Historic mobilization of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil

As never before, leaders from all over the country came together for a show of force against Jair Bolsonaro’s anti-Indigenous and genocidal policies. It is no longer just symbolic violence or covert racism: it is direct violence. The Indigenous peoples want to be protagonists of a new development model and, to that end, they seek to increase their representation in the national Congress. Unity with city workers and family farmers is a fundamental requirement for us to move towards a more just society.

By Indianara Ramires Machado - May 1st 2022

Around 8,000 leaders from 200 Indigenous peoples from all over the country gathered in Brasilia for the 18th Acampamento Terra Livre (Free Land Camp). The mobilization was organized by the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) and its grassroots organizations and is considered one of the largest in history. The program involved assemblies, talks and protests in the vicinity of the National Congress.

The demonstration was held to offer resistance to a series of legislative initiatives that will affect their territories: Bill 490/2007 to modify the Temporary Framework of Indigenous Lands and the authorization of mining in their territories; the repudiation of the so-called "Poison Package" that allows the use of agro-toxins; projects that promote land grabbing; the alteration of environmental licensing rules to favor the exploration of natural resources; and the discussion of a new Statute on disarmament and possession of weapons.

The Indigenous peoples of Brazil denounce that it is no longer just symbolic violence or covert racism: it is direct violence. Genocide is slowly taking place before the eyes of the whole world. Human rights violations are committed day by day without any legal action being taken. Impunity reigns in Brazil. We Brazilians have returned to the era of colonization and extermination.
Protagonists of a new development model

With this massive mobilization, the Indigenous peoples demonstrated that they repudiate a project for a "civilizing country and world", based on the principles of respect for democracy, human rights, justice, care for the environment and Mother Nature. The communities demand respect from the Brazilian State for the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country to which more than 305 ethnic groups and 284 Indigenous languages belong.

Indigenous peoples want to be protagonists in the life plans that affect them, to exercise their autonomy in their territories and to participate in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them. For this to happen, it is essential to increase Indigenous representation in the Legislative Chambers. Not only to confront the threats to their fundamental rights, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988, but also to establish a symmetrical dialogue, on equal terms, with all spheres of the government and the Brazilian State.

The Tierra Libre Camp also strengthened the alliance with other popular movements in society. The problems listed by the organizations are not limited to Indigenous peoples but also include other vulnerable sectors: Quilombolas, traditional communities, city workers, family agriculture and the poor, mainly black men and women living on the outskirts of Brazilian cities.

An alternative path

From an integral point of view, Indigenous peoples consider that the planet can no longer support a model of unbridled consumption. This predatory development model anticipates the end of the world. Indigenous peoples live in balance with nature, but in recent times our values have been suffocated by the imposition of models of land exploitation that are not sustainable in the long term.

We Indigenous people affirm that it is possible to coexist with diversity and otherness. It is possible to respect the other. Our main contribution is very simple: "Individuality is not more important than collectivity". We are convinced that nature is not a source of
resources, but a source of life. We do not believe that merchandise or money are the most important thing. We are interested in "good living" and respect for others, for those who are different.

The mobilization of the Indigenous peoples of Brazil in the Free Land Camp reaffirmed that unity is a fundamental requirement for us to move forward together. We need a country that is truly democratic, just, multicultural, respectful of life and protective of Mother Nature. Our struggle is permanent and maintains an alliance with rural and urban workers.

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