

A left with audacity, decision, conviction, a programme and a clear strategy can confront the Right: an interview with Claudio Katz.

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Claudio Katz is one of the most prominent economists of recent decades, with a long career in critical reflection in politics and academia, and who actively supports the defence of human rights. His publications have been translated into Portuguese, English and Chinese. He currently participates in several CLACSO working groups and has coordinated some of them. Among his most outstanding books are: “América Latina en la Encrucijada Global” (2024)¹ ; “Teoría de la Dependencia: cincuenta años después” (2019)² ; “Bajo el Imperio del Capital” (2011)³ ; “Las disyuntivas de la izquierda en América Latina” (2008)⁴ ; and “El porvenir del socialismo” (2004)⁵ . He won the Libertador Prize for Critical Thought in 2019, awarded by the Ministry of Popular Power for Culture of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Network in Defence of Humanity, for his work “Teoría de la Dependencia 50 años después”.

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PV/GD: Claudio, in your latest book “Latin America at the Crossroads”, you deal with the situation of different countries, both in Latin America, China and the United States. We want to delve more deeply into the question of the right wing, given that it has taken on new currency in the political, academic and social spheres. What would you say?

Claudio Katz: Well, I believe that the advance of the right is the dominant fact in the world and, therefore, also in Latin America, and here we have a different right, but related to that of Europe and the United States, which is not classic fascism, which should not be interpreted in terms of mere populism, that has a strong onslaught, that faces limits, but what is central is the priority of fighting this right with a firm decision, prioritising action from below, popular mobilisation, and with the forcefulness that

¹ Katz, C. (2024). Latin America at the Global Crossroads. Buenos Aires. Battle of Ideas.

² Katz, C. (2019) Teoría de la Dependencia, cincuenta años después. Buenos Aires. Batalla de las Ideas.

³ Katz, C. (2011). Under the Empire of Capital. Buenos Aires. Ediciones Luxemburg.

⁴ Katz, C. (2008). Las disyuntivas de la Izquierda en América Latina. Buenos Aires. Ediciones Luxemburg.

⁵ Katz, C. (2004). The Future of Socialism. Buenos Aires. Ediciones Herramienta - Imago Mundi.



Chávez and Fidel bequeathed to us, and not with the hesitation that predominates today, especially in the various exponents of progressivism, who not only fail to fulfil the promises of their governments, allowing the right to regain permanent strength, but who, in the face of the right, do not show the decisiveness, the audacity, the courage needed to confront the danger of these characteristics, of this dimension.

PV/GD: At different moments in the history of Latin America, the left has had a place in confronting the right wing and pushing for the demands of the popular sectors. In this general framework, for the moment we live in as a society, how would you characterise the left, and what role would they have in confronting the right wing?

Claudio Katz: First, the left needs audacity, decision, and conviction; then, they need to set out a programme and a strategy, especially a programme and a strategy, because it is not enough to fight. We have had a wave of recent revolts, from 2019 onwards, in several countries that brought down neoliberal governments, and the right came back. Conservative restoration has regained strength. This means that a successful struggle is not enough, but that the left has to conquer enough authority to, beyond resistance, manage to consolidate a project with solid foundations. And that, in the face of a right-wing that so brazenly exposes what it wants to do, requires the left to reveal its anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and social transformation project forcefully.

And that means a struggle against inequality, a struggle against dependent capitalism, a struggle where the socialist ideal is present as a goal to be achieved. In my opinion, the left can only regain consistency and strength if it enunciates a strategy to achieve the objectives of equality, democracy, justice, and socialism.

PV/GD: The left has always thought about strategy and tactics to advance the struggle in favour of the disadvantaged; what would that strategy consist of today? What can we learn from the experiences of the Latin American left since a programme is not enough?

Claudio Katz: Regarding strategy, I share with a broad sector of the left the conception that the plan that suits our times is to win the government and begin to contest power. To win the government by electoral means and to contest military, media, economic and judicial power in a long battle once the government has been won.

The first key idea is that government and power are not the same thing, and the conquest of government is only a tiny link in the power struggle. But the first step is to consolidate this arrival in government and this political transformation from the government, generating an integral democratic transformation of the political system where citizens conquer real decision-making power, with experiences of democratic constituent assemblies, as we saw in Venezuela, as we saw in Bolivia, and where this transformation is sustained and driven by a widespread power built from below, parallel to the institutional system. To govern by winning through elections but creating support for extra-institutional, extra-parliamentary mobilisation linked to the institutional parliamentary project.

If the social struggle only unfolds in the limited terms allowed by the institutional framework, the left's project will not advance in the dispute for power. It can reach the government, but it can only dispute power by breaking the current institutional framework's restrictive framework. From there, the dispute for power, in my opinion, will have different temporalities, where the key is the rapid and forceful control of the political system, the battle for the media to develop an economic transformation that will not be immediate, that will have different steps and where we have to learn a lot from important experiences in Latin America, Bolivia or internationally, such as China, which give us certain guidelines of where to go through processes of transformation and development.

PV/GD: From your perspective, how does this strategy differ from previous ones that have crossed the struggles in Latin America and the world, and what new features would it have?

This strategy that I am putting forward differs substantially from the predominant socialist strategy in Latin America during the second half of the 20th century, which was a strategy that counterposed armed struggle, in terms of protracted people's war or insurreccional processes, against the parliamentary road to socialism; this was what was discussed in the last decades of the last century: guerrilla, insurrection, parliament, as counterposed instances.

Well, about the idea of reaching the government, conquering and disputing power, we can say that it is this dynamic of Reform and Revolution in which it is always necessary to determine when one is concatenated with the other because that will depend on the process as it unfolds. And where the social subject of this change is an expanded popular subject, I distance myself from the sociological view of a privileged

subject, which is the traditional idea of classical Marxism, of the proletariat, of the exploited, as the subject that, unlike the rest of the oppressed, has the capacity, through its control of the levers of the economy, to play a leading role in the transformation of society. The true part is that these are the key sectors for a transformation, the bankers, those who run the ports, those who manage the oil, they are the subject that manages society's transformation. However, this does not mean that the one who is driving the transformation, the one who is pushing the dynamics of Reform and Revolution, is the one who will follow; it may or may not be the same subject. And experience instead induces us to be flexible, the experience of the 20th century. There have been revolutions of the proletariat: the classic Russian one, there have been revolutions of the peasants in China, and there have been many revolutions, many revolts of the precarious or the mass of the precarious as intervening subjects in contemporary processes. Flexibility on this point and flexibility in the organisation: there is no doubt that this process requires organisation. An organisation is needed for the struggle; you cannot fight without organisation. However, whether this will be with movements, with parties, or what kind of parties, there are various situations where it is impossible to predetermine and where there is no single model for Latin America. There is no programme for Latin America; in no way is there a presupposition and a priori definition that the subject in Haiti is going to be the same as in Brazil.

PV/GD: What are the challenges for a work agenda in favour of the gains of the popular struggles?

It seems that all this that I have just explained needs to be investigated, studied and clarified in terms of four concrete experiences so that there is no vacuum of projects to be carried out in the future; we need to assess what there was and what there was not of these elements in the Salvador Allende process in Chile, in the Cuban revolution and Venezuela and Bolivia in recent decades. These four processes have to be studied there, how it was, and what they did and did not have. It does not seem that the idea of socialism we want to build is something we will invent tomorrow, apart from the experiences that have already occurred. In many cases, they are experiences that teach what was not done and what was lacking. Processes frozen today in Venezuela and Bolivia failed, and there are other tremendous ones like that of Salvador Allende. That is why we study what has been done and we build future projects on what has been done. This would be the first panorama to tackle in order to move forward.



Biography

Biography of Claudio Katz (interviewee): Argentine economist, militant, and human rights activist. He was born in 1954. He completed his undergraduate studies in Economics at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), where he also obtained his doctorate. He is one of the most prominent economists of recent decades, with a long history of critical reflection in politics and academia. His publications have been translated into Portuguese, English, and Chinese. He currently participates in several working groups of CLACSO, in addition to having coordinated some of them.

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Biography of Gonzalo Durán (interviewer): Economist from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, holding a Master of Sciences in Labour Economics from the University of Turin (Italy) and a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Duisburg-Essen (Germany, DAAD scholar). His research interests include: trade unionism, collective bargaining, wages, and inequality. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Chile.

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