

Proposal for the conference:

The Political Economy of the Extractive Imperative in Latin America: Reducing poverty and inequality vs. ensuring inclusion and sustainability?

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Extractivism in Venezuela and Ecuador: an answer to capitalist's rejection of developmentalism.

This paper draws on extensive fieldwork to argue that neo-extractivism in Ecuador and Venezuela, as pursued by left wing governments, is the result of a the process of transformation of class relationships that began in the decades preceding the pink tide. Prior to the “turn to the left”, capitalist classes in both countries rejected ISI-inspired state-led development in favour of neoliberalism. This shift included key changes that negatively affected labour: working conditions were eroded and rights of workers to organize undermined. It led subaltern classes, formerly led by the formal labour sector, to be coalesced by other social sectors (e.g. peasants, indigenous, urban dwellers – popular classes), in the struggle over the development model. This transition resulted in new forms of mobilization that destabilized the state, while factions of the capitalist classes, using their own organisations (e.g. chambers of commerce and industry), struggled to preserve their influence within the state.

In this context, neo-extractivism appears as a key means adopted by pink tide governments to retrieve the autonomy of the state from the earlier incursion of capitalist classes. While the state institutions were cleared from capitalist class direct representation, the extractive rent allowed the state to invest and foster growth despite capitalist reluctance towards the development model. Simultaneously, the increased rent captured by the neo-extractivist policies enabled redistribution efforts aimed at diminishing the source of social antagonisms and grievances from popular classes. From this vantage point, the durability of the regimes does depend on resource prices, but it most importantly depends on the capacity of the state to use extractive revenues to maintain a balance between redistribution and the process of accumulation.

Short Bio:

Thomas Chiasson-LeBel is a PhD student in political science at York University. After completing a B.A. and M.A. in sociology at UQAM (Montréal-Canada), he began a PhD in political science at York University, where he also joined the Center for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC). His research focuses on comparative studies of class relationships in the period surrounding the rise of the “pink tide”, with a special interest in Venezuela and Ecuador.