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Venezuela

The Revolution Will Not Be Decreed

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In Caracas, we caught up with Gonzalo Gómez, a founder of the radical website aporrea.org and militant in the Trotskyist organization, Marea Socialista. In this interview, Gonzalo describes his own path to militancy, the different phases of the Bolivarian process, and the dangers of bureaucracy, the “bolibourgeoisie”, and the stultifying internal life of the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV). He also stresses the centrality of the creativity and dynamism of social movements from below, the complexities of workers’ control, and the dynamics of the current conjuncture prior to the October 7, 2012 general elections.

SS and JRW: Can you tell us about your own political formation and history?

GG: I began my political activism when I entered university in the 1970s. I became involved as an active militant in political struggle when I was 19 years old, but I had already been involved in various student activities for a few years before this.

I studied at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello because my first attempt at entering the Universidad Central de Venezuela failed; the university had been shut down at the time by the government of Rafael Caldera. There were serious confrontations between the students and the state at the UCV. So, instead, I applied to the Catholic university, which was a new university, a private university run by the Jesuits. But as a result of a process of radicalization amongst Venezuelan youth during those years, the Catholic university also entered into a situation of crisis and conflict.

We were successful in building a movement that demanded co-governance between the students and the administration in the university. We were able to hold forums and open political discussions at the university. We created an Assembly of Student Delegates, and a Student’s Congress. My activism in this area led initially to my expulsion from the university along with 14 others, but pressure from the student movement – there were mobilizations and a hunger strike – forced the administration to allow our re-registration. Our return to the university provoked the resignation of the rector of the university and a few department heads. Those who left were extremely reactionary people, with very conservative political positions – people who had previously held positions in the business associations of Venezuela, and others who had been ministers in the first government of Carlos Andrés Pérez.

At the university during this time we were all concerned with what was happening in Chile, given that this was the period of Allende’s government (1970-1973) and then the Pinochet coup of 1973. I became involved in an organization with a Trotskyist orientation called the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers Party, PST), which published the paper *Voz Socialista* (Socialist Voice). This organization later fused with a part of the Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionaria (Movement of the Revolutionary Left, MIR), which published the paper *La Chispa* (The Spark). The new organization was called PST-La Chispa.

Of course, from here we went on to participate in various important events and movements, in the struggle of February 27, 1989, [1] the movements preceding and following the military uprising of 1992 led by current President Chávez, the urban movements of the popular barrios, and the teacher’s union, through something called the Base Magisterial Democracia Sindical (Grassroots Teachers for Union Democracy, BMDS). I was a teachers’ delegate for this movement.

More recently, I’ve been participating in various spaces, for example, in Asociación Nacional de Medios Comunitarios

Libres y Alternativos (National Association of Free and Alternative Media, ANMCLA), and the Comando Nacional de Comunicación Popular – Misión 7 de Octubre (National Command of Popular Communication – Mission October 7, CNCP -7O), is another space I'm involved in. Together with others in Marea Socialista we are also participating in articulations with other social movements and political currents inside of what's called the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Popular Alliance, APR). [2]

SS and JRW: What was the importance of the failed coup d'état of April 11-13, 2002 to the development of the left?

GG: The struggle that began in 2002, when activists and organizers took the initiative to challenge the coup d'état that occurred in April of that year, marks the beginning of a new phase of struggle. At that time, we formed the Asamblea Popular Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Popular Assembly). It was a short-lived political space that existed only until the second wave of counter-revolutionary reaction, that is, the bosses' lockout and sabotage in the oil sector in 2002-2003.

The assembly played an important role in helping to foment the resistance against the coup, because the government had not called on the people to defend the process against the coup, but rather had bet all of its cards on trying to manage the balance of forces internal to the state and the armed forces. This was, perhaps, a tactic of the government to avoid a bloodbath in the streets. But we in the assembly concluded that the decision to not mobilize the people could mean an even bigger bloodbath, that the presence of the people in the streets was necessary.

We helped to organize this initiative and were involved in the confrontations with the military police in the streets, in which a number of people were killed. But we believe these actions prevented the original plans of the right from taking hold. The right wanted to carry out a coup disguised as something else, to make it seem as if it was a popular mobilization against Chávez. The right called on the mobilization of the upper middle class and the wealthiest Venezuelans to mobilize in the streets, a tactic that was extremely well -managed by the private media.

The armed forces and the police were obviously to be behind these actions, but the idea was to give the impression to the world that the people themselves were overthrowing Chávez, that they were mobilizing and going to the presidential palace in Miraflores to carry out a democratic revolution, that this was a recovery of peoples' power that had been taken away by a dictatorship. This was the plan that the right had developed.

The resistance of military forces loyal to Chávez around Miraflores, together with the presence of pro-Chávez popular mobilizations in the streets, revealed the true nature of this conspiracy.

The Asamblea Popular Revolucionaria created the webpage aporrea.org during this period, with the idea that the Internet would be a useful tool in the denunciation of this coup d'état, as well as a medium through which to organize the resistance. But the response of the people on April 13 in the streets exceeded anyone's expectations. Indeed, we had planned on April 19 as a day of resistance, which has a resonance in the history of the struggle for Venezuela's independence. But the popular reaction happened much more quickly than anticipated.

[Aporrea.org](http://aporrea.org) was fully on-line in May of 2002. And it eventually became a bigger phenomenon of communication than was initially planned. It played a role that the existing sectors of public media couldn't play. In aporrea.org we featured open confrontation with the right, radical positions of popular struggle within the revolutionary process, but also critical analysis and internal debate.

These were things that the existing public media was not doing. We believed, unlike the existing public media, that we needed to have a massive mobilization of the people, and that we needed to have open political discussions. We thought that the differences of opinions inside the revolutionary process had to be spoken about publicly in front of

everyone, and not between four walls amongst a few select people. We also wanted to hold these discussions in front of the right, debating publicly with them, with no fear that they would use these debates against the revolution. We believe that the best tool that the counter-revolutionaries could dream of would be the silencing of debate within the revolutionary camp. It is precisely the right that would benefit from this.

Aporrea.org was subsequently used as a tool to continue fighting the forces behind the coup, because the effects of the coup did not disappear after its formal defeat on April 13, 2002. Chávez returned, but not without various conditions attached to his resumption of office, perhaps by sectors of the armed forces before they agreed to the liberation of Chávez.

In the first news reports that followed Chávez's return, it was not reported that there had been a coup d'état, but rather a vacuum of power. Those who defended the demonstrators at Puente Llaguno [3] were characterized by the right as gangsters (pistoleros) and were imprisoned. How is it that those who defended the revolutionary process were put in prison after the return of Chávez? How is it that we defeated a coup d'état and then we were put in jail? If there are people from our side who were jailed it is because sectors of those who orchestrated the coup retained some power, and imposed conditions on Chávez.

So events about 2002 are not as clear as they sometimes appear. No doubt, we defeated the coup and Chávez returned. But if we so clearly defeated the coup, why weren't the policies of the revolution pursued and deepened immediately thereafter? Why did the press announce that there hadn't been a coup? The Bolivarian Circles were stigmatized. Meanwhile, people who led the pro-coup marches in April, members of the reactionary former management of the state-owned oil company PDVSA, who had been fired by President Chávez, were reinstalled in their former positions.

And how is it that key figures in the coup attempt were allowed to return to their positions in PDVSA? These were the same people who then went on to lead the oil lockout of 2002-2003. Who established all of these conditions? Was it simply a policy of President Chávez to pacify the situation, to open up dialogue? Or were there forces of power within the armed forces and the state apparatus itself that continued expressing the interests of those who carried out the coup?

This is why I'm suggesting that the legacy of the coup lasted beyond its formal defeat with the return of Chávez. It is also the case that the organizers behind the coup of April 11 who were occupying Miraflores were guaranteed their freedom. The attorney general said all of their rights and freedoms would be guaranteed, that they wouldn't be facing trial. All of this together reflects the fact that the legacy of the coup extended beyond April 13.

This legacy of the coup caused a momentary ebb in the revolutionary process, which was reversed with the subsequent defeat of the oil lockout. The defeat of the oil lockout reinvigorated the revolutionary process once again. After the coup, activists were fighting against impunity for the coup plotters and calling for the dismantling of the metropolitan police force, and for the transformation of the judicial apparatus, because it was taking decisions in favour of the coup plotters.

The Asamblea Popular Revolucionaria put forward an entire program of struggle around these issues, including plans to prevent further coup attempts in the future. It's for these reasons that aporrea.org became a key resource for the popular movement. It was the medium through which the public came to know about all of these dangers and problems. And because it was always a very open forum, and was capable of publishing news very rapidly, we received constant reports from the popular movement, from the activists on the ground who would send us reports and photos from the streets.

In 2007, when the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV) was formed, fragments of PST-La Chispa, which had dissolved and reformed, together with other currents merged into Marea Socialista, and joined the PSUV as the Marea Socialista. I was a delegate from Marea Socialista at the founding congress of PSUV.

I was heavily involved in PSUV initially, and was part of the regional political executive of the party in Caracas. Currently, I am not involved in the party at this level, which has a lot to do with the negative dynamic that the party has entered into; this had led leading activists and organizers to articulate themselves outside the party, without actually leaving the party.

This has happened because there seem to be other political spaces where there are greater possibilities for participation and democratic debate than within PSUV. The PSUV has become a party of public functionaries, and we want the PSUV, or whatever organization assumes the vanguard of the Venezuelan revolution, to be constituted by the leaders of the social movements, with the popular movements at the front, rather than there being such a strong influence on the part of functionaries of the government. The fact that these functionaries have assumed the leadership of the party has led to the party losing much of its vigor, its dynamism, and its internal democracy. This is an important risk facing the revolutionary process.

SS and JRW: Can you clarify for us the way you understand the different phases of the Bolivarian process, both before and after the period of the coup attempt that you've discussed in some detail?

GG: The first phase before the coup was Chávez's electoral victory in 1998 and the installation of the Constituent Assembly process shortly thereafter, in 1999. During the Constituent Assembly process the people, in one way or another, participated in a discussion around the model of development and politics of the country.

The next phase has to do with the facilitating laws [leyes habilitantes] of 2001, where Chávez was delegated authority to decree these laws. Among these laws was the Ley de Tierras (Agrarian law), which began a process of taking land from the hands of the latifundistas (large land owners) and redistributing it amongst the peasantry. It also meant that the state would try to push ahead with another form of agricultural production, from a very different perspective than what had existed previously. There was also the Ley de Hidrocarburos (Hydrocarbons Law), thanks to which Venezuela recuperated sovereign control over the industrial production of petroleum, including the imposition of greater royalties and taxes that generated increased revenues for the state. Another important law in this period was the Ley de Pesca (Fishing law), which sought to reverse the ecological depredation of the coastal flora and fauna from commercial fishing.

So there were a series of laws against which the bourgeoisie reacted, including, on December 10, 2001, the first signals of the coming coup attempt, with a business lockout backed by the right-wing bureaucracy of the traditional trade union federation Central de Trabajadores de Venezuela (Workers' Central of Venezuela, CTV), which had long been linked to the Acción Democrática (Democratic Action, AD) and other parties of the traditional right. Thus, the series of laws passed in 2001 was a second important phase of the process that occurred before the coup.

After the coup, I would say the next phase began when Chávez outlined the anti-imperialist character of the revolution, and afterward, in 2005, the socialist character of the revolution. All of this occurred during the recall referendum initiated by the right in 2004, a failed attempt to defeat Chávez using electoral mechanisms. This was important because it represented the employment of a fairly unique democratic mechanism, given the fact that very few countries have a democratic mechanism through which you can recall the President. The right tried to employ this mechanism, and failed in their attempt to recall Chávez [in the official results 57% of voters voted in favour of Chávez].

Meanwhile, of course, many other important things were happening in the revolutionary process – the nationalization

of various enterprises, the recuperation of various enterprises that had been privatized, like the telecommunications firm CANTV and the steel plant SIDOR. Such nationalizations generated important conflicts internal to the Bolivarian process in some cases. The government put the question of nationalization on the agenda, but, for example, the actual nationalization of SIDOR would never have actually happened if the workers of the plant hadn't mounted a struggle of their own.

There was also the pushing forward of the forms of popular organization encompassed in the concept of "popular power" – this has had its contradictions and problems, but it's undeniable that the level of popular consciousness of the people is much higher today as a result. Obviously, though, there are deformations of popular power as well due to the amplification of bureaucracy and clientelism. The institution of genuine popular power can only be won with intense popular struggle. Some of the contradictions came to the fore in the case of SIDOR, where there was a struggle for workers' control, on the one hand, and a tremendous resistance on the part of management on the other, and the bureaucracy of the union itself, accustomed to clientelistic and corrupt relations with management.

The most recent development in the process has to do with the illness of the President. [4] This has raised a whole series of questions around the continuity of leadership, giving the unifying role the Chávez has played in this process. He will not easily be replaced. The social movements, the working class, and their organizations, have not organically constituted themselves as a social subject with sufficient strength to have weight in the exercise of power within the government. We need to move toward a form of government, even while Chávez is still present, where there are mechanisms through which the organizations of the working class and social movements are taken into account, are consulted, where they have a direct role in the design of policies and decision making.

Currently there is an inorganic form of consultation, what is sometimes called street parliamentarism, where deputies from the government consult with people in the street. But it is the functionaries of the government who ultimately conduct the syntheses of these views and select the proposals that they are going to carry out. It is not we in the popular movement who are carrying these things out directly. If this isn't a bourgeois government, neither have we yet arrived at a situation in which there is direct control by the popular movement itself.

The government is a close interlocutor of ours, sensitive to our demands, and it pushes various actions forwards and provides an orientation; but at the same time, the bureaucratic apparatus of the state often acts as a break on all advances. The bureaucracy appropriates the discourse of the revolution, but in reality rather than living for the revolution, they live from the revolution. They accumulate capital, negotiate with the bourgeoisie, and reject real changes. And when the bureaucracy blocks changes pushed from below, it generates discontent.

SS and JRW: Are you referring here to what some have called the "bolibourgeoisie"?

GG: Yes. Look, when someone assumes a position in the apparatus of the state, and benefits from transactions that are not their own, but rather are transactions that use the budget of the state, and which extract benefits from commissions, we are witnessing the formation of a new bourgeoisie. They skim off a layer of the oil rent not for the benefit of the people but for their own benefit. It is difficult to obtain precise information regarding these practices, but it is certainly going on. And this is one of the strongest indicators that we have not completed a rupture with the capitalist system, but that it remains very much alive. We've nationalized banks, for example, which is all to the good, but private banking continues to exist. And the banks that are in the hands of the state are quite crucially inefficient and incapable of resolving the problems that they are intended to solve.

For me, it's necessary that there be an acceleration, a democratic radicalization, of the revolutionary process, with more audacious and radical measures that rupture with the existing capitalist system – these measures will have to recognize the reigning balance of forces, obviously. It's also necessary that there be more organic consultation and participation of the social movements in the leadership of the government. This, still, is not very advanced.

SS and JRW: What happened with the PSUV from your perspective? Marea Socialista entered the party right from the beginning, but today we hear a lot of criticisms of the internal functioning of the party, including from Marea Socialista. Can you explain a little more fully the substance of the criticisms of the internal process of the party?

GG: We in Marea Socialista remain in the party, and do so freely in the sense that we conduct discussions, hold forums, and so on, and we continue to push forward our proposals and policies within the party. We're active both inside and outside of the party. And no one has told us that we can't be doing this. But neither have we found an organic space within PSUV to be able to debate these policies and proposals in a way that has an effect on the decision-making and orientation of the party.

It is a party with an extremely vertical structure, with Chávez as the maximum leader, the vice-presidents of the party below him, and then the leadership layers beneath the vice-presidents that are now selected through processes of cooptation, rather than through elections by the base of the party. And when the base is able to vote on leaderships, there is a whole machinery of power of the existing leadership that uses resources of the state apparatus and party media in conditions that are very unequal for competing leaderships.

So, how can we say that this party reflects the actual balance of social forces in the revolutionary process? The party is a very significant distortion of this balance of forces.

We continue to be active within the PSUV because we consider it an important political space. But we feel an urgent necessity to participate in other spaces of debate and articulation because of the limits of the formal structure of the party. This has been the position that many, many social movements have found themselves in, with regard to their relationship to the party. This is the case, for example, for the various social movements that constitute the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria (Popular Revolutionary Alliance, APR), which participates inside of the Gran Pólo Patriótico (Great Patriotic Pole, GPP), and which is not an insignificant grouping of social forces. These are the movements of the movements. Inside the Alliance one finds the peasant front that brings together a whole series of smaller peasant movements across the country. It is also true of the MP – another movement of movements – which brings together the renter's movement, the movement of those occupying public buildings, domestic workers, the network of the homeless, and others. The case of Asociación Nacional de Medios Comunitarios Libres y Alternativos (National Association of Free and Alternative Media, ANMCLA) is similar when it comes to the question of alternative community media, and it is also true of Marea Socialista itself, which is simultaneously a workers', youth, and popular movement.

We are all looking for alternative routes through which we can build our capacities and build our presence, because the formal structures of the PSUV do not allow for the flourishing and developing of our initiatives, nor for the creativity of the social movements. To bring everything into a single line within the party would transform all of us into little squabblers positioning for a piece of the apparatus, or merely into bodies to attend marches and public events of the party.

In the foundational congress of the PSUV, and in the other opening discussions, there was wide and open debate over the programmatic positions that the party would assume. But when one looks at how this programmatic elaboration has been translated into the practical governance of the party, and in the general practice of the party, there is a large dissonance. From my perspective, the party is not implementing its own program. The program there as a general horizon of the party, but day to day there is no movement to actualize it.

So we're here in Venezuela in the midst of a very important process, a reference point for Latin America and the entire world, but the process is still operating within a fundamentally reformist schema. This includes, for example,

the regional integration projects with the rest of Latin America, in spite of the various positive characteristics you can point to in these initiatives. Latin American integration is seen as the building of common spaces and closer association between Venezuela and a series of countries that continue to be governed by their own bourgeoisies. So it's not a vision of unity on the basis of class, unity of the exploited.

I believe that President Chávez has been able to make advances in many areas, some of which have been extremely difficult – for example, to have introduced an ideological influence of socialism within the armed forces of Venezuela, which is of incredible value. For many years the left in this country struggled without success to have this kind of influence on the armed forces.

At the same time, we have committed important errors. We're 13 years into this revolutionary process and we are still entwined in this rent-dependent economy, based on oil. We have been unable to advance in our own agricultural production rooted in a strong foundation of social property. The concept of the *empresas de producción social* (social production enterprises) should not be mere window dressing, a curiosity, an interesting little thing to look at, "oh look, how interesting, how beautiful, this enterprise in Carora or Guanare has socialized its process of production." If we are not capable of producing for this country's needs, building enterprises that can compete with the existing bourgeoisie, which can help to neutralize all the distortions that are created in the market, then we will continue to face major economic problems. We have a large external debt, for example, even if today it's not with the United States or the International Monetary Fund, but rather with China.

SS and JRW: Changing themes slightly, can you explain for us what Gran Polo Patriótico is, as well as its relationship to PSUV.

GG: In the period in which we were navigating the problems associated with the illness of Chávez, the PSUV was encountering all kinds of problems in its attempt to assume the role of a dynamic center of popular organization and mobilization. And thus the social movements began to build initiatives outside the party. Chávez had introduced the idea of the Gran Polo Patriótico (GPP), and various social movements took up this idea as an instrument for pushing forward with various actions. We began to speak about organizing *asambleas patrióticas populares* (popular patriotic assemblies), to build the foundations for a *polo patriótico popular* (popular patriotic pole). When the president was in the process of recuperating from his illness, he put forward the idea of the GPP in a definitive manner.

At the beginning, the President's call received a very spirited reaction, with the dynamic and enthusiastic participation of many regional and national social movements. However, from my point of view, when the GPP could not effectively respond to the creativity and initiative of the movements within their own spaces and areas of focus, and when it tried to encompass everything under a single vision – with a conception of unity that lacked the necessary diversity that needs to be included in any serious conceptualization of unity – and when it tried to discipline everything so that it fell into line with a single plan, this spurred discontent within popular movement.

One of the problems with the GPP has been that it has not distinguished between the large national and regional popular movements of significance and various little grouplets, organizations, or expressions of very localized struggles. And these different kinds of movements cannot be placed on a similar level within an umbrella organization like the GPP – a neighbourhood organization of a dozen people should not be confused with a national peasant movement or workers' confederation.

The GPP should have sat down from the beginning with the largest of the popular movements, but instead every tiny expression of struggle was inscribed into it, without any clarification about the different social and political weight they held in the country, or whether or not they genuinely expressed important social forces. As a consequence, something that at first appeared extremely democratic and capable of bringing together social movements in a dynamic way began to lose its force, its capacity to mobilize and its real social weight within actually existing society.

The President and the government never sat down with the key social movements at a national level, the peasant front, the poor peoples' movement, with the two main labour federations [the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (National Union of Workers, UNT) and the Central Socialista Bolivariana de Trabajadores (Bolivarian Socialist Workers' Central, CSBT)] rather than just the CSBT.

SS and JRW: Can you tell us about the Marea Socialista's relationship with the trade union movement?

GG: Marea Socialista recently decided to leave the UNT and join the CSBT, with a variety of conditionalities and criticisms of the new labour confederation. We believe in the project of UNT but we think it has exhausted itself. But the government only recognizes the CSBT, and the workers who have organized themselves in the UNT are not taken into account, as if they weren't part of the revolutionary process because the government hasn't formally recognized them. If the President is the president of all Venezuelans who are with the revolutionary process, it should not be the case that a sector of the government decides that it's appropriate to recognize only one of the labour confederations that is on side with the revolutionary process. Thus, all of these social movements were not called together as they ought to have been. And this had a very negative impact on the dynamism of the GPP.

And when it came to the time of selecting spokespeople and regional representatives for the GPP, the process was not carried out in the democratic traditions of the social movements, but rather through designations from above. For example, the PSUV played a major role in this process of creating an ostensibly separate political space – the GPP. I believe that this weakened the latter considerably, compared to its beginning as a significant initiative that could have been quite important as a social force.

I still believe that the GPP's original potential can be recuperated, but the path toward such recuperation is to recognize clearly its current state, and to bring together the various social movements to work together with the government, and President Chávez, so that there can be an effective electoral campaign for the October 2012 elections. But the real political weight and influence of the major regional and national social movements must be taken into account in revising and recuperating the character of the GPP in order for this to function. And the local movements, which are engaged in the very specific environs of their locales, should not be extracted and abstracted from this activity and situated within the GPP as if they were something different.

The popular movement in this country is still alive, and you can see a whole variety of activities in development. What I think is difficult is managing these activities through the structures of the PSUV or the GPP, particularly as the latter has shifted in character. But the movement is there, and you can see it in autonomous mobilizations and spheres of organization, including independent initiatives organizing for the electoral campaign of Chávez.

There are those who say that everything has to be organized into a single framework, into a unified electoral campaign, with elections as the central focus. I don't think social movements function in this manner. If this is not understood, these efforts of centralization and control are going to continue without the desired results. But they're there; the movements are present.

SS and JRW: What are the most dynamic social forces and popular movements in the current conjuncture?

GG: In the labour movement, for example, there are the two labour confederations, the UNT and the CSBT, as I mentioned. The UNT developed with a more autonomous character, with a more critical and combative political orientation, but it was beginning to deflate. More and more unions and federations of unions were beginning to affiliate with the CSBT, which has always been more subordinate to the apparatus of the government, and which does not have the perspective of struggle that it needs to have, from my point of view.

We have to fight against the right wing in Venezuela and against imperialism, but we also have to fight within the apparatus of the bourgeois state precisely to destroy the apparatus of the bourgeois state to be able to implement real workers' and popular power. And this implies confronting the bureaucracy regularly in the decisions they make that favour the bosses or are anti-worker and anti-popular in character, above and beyond the progressive reforms called for and introduced by Chávez.

If there is no struggle, if there is no tension, the bureaucratic apparatus will tend to impose itself over the popular interests. In order to prevent this we need to redouble the popular forces fighting against this tendency, and they need to be taken into account by the government.

Next, of course, there is the peasant movement. There is the Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar y Zamora (Revolutionary Current Bolívar and Zamora, CRBZ), which is a powerful, organized peasant movement. They've carried out important mobilizations and are involved in different collective agricultural projects and initiatives; they've also had experience with the establishment of communal cities. There's another important peasant movement that's called Jirajara. Braulio Álvarez, a national assembly deputy, is the leader of this peasant movement.

Then there is the Movimiento de Pobladores (Movement of the Urban Poor, MP), which has been involved in the struggle for renters' interests, and in the struggle for gaining title to squatted lands in the city, among other initiatives. I've also mentioned ANMCLA, but in the current moment there is also the Comando Nacional de Comunicación Popular – Misión 7 de Octubre (National Command of Popular Communication – Mission October 7, CNCP -7O), which groups together all of the alternative media, including those of ANMCLA.

There are other newer organizations that have emerged as well – a novelty in the Venezuelan process is the defence of the rights of women, the field of feminism. The Alianza Feminista (Feminist Alliance), Faldas en la Revolución (Skirts in Revolution), are important organizations, as is La Alianza Sexo-Género Diversa Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Alliance of Sex-Gender Diversity, ASGDRé), which for the first time has brought into the revolutionary camp the movement of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people. They are now actively participating in the popular movement.

There are other notable organizations that are in processes of recuperation. One example is the Bolivarian Circles. Another is the Frente Socialista de Profesionales y Técnicos (Socialist Front of Professionals and Technicians, FSPT), which has organized several gatherings of professionals and technicians from across the entire country. Within the FSPT you have smaller groupings like the Frente Nacional de Abogados Bolivarianos (National Front of Bolivarian Lawyers, FNAB).

There are a number of nation-wide, massive organizations, clearly identifiable, that express the interests of specific sectors and which could reinvigorate the program of the President, the program of the government, with their own proposals, and they have their criticisms of the process which need to be taken into account.

If these various national movements were able to articulate themselves clearly, and act in concert with the figure of Chávez, but with the capacity to act with or without the presence of Chávez, this would allow for the political advancement of this revolutionary process.

This would include thinking seriously about this entire period of uncertainty, inquietude, and risk that we've been living through with Chávez's illness, when he was undergoing operations for cancer and so on. Now it seems as though he has recovered, but still. We don't know what will happen in the future...

So there are movements in this country, with the characteristics that social movements have here in Venezuela. If we compare ourselves to social movements in Europe that are very well organized, disciplined, and with clear structures

and financing and so on – or at least historically, now with the indignados in Spain, some European movements look a little more like the movements we have in Venezuela.

The movements in Venezuela are not like the historical movements in Europe, but they have a very high capacity for spontaneous responses, particularly in times of emergency – they produced the Caracazo of February 27, 1989, the response to the coup attempt on April 11-13, 2002, and were able to forge the civic-military alliance that exists with the Bolivarian revolution. These are not small achievements of our social movements – with their characteristics that some have called “tropical.” There are advantages and disadvantages to these characteristics. And in certain circumstances the advantages have been particularly clear.

SS and JRW: Can you comment on what has happened in Ciudad Guayana? When we were here two years ago this was one of the central political battles.

GG: In Ciudad Guayana, after the strike that led to the nationalization of SIDOR, a very positive process of meetings, gatherings, discussion tables, and so on, began, with the direct participation of workers. President Chávez himself arrived to participate. Out of this process emerged the Guayana Socialist Plan, and a series of initiatives of workers’ control were introduced.

However, this experience of workers’ control wasn’t able to come to fruition in the way that it should. One thing is that the necessary level of organization of the workers, to the extent where there is a real possibility of implementing workers’ control, would represent one of the starkest scenarios of class struggle. The idea that this could be calmly normalized when the capitalist system continues existing is delusional, and bureaucratization has crept into the actual process since the Guayana Socialist Plan was first unveiled. This bureaucratization occurred within the union movement itself as well.

The working class did not have the sufficient force from below to push forward with workers’ control, and the working class’s leadership, or, in some cases, the supposedly socialist management of these enterprises, ended up hijacking the project of workers’ control.

Workers’ control should not be understood as a situation in which new management is assigned with the participation of workers, to manage the company on behalf of the workers. It is not a situation in which management takes decisions without processes of workers’ assemblies, consultations, and voting that emerge out of processes of workers’ education.

When workers within enterprises selected delegates that were not favoured by management, management would simply not recognize the election of these delegates, and would repeat elections indefinitely until a favoured delegate from the workers emerged. These were the sorts of things that were going on in Guayana.

In Guayana, in SIDOR, there was a management team with ties to the presidency of SIDOR under D’Oliveira, who employed a language of workers’ control, and talked about forming socialist councils, but in reality operated everything in the interests of the bureaucratic apparatus of the company.

And the workers persisted in supporting this process, but their actual participation was eroding. They focused on struggling for their immediate economic needs, and didn’t see the necessity of intervening politically in the administration of the enterprise, and in the planning of production. As a result there are many things that remain underdeveloped and incomplete, and now there are struggles to resolve even minor issues. There was a struggle over the incorporation of sub-contracted workers, for the promotion of a collective contract that included them.

Marrea Socialista participates in a union alliance in SIDOR, in Guayana, called the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Siderúrgicos y Similares (Union of Steelworkers, SUTISS), which is supported by the majority of workers, and has the majority on the union's executive in SIDOR, but which does not control the presidency of the union. The management sector of SIDOR, which describes itself as being under workers' control, has accused SUTISS of being involved in the mafia, of violent actions, of being involved in networks of corruption and so on. But no one in SUTISS is in a position within management; they aren't controlling the budgets of the enterprise or arranging contracts with clients. Who then has the capacity to engage in this kind of corruption? The workers who are involved in a union movement, or those who are presently managing the company? Where should we look to find networks of corruption, into the apparatuses of the state, or the union movement?

None of this is to deny that there are sectors of the union movement that have very serious problems, across the country, particularly in the construction sector, where there are assassinations and an internal battles for contracts.

But the struggle inside of SIDOR got to a point where the management tried to criminalize the workers' struggle, where they hired intelligence services to investigate and persecute union leaders, tried to bring them to trial – all of this instead of resolving the problems of the enterprise through the democracy of workers' power, with assemblies, consultations, and participation.

I believe that achieving workers' control will never come from the government merely giving a directive for workers' to assume that role. The working class needs to achieve a certain level of organization and consciousness, it has to have its own leaders, and it has to be carried out in a dynamic of struggle. If there is no dynamic of struggle, the attitude of the people is to wait for the government to implement workers' control. And the functionaries of the state are going to find it difficult to do this, if it doesn't emerge out of the struggle of the workers themselves.

It's going to be necessary to engage in confrontations with the right, confrontations with bureaucratic sectors, carried out on the terrain of strikes, public demonstrations, the takeover of enterprises, so that the objective of workers' control can be carried out within a revolutionary dynamic. It won't be achieved by legislative decree, as an act of parliament, or within the framework of bourgeois democracy. A revolution implies confrontation, mobilization, conflict, struggle, and the occupation of spaces.

During the oil lockout and sabotage of 2002-2003, for example, the oil workers directly confronted this sabotage, and created what were called comités guás (leadership committees). The leadership committees were formed by workers, professionals, and sections of management loyal to national sovereignty and opposed to the coup, as well as popular communities.

Through the actions of these leadership committees, the workers were able to assume control of oil production during this period of oil sabotage on the part of the management of PSVSA who participated in the coup. However, after the coup was defeated and with the passage of time and the return of normality, the internal dynamics of PDVSA have allowed for re-bureaucratization.

We have to ask, why didn't the leadership committees that assumed control over production during the period of oil sabotage continue to exist following the defeat of the oil lockout? The carrying out of workers' control was successful in the oil sector in 2002-2003 precisely because of the fact that it emerged out of the dynamic of struggle with the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy, in a dynamic of mobilization. Outside of a dynamic of struggle, workers' control did not persist in the oil sector. Workers' control would only work in "normal" times if there'd been a complete seizure of power of workers in Venezuela and the beginning of a transition away from the capitalist mode of production.

The problem isn't, therefore, decreeing workers' control in a series of enterprises, and deciding that the workers

assume management of these enterprises. If there is no dynamic of struggle and mobilization within the workers themselves that make this a possibility in reality you are not going to see actual workers' control installed. The enterprises will instead be managed by the government. And with the structure of the state that currently exists, given the fact that we have not superseded capitalism, with all of these processes of bureaucratization inside of the state and with many legacies of the Fourth Republic still intact in the state, the slogan of workers' control will be distorted. We need, then, for there to be a working class with a dynamic of struggle, which means proceeding conquest by conquest, conflict by conflict. If, instead, we want calmness, tranquility, and to stabilize the situation as it is now, what will be stabilized is the old system, not a new one. There will not be a revolutionary process with calm and tranquility.

Marea Socialista recently took part in a workshop with workers on the theme of workers' control, within an enterprise that had been reclaimed by workers and nationalized by the government. Beyond discussing the theories of workers' control in the abstract, we had discussions over the process of production, about what was the quantity of production, about what was the division of labour of production across different departments of the country in this sector of this enterprise, and so on.

Why did we have this discussion? Because, prior to this discussion, only management had an understanding of the process of production in its entirety. Each worker only had a very fragmentary understanding of the production process. We needed therefore to reconstruct a vision of the production process in its entirety, and to then examine each of the various parts of work along the production chain, in order to understand what needed changing – to avoid areas of over-exploitation, so the workers could achieve a more egalitarian distribution of their participation in the process, to improve production and ensure that the enterprise was viable, and so on.

What I'm trying to say is that the problem of workers' control is not a question of bureaucratic implementation; it's our problem to solve. It's a question of our organization, our maturity, our development, and our political and organizational capacities as the working class, a working class that is uneven in its experiences.

SS and JRW: Changing themes again, can you talk about the current conjuncture in regional terms throughout Latin America, and the role of Venezuela within the dynamics of the region?

GG: I think that in Latin America we are still in a position of defending the advances that have been made with the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, as well as the processes in Bolivia and Ecuador, and the formation of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, ALBA). The latter has involved a search for mechanisms of regional integration; even though in this case it is an alliance with countries governed by their own bourgeoisies, it has allowed for a shift in the correlation of forces in the region vis-à-vis imperialism, one that has opened up some wriggling room. I say wriggling room because I don't think these bourgeoisies are going to be consistent in the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggle. All the same, conditions are undoubtedly more favourable. These alliances also help in the protection of the Bolivarian process in Venezuela.

But there is also a contradiction and a problem, because we need to articulate ourselves with all of these nations, but this articulation is achieved through agreements arrived at with states dominated by the bourgeoisies of these nations, that sometimes enter into conflict with imperialism, but which simultaneously enter into agreements with imperial states and transnational corporations. The danger here is that we may be assimilated into the form that capitalism is assuming in South America today – Mercosur, for example, is a capitalist market. To enter into Mercosur, which Venezuela did this July, could provide certain advantages in terms of exports, but it could also bring to Venezuela capitals and products from the capitalist enterprises in these states dominated by their bourgeoisies, capitals that are typically allied with transnational corporations from imperial countries, a dynamic that could accentuate internal distortions in the Venezuelan process. It could distort our processes of industrialization, our attempts at developing agro-industrialization in an endogenous manner. So there could be advantages, but it could also generate many disadvantages simultaneously. The danger is that instead of uniting Latin America in order to

confront imperialism we simply become further assimilated into Latin American capitalism in the manner in which it is currently inserted into the world market.

The ongoing development of ALBA in a positive direction will not happen if there are no other revolutionary processes in Latin America, with the assumption to office of governments of a popular or anti-imperialist character. If we commit ourselves to defending processes of revolution, supporting those social movements that exist in the struggles of their respective countries, we are undoubtedly going to run into problems with the bourgeois governments with which we have entered into various political and economic agreements.

This is the indissoluble contradiction. We can surf this wave, and situate ourselves in each moment according to the reigning balance of forces, but our fundamental alliance, from my point of view, has to be with the peoples themselves, with the social movements, with those who are struggling, those of the grassroots.

We need to keep in mind those progressive governments that have a nationalist discourse, that introduce popular measures, that have offered certain instances of resistance against imperialism. This is all for the good. But we need to understand that, ultimately, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist revolution will be made by the peoples themselves.

Look, these are delicate points. We need to maintain peace with Colombia, for example, and maintain commercial relations with Colombia. Many people in Colombia survive off of these relations; but a problem arises if the cost of maintaining relations with the Colombian government signifies at some point that the Venezuelan government takes measures that jeopardize the Bolivarian process in the image of the world; or if our relations with Colombia help to stabilize a government that represses its people, that assassinates activists.

So it may be necessary and convenient to maintain relations with neighbouring governments, and stability in the region, so that we are not asphyxiated; at the same time, this is not a strategic position for developing and deepening the revolutionary processes and contradictions of the region. It is, therefore, a very complex problem, and we have to manage it artfully.

President Chávez has had some successes in the past in navigating this terrain, particularly in the case of the struggle against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) initiative. The Venezuelan government's support of the position of anti-globalization activists against the FTAA helped to defeat that initiative in the early 2000s. But if this was one battle that we won, there have been other instances that have been much less clear, and that put in jeopardy our revolutionary process. We need to avoid our incorporation and integration into alliances in Latin America that stabilize the region on the terms of the majority of the countries that continue under the control of their own bourgeoisies.

I don't characterize the government of Cristina Kirchner in Argentina as revolutionary, to use another example. It might be a government with which the Venezuelan government can enter into certain alliances, and with which it might be possible to engage in certain economic exchanges, with which we can enter into certain strategic political agreements at a regional level, but this should not mean that we support the politics of Kirchner. What interests me are the dynamic of the working class struggle and the social movement struggle in Argentina, which proved capable of carrying out the Argentinazo in 2001-2002, that took on the banks. The government of Cristina Kirchner today is only in office because of the history of these struggles, which overthrew a series of governments, including those of her own party.

SS and JRW: We can see some of this complexity as well in the international sphere if we consider the positions of Chávez in relation to the movements of the Arab Spring of 2011.

GG: No doubt this has generated much debate. For example, I've been challenged at international conferences where people on the international left, historically involved in solidarity with Venezuela, have called into question the relationship between Chávez and Iran, for example.

Chávez has advanced the proposal of multi-polarity in the world system. My argument is, good enough, tactically speaking multi-polarity can be interesting in the sense that some countries in certain circumstances enter into conflict with imperialism, and in so doing act as a form of protection for us. But when these countries are countries that are governed by their own bourgeoisies, or when they have authoritarian, or anti-democratic regimes that produce internal rebellions against them – even when there are attempts to manipulate and intervene in these rebellions by imperialism, as there almost always are – how can we not ally ourselves with these rebellions? Do we ally ourselves with the governments, or with the people themselves?

Does having commercial relations with Iran have to imply supporting the politics of that country? When Iran comes into conflict with imperialism, does that also imply that it's governed by a regime we support? These are the discussions that are alive on this question in Venezuela. My own position in regard to this case is that we need commercial relations with Iran, and that we can enter into specific political agreements in the international sphere with this type of government, in the sense that they dispute imperialism and defend their sovereignty. But this has its limits.

In aporrea.org there are distinct positions represented, because the editorial team has very different positions on these questions. We've published debates on what's going on in Libya and Syria, for example. We've published material which says that in Syria the rebellion is basically constituted of terrorist organizations supported by Saudi Arabia and imperialism, and that they have ties with Al Qaeda, and that we need to defend the government of Asaad. And if we don't defend them they'll be coming for us next.

We have also published material which says, no, that the government of Asaad is an authoritarian regime that is massacring its own people, that there is a genuine popular rebellion, that we are opposed to imperialist intervention, but that the government of Syria is not going to be of any help to us.

And then we've received letters that say, how could we publish articles that are defending the Syrian government, a government that even Israel doesn't want to see overthrown because it provides regional stability? And other letters that accuse us of the opposite.

At aporrea.org our position is that we need to recognize the debate that exists at the level of the international left, to publicize the different views, and to enter into an open debate. We don't accept the position that we should censor some of this material. For us debate is always good.

In Venezuela, this is obviously complicated because of what happened here on April 11-13, 2002, an event that is understood to have been backed by imperialism; the result is that what is happening in other countries is easily understood to be a similar phenomenon. But reality is complex, confused, and contradictory.

Whoever said, for example, that rebellions deserving of support need to be led by Bolsheviks? This hasn't been the case in Venezuela. There is no Bolshevik part leading this struggle, with an internationalist communist program. It is sometimes the case, for example, that a religious sector of a society is reflecting the problems faced by a certain segment of society and is struggling against those specific manifestations of oppression, with very contradictory internal politics. Reality is complicated. I believe in uneven and combined development and dialectics. I believe you have to study situations concretely, and to avoid unilateral decisions.

I personally believe that there has been a genuine process of democratic rebellion in the Arab world that have reacted against certain governments that have always been conservative and authoritarian, and others that emerged at one time from democratic and anti-imperialist revolutions but that have since become bureaucratized such that they are no longer what they once were. In this sense, I think we need to support these rebellions that have emerged from below.

The issue becomes complicated, of course, because imperialism has its own plans to intervene and to control these rebellions. If these revolutionary processes are not strengthened and consolidated, what have been completely justified and genuine rebellions can be thrown off course. None of these decisions are simple or easy. I don't pretend to be able to resolve this by saying simply, well, I'm with the rebellions and against the authoritarian governments and imperialism.

SS and JRW: It does seem as though the image of Chávez and the Bolivarian process suffered internationally on the left because of its lack of clarity on these issues regarding the Arab Spring of 2011.

GG: There's no doubt that there's been a decline of enthusiasm and support for the Bolivarian process on the European left; I've noticed this. It's not that they have stopped supporting the Bolivarian process, because they continue supporting it, but there has been a decline in support, enthusiasm, and confidence in the Bolivarian Revolution. Because the European social movements of the left are confounded by the fact that Chávez has relations with governments that are so distinct from the character of the Chávez government itself. It is also the case that the European social movements also have close ties with the populations of the Arab countries where these revolts are taking place because of patterns of immigration. There are many Tunisians and Egyptians in France, for example, and other European countries, and so these connections are well developed.

August 9, 2012

[1] This refers to the Caracazo, named for the events in the capital city of Caracas in February 1989, involving protests and rioting against the introduction of neoliberalism across the entire country. Carlos Andrés Pérez had just been elected on an anti-neoliberal platform but quickly attempted to ram an orthodox restructuring program down the throats of Venezuelans. The president decided to make an example of the protesters, and the urban poor more generally, giving the green light for military and police repression for days, killing a large number of people. Estimates range from 300 to 3,000 dead.

[2] The APR was formed in May 2012, and includes the Movimiento de Pobladores (MP), a peasant front that includes the Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar y Zamora (Bolívar and Zomara Revolutionary Current, CRBZ), Asociación Nacional de Medios Comunitarios Libres y Alternativos (National Association of Free and Alternative Media, ANMCLA), Alianza sexo-género diversa revolucionaria (Revolutionary Alliance of Sex-Gender, and Diversity, ASGDRe), Socialistas por la Unidad Revolucionaria hacia al Comunismo (Socialists for Revolutionary Unity toward Communism, SURCO), Movimiento Campesino Jirajara (Jirajara Peasant Movement, MCJ), Faldas en la Revolución (Skirts in the Revolution, FR), Insurgencia Comunista (Communist Insurgency, IC), Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide, MS), and the Coordinadora Simón Bolívar de Guarenas (Simon Bolívar Coordinator of Guarenas, CSBG).

[3] An overpass in Caracas where demonstrators were killed during the coup d'état of April 2002.

[4] Chávez received treatment for cancer for much of the last year