industries. Under Correa, the state criminalized Indigenous groups,[6] LGBTQ+ populations, and exploited new mining resources and areas such as Yasuní.[7] Rogatyuk mocks the new left in Ecuador as a “ragbag” and “surreal” group who “absurdly” make claims about the partiality of electoral commissions. Rogatyuk overlooks the extensive and historic struggles of Indigenous identity, genocide and sovereignty, as well as the multiple battles against extractivism and ecological devastation, gendered injustices, political/social misogyny, [8] and homophobia. The article willfully ignores the organizational and social momentum and innovation that fueled Pérez’s electoral success. It ignores these movements’ critiques of extractivist statism and monolithic personalism. Rogatyuk suggested that “Pérez’s political record suggests he is a Trojan horse for the left’s most bitter enemies.”

Similarly, Norton’s Monthly Review article disdainfully dismisses environmentalists, whose critiques of extractivism or racist policies of the statist left he portrayed as “opening up space for the right.” The author singles out “Extinction Rebellion” as a right-wing tool. He rages against the language of “decoloniality” and the eco-socialist left’s critique of statist leaders’ complicity with whiteness and colonial-economic and social legacies. In a typically authoritarian thrust, the article demonizes anyone who allies themselves with NGOs, branding them as supporters of imperialism.

Norton’s widely circulated Monthly Review article aimed at fracturing the left and eroding social movement support for Pérez as an alternative. The piece was published at a crucial moment in the Ecuadorian presidential election. Conventional media outlets have used it to discredit and damage a candidate of the eco-socialist/Indigenous/feminist left. Norton’s article wove together a series of Pérez’s tweets critiquing the statist and extractivist left. Of course, many members of the progressive left, including some of us writing this letter, disagreed with these proclamations as well as Pérez’s support of neoliberal candidates as a strategy to defeat authoritarian elements. But we contextualize these positions. The Monthly Review article spotlights Manuela Picq, Pérez’s partner, in a misogynist and homophobic diatribe that mocks and attacks her feminist, queer studies, and eco-social politics. Generating absurd conspiracy narratives, this article designates her body as evidence of Pérez’s imperialist complicity. It stinks of rumor-mongering, noting that she took classes at Princeton in a

building named after Ronald Reagan, as if this would prove that she was a stooge of the Reagan administration. At age 25, Picq was part of a civil society dialogue in the FTAA negotiation process where she organized critics of the FTAA. Instead of mentioning this history of radical praxis, she is accused of being a “CIA cutout” and an agent of “billionaire George Soros,” a familiar anti-Semitic accusation. She is also incriminated for teaching classes in queer studies and feminist theory. The author claims that because Picq teaches “Latinx Studies” and “Queering Notions of Modernity,” she is an enemy of global class struggle and complicit with imperialism. Norton does not acknowledge the long list of Picq’s other publications on queer theory, international relations, social movement struggles, or resistance to authoritarianism. Most tellingly, the author does not mention that Picq was arrested and deported from Ecuador by the Correa government for having participated in united Indigenous, feminist, and anti-extractivist protests.[9]

These two articles do not explore in detail the context of Pérez’s political momentum in the organization and revitalization of CONAIE—the Indigenous confederation that led the largest set of protests in Ecuadorian history in October 2019, uniting Indigenous groups, feminists, students, and workers movements to fight back against the imposition of a wrenching IMF accord and to demand the end to ecocidal plunder and land dispossession. This moment consolidated the leadership of a younger generation. CONAIE’s legacy, of uniting movements in October 2019, lent popular and movement support to Pérez’s candidacy and might bring him perhaps to second place in the polling. The article does not mention the historic October 2019 uprising or CONAIE and Pérez’s roles in it.

We are concerned that a significant number of today’s left-wing actors, across the Americas and the world, align themselves with extractivism, agrobusiness, authoritarian statism, [10] and stand against Indigenous, anti-racist, and anti-patriarchal movements, ideas, and leaders. We worry that the former is acting to eject the latter from the conversation by labeling them as right-wingers and allies of imperialism. We should not be distracted from the wave of violent, ultra-racist “populism,” and military and parliamentary coups that have swept the region in the past years. It is exactly these authoritarian developments that make it irresponsible and dangerous to brand those who critique the extractivist left as allies of Yankee imperialists or sympathetic to Bolsonaro-type populists who are encouraging genocide, femicide, racial exterminations, and homophobic assassinations. We stand against authoritarian statism focusing on individual male populist figures and armed, militarized “machocratic” patriarchy. Against this model, a new progressive alternative for the left has been emerging—led by Indigenous, Black, and feminist as well as class and worker-identified justice movements—to advocate redistribution of wealth, land, and autonomies to forge new modes of collective, bodily, and eco-social participation and rights.

After Ecuador’s 7 February 2021 election, civil society groups across Ecuador raised concerns that an effort was underway to “find votes” needed to bring Lasso’s totals above Pérez’s. This would serve both sides of what Chilean writer Andrés Kogan Valderrama has labeled the “binary” political equation [11] of extractivist left and neoliberal right. Both sides saw Pérez as the most threatening opponent, for he might win and, more than that, dismantle the binary political equation that has been making true redistribution and eco-social justice unimaginable. The Ecosocialist Feminist Network stated, “We reject the role that ‘Correismo’ [Rafael Correa’s regime] has played in this moment, exacerbating racism and delegitimizing social struggle through media campaigns... We know that the struggle continues and what will be the mobilization and unity of the popular field will permit us to sustain the gains accumulated in October [2019] and resistance against this system of death.” [12] We deplore the demonization of both Pérez and movements that brought him so close to the run-off election. A left-wing global community deserves better, and we call on the editors of Monthly Review and Jacobin to reject these simplistic and dangerous analyses which feed right wing structures of hate in Latin America

Signed,

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Notes

[1]

<https://mronline.org/2021/02/10/how-ecuadors-u-s-backed-coup-supporting-ecosocialist-candidate-ya-ku-perez-aids-the-right-wing/>

[2] <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/02/ecuador-election-arauz-hervas-perez-neoliberalism>

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monthly_Review#:~:text=The%20Monthly%20Review%2C%20established%20in,magazine%20in%20the%20United%20States.

[4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20190711101435/>

<http://idiommag.com/2011/03/no-short-cuts-interview-with-the-jacobin/>

[5] There is extensive literature that examines how the period of Rafael Correa's government as a time of impunity and human rights violations.

See: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-8675.12117>

[6] In 2017, CONAIE fought to get amnesty for all activists of the indigenous movement who had been prosecuted and sentenced for protesting Correa's government and Chinese mining companies, and defending water resources. The government misused anti-terrorism laws dating from the 1970s military dictatorship to incarcerate indigenous leaders protesting extractivism. At that time, 98

individuals faced criminal prosecutions for resistance to authority, terrorism, sabotage, etc. See: <https://www.planv.com.ec/historias/politica/conaie-la-lucha-la-amnistia> and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-22656374>

[7] See:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2013/oct/15/ecuador-president-misleading-yasuni>

[8] Correa's sabbatins, weekly speeches televised in different locations around the country on Saturdays, were spaces which could last up to three hours. There he presented his visions and proposals, and attacked citizens, journalists, human rights activists, academics, and environmentalists. The Media Observatory of Ecuador (OME) has counted 95 grievances against women and for sexist language in the 152 Correa's weekly speeches between 2013 and 2016. See: https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/05/23/planeta_futuro/1495560980_079621.html. On Saturday December 28, 2013, one of the last during Correa's first administration, the former president criticized "gender ideology." On the same occasion, Correa affirmed "defending the traditional family" and declared opposition to abortion "has nothing to do with the left or the right," but are simple "moral issues." See full video here: <https://youtu.be/ODXFdqtGsy?t=6341>

[9] See: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/case-history-manuela-picq>

[10] In 2013, Rafael Correa issued Executive Decree No. 16 to control NGOs and establish limitations on the independent and autonomous functioning of unions and social organizations. The decree was harshly criticized by local and international organizations.

<https://sobrevivientes.planv.com.ec/decreto-16-y-las-amenazas-a-las-ong/> Correa arbitrarily punished journalists who did not agree with him and actively attacked indigenous environmental activists who opposed oil and gas extraction or open-pit mining on their lands.

<https://rsf.org/en/news/what-future-free-speech-ecuador-after-presidential-election>

<https://amazonwatch.org/news/2018/0418-new-report-shines-light-on-dark-days-for-amazon-earth-defenders-in-ecuador>

[11]

<https://oplas.org/sitio/2021/02/14/andres-kogan-valderrama-yaku-perez-y-el-fin-de-los-binarismos/>

[12] <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7033>