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Venezuela

The Bolivarian Revolution at the crossroads between imperialism, constitutional reform and the socialist discourse

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The tensions, struggles, debates and contradictions within the revolutionary process are deepening. On the one hand, the pro-imperialist bourgeoisie, which tried to take over the street following the non-renewal of the licence of RCTV [1], but which in this case bit the dust, is currently preparing new actions within the framework of its opposition to the constitutional reform and the new law "of stability at work". On the other hand, sectors of the workers' movement are exerting pressure to obtain improvements in collective bargaining agreements and so that the bureaucracy of the government as well as of the trade unions - does not decide in their place. This is in particular the case with oil workers and public employees, but also with sectors of the poor population which are continuing to fight to obtain decent housing and better social services.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/chavez45.jpg>]

All of them, however, are increasingly concerned by the growing weight of the state bureaucracy, which is securing and increasing its power and its privileges. On his part, Chávez has announced new projects which have irritated the bourgeoisie, but at the same time he maintains links with sectors of it, while affirming that the Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) is not a Marxist party and that the working class is not the motor force of the revolution, thus weakening a left option. All this effervescence will be refracted in the mass organizations and in the PSUV, where our class-struggle current defends its positions while working with the grass-roots militants and clashing with those who want to confiscate its process of organization and its democratic character.

The Venezuelan economy continues to progress, with a growth rate of over 9 %, exchange reserves of more than 35 billion dollars, increasing tax revenues and the price of oil at its best levels, above 50 dollars a barrel. Within this framework, a monetary reform - the strong bolivar - is in preparation for January 2008. But this good economic situation did not prevent that, as in the previous year, inflation is severely affecting the everyday life of the popular sectors. It is likely to reach nearly 15 per cent at the end of this year, without the real incomes of workers as a whole having evolved in proportion. And the worst is that the shortage of foodstuffs is tending to worsen. At the same time the social projects continue to be developed, but they still do not manage to solve the major social problems. In particular, the social security law has still not been implemented. We are seeing the establishment of the first so-called socialist enterprises and, with the Villanueva Mission, the projects of new towns which will be situated in the framework of the constitutional reform, through the plan of territorial reorganization.

The process of nationalization, although not exempt from problems and contradictions, has made it possible for the state to reinforce its control over strategic sectors such as electricity, the telephone network and the key sectors of the oil industry, in particular the Orinoco Belt. In the sectors of electricity and telephones, new trusts and new plans of development are being set up by the state apparatus, instead of being based on democratic debate by the workers of these sectors, to allow them to exercise their control and develop their decision-making power. In the oil sector, even with the majority of shares held by the state, the different multinational companies continue to appropriate a part of our wealth, and the internal structures of PDVSA [2] reproduce the vices of the preceding administrations. Identical to those of the big oil companies, these structures are also less efficient on the level of production than they were before.

The country, which has recently experienced great political and social tensions, will probably remain in a similar situation during the coming months. Imperialism and the big bourgeoisie will exert pressure to try to avoid new measures and laws that affect their interests, while the Bolivarian masses will seek solutions to their serious social problems by confronting a rising state bureaucracy.

Bourgeoisie and bureaucracy: "united not by love but by terror"

The development of a Bolivarian bureaucracy - which starting from its positions in the state apparatus is undermining the bases of the revolutionary process and maintaining increasingly close links with the Bolivarian neo-bourgeoisie which negotiates credits with the government - is a major fact, and one that it is impossible to circumvent. The bureaucracy of the state structures is probably the greatest danger which threatens the Bolivarian Revolution at this stage. It is a sector which acts as the transmission belt for interests that are foreign to the revolution, which demoralizes and weakens the mass sectors supporting the revolutionary process.

As Haiman El Troudi has well defined in its new book, [3] the counter-revolution has undergone a mutation. Its new clothes are those of a Chavism without socialism, which "means slowing down the structural transformations of society, masking the inequalities, preserving intact class privileges (...). The principal spokespersons of this counter-revolutionary tendency are mercenaries infiltrated into the process, who are weaving their obvious conspiracy with the threads of corruption, political control, negation of popular participation in public affairs. Their fundamental aspiration: to install a new oligarchic class and to seize power by means of treasonable plans against the Bolivarian Revolution." Euros

This description, which corresponds to what very many compatriots feel and suffer, illustrates at the same time the necessary unity between these two sectors, which are equally dangerous and now allied with each other: the bourgeoisie needs the bureaucratic layers of the state in order to continue to do business and to gain ground so as to slow down measures that endanger its class interests; the bureaucracy needs the bourgeoisie in order to maintain its privileges and its areas of power, at the same time as it develops itself its own business affairs. We can see at present the Banesco and Canarias banks, other bankers such as Víctor Gil, Irausquín, Cedeño, Rafael Sarría and Petricca, developing the business deals of the century. With whom in the government are these users negotiating and concluding agreements? They need each other, they are complementary, and they all fear rank-and-file workers and popular mobilization. To paraphrase Jorge Luis Borges, [4] the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy are not linked by love but by their terror faced with the prospect of an advance, in the revolution, of the movements at the base and of anti-capitalist measures. It is no accident that it is from these two sides that are coming criticisms of sectors engaged in struggle, attempts to control the social organizations, orders for the dismissal and persecution of those who raise their voice inside the structures of the state and if, today in the PSUV, it is they who seek to impose clientelist methods in order to preserve their areas of power.

Faced with the attacks of imperialism and the increasing weight of the bureaucracy, millions of Venezuelans are wondering what Chávez thinks and what he is going to do. Is he conscious of the serious problems which exist in his entourage? Until when will the Bolivarian Right remain encrusted in the higher spheres of the government? It seems to us that he is conscious of everything, when he refers to people in his entourage by saying, for example last July 22, during the first meeting of the "January 23 urbanization battalions": "Like snakes that are coiled up, they are playing at Chavism without Chávez, at pushing Chávez aside; well, I will be isolated only by God who is our Lord and Master, or by you, the voice of the people". [5]

Towards the debate on the constitutional reform

When Chávez speaks about socialism and about finishing with capitalism, he attracts all the sympathy of the majority of the population. When he speaks against the working class and Marxism, he gives rise to doubts and divergences in sectors of the revolutionary process. When Chávez calls on people to organise from the bottom up in the PSUV, he generates hopes. When he publicly supports Diosdado Cabello - the principal spokesperson of the Bolivarian Right "Euros" he disorients and weakens the most consistent sectors of the revolution. We have defended Chávez against every imperialist attack, and we will continue to do so insofar as he maintains his political independence in the face of the empire. But if we want to go forward, or if, as he says, we are at a moment of transition towards a supposedly socialist national model, that means that, to quote the words of Simón Rodríguez, [6] "a political revolution forcibly demands an economic revolution". This economic revolution should manifest itself in

concrete measures, but such measures have still not been taken.

On August 14, Chávez submitted to the national assembly his project of constitutional reform. As had been announced, this project dealt with important questions such as popular power, the length of working hours, new executive powers and federal territories, the possibility of indefinite re-election to the presidency of the Republic and the various forms of property.

On the question of the legal length of working hours, a modification of article 90 of the federal Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic would represent a step forward, by stipulating that "in order to allow workers to have sufficient time for their all-round personal development, working time during the day will not exceed six hours daily and 36 hours weekly, and working time at night will not exceed six hours daily and 34 hours weekly". That opens up the need for the workers to organize and mobilize to guarantee its application. On popular power, the proposal made on article 136 of the constitution announces: "popular power is expressed by constituting communities, communes and municipal self-government, through communal councils, workers' councils, peasant councils, student councils and other entities indicated by the law". All this aspect deserves a wide-ranging debate. It is positive that this question is tackled in the reform, but it is necessary at the same time to avoid, and to fight if necessary, any inclination towards control of the rights and sovereign functions of these councils as popular organizations.

It is proposed "to increase to seven years the presidential term and to allow immediate re-election to this position". The important thing should not be such a possibility, but changes making it possible to advance towards a more democratic regime, which instead of continuing to invent new tasks and responsibilities within the executive power, legitimates the power of the workers' and people's organizations, envisages that they should have majority representation in a new Parliament, extends the possibilities of recall by the voters, in an immediate way and for all functions, and defends at all levels of political and economic decision the right of the people to express themselves and to decide.

Lastly, with regard to the mode of property, the project of reform legitimates five types, including private ownership of companies.

The fact is that, within a framework which remains contradictory, broad sectors of the bourgeoisie are worried. For lawyer and representative of the bourgeoisie Asdróbal Aguiar, "the state reserves for itself planning of private economic activity. For them, the private entrepreneur is an appendix of the socialist model of production and operates as a license-holder. That is accompanied by a big contradiction which is revealed by article 113 of the project of reform, on the role of work: the government penalizes the fact that private individuals do not subject themselves to the methods of production ". [7] Fedecámaras [8] and other voices also contested the new law of stability in work. They fear that the state will restrict the possibility of laying off workers in private companies, as one of the principal newspapers of the upper bourgeoisie explains: "This legal instrument will introduce limitations on the right of employers to lay off their workers (...). Employers will have to request authorization from the public authority, represented by the factory inspector". [9]

The Minister of Popular Power for Planning and Development, Jorge Giordani, assured us that "the figure of the private company can coexist perfectly within the framework of a socialist system, in so far as its finality does not enter in conflict with the wellbeing of the society to which this company belongs". [10]

Apart from the fact that such a choice is utopian - because the operations of private capital are never determined according to social wellbeing, but according to profits made on the basis of exploitation - it weakens a true socialist project. Without nationalization of the banks and replacement of private property of the means of production by social property, without the preponderance of the power of the people's organizations, it will be impossible to advance towards a socialist country.

This conception of a socialism that is open to private capital, far from being new or - as is claimed - "Venezuelan-style", has already been put into practice, with painful results. The most current example is that of China - although this country started from a situation where, following the revolution, the totality of the means of production was in the hands of the state. With a similar discourse about "Chinese-style socialism", the central government launched a process of market reforms and of opening up in three stages to private capital, with catastrophic consequences in terms of misery and super-exploitation. As two recognized Marxist economists explained, in connection with the entry of private capital in the 1980s, "although depending initially on the state sector, the urban collective enterprises were lucrative and many of them were in fact private companies painted red in order to obtain tax advantages for provisioning and credits (...) Each new stage of the process of reforms generated new tensions and contradictions, which were solved only through a widening of the power of the market, leading to an increased consolidation of the capitalist political economy. Thus, instead of using capitalism to build socialism as the reformists affirmed, what was inevitably going to happen, and what did actually happen, is that market socialism used socialism to build capitalism (...) This process of reform highlights the fact that once you start to go down the slope of market reforms, you can only continue to slide ". [11]

Venezuela is starting from a different situation, it has evolved from a classical capitalism towards a perturbation and a destabilization of the market, each reform making the situation more tense. If we do not go further, if behind a socialist discourse we maintain the power of capital over the means of production and a private financial system, then in the long run, instead of breaking with the capitalist model we could come to maintain it, and even reinforce it. The risk is that instead of advancing towards something new, we repeat the worst faults of one of the most perverse models of false socialism of the 20th century.

Another argument that is advanced in order to justify coexistence with private enterprise is that it is necessary to break with dogmatism. As everyone knows, any truth that is pushed to outrageous limits starts to be no longer true. Not to have a dogmatic method is a good thing, but that does not imply rejecting the theoretical and political bases of Marxism, if they still correspond to the reality of the world and of Venezuela. Today, wherever it is to be found, private capital is synonymous with exploitation and individual profits. Lorenzo Mendoza (Polar Enterprises, Gustavo Cisneros (the Cisneros group), the families Capriles (Cadena Capriles) or Salomón (Sambil), the bosses of Empreven and the new leadership of Fedecámaras (Manual González, Nicolás Ivarez and Ciro García), with whom the government has come to an agreement or is seeking to do so, have nothing to do with any socialist project. We propose that the constitution establishes clearly that the way to be followed is that of the progressive elimination of capitalist power in the economy and in the mode of ownership of industry and of the financial system.

The debate on the constitutional reform is being conducted in a tense atmosphere, marked by the opposition of the big bourgeoisie and of imperialism. However the big bourgeoisie fears that, if it undertakes new actions, the people and the workers mobilized in the streets may push Chávez to be more radical. The issues concerned are too important for the debate on the constitutional reform to remain confined to commissions of notables or within the chambers of the national assembly. It must be a debate of the whole people, with their organizations, a mass, constituent debate, in which the rank-and-file discuss the changes that need to be made to the Constitution so that it points to a socialist way and legitimates the decision-making power of the workers and the people.

The workers' and people's organizations, a priority for the revolution

A process of organization at the base is continuing to develop on a whole series of terrains. At the trade-union, peasant, popular, indigenous levels, within the committees for land, housing or water, in the alternative media, everywhere the participation of the masses is being maintained. It is this motor force of the revolution that it is necessary to consolidate and develop. And if some people want to eliminate autonomy and criticism, we need to avoid that by unifying the struggle against any authoritarian tendencies within the process.

Within the trade-union movement, this reality is expressed by the development of CCURA, [12] which remains our first priority of work. Today more than ever, within the framework of the agreements reached with other currents to defend the UNT and to advance in the process of internal elections, it is necessary to preserve its structure and its functioning. Within CCURA, beyond the fact that a big sector of it has registered with the PSUV and that another sector did not do that, [13] what must take precedence is unity and independence from the state and from parties, by allowing the free development of all political experiences within the framework of the revolution and the need for deepening the revolution.

There are a certain number of important struggles, in which the organizations at the base are in the front rank, and which deserve all our support. In the oil sector, CCURA is clashing with the plans of the Ministry of Labour and of the Bolivarian Workers' Trade Union Force (FSBT), which wants to consolidate its power with the state bureaucracy and puts forward collective bargaining agreements without the participation of the workers, while treating their opinions with contempt. The same thing is happening with public employees, and they have a similar project for the transport sector. Other fights are being conducted by the fishermen and the community of the port of Guiria, who remain organized, by the Wayu' indigenous people who refuse the installation of a gas pipeline on their ancestral grounds, by the communities which are fighting for decent housing and by the peasants who are calling for their demands to be taken into account more quickly. Far from accepting the new theory according to which there is no need to fight for demands because we are going towards socialism, we are engaged in supporting and developing these struggles. The immediate needs of the workers and the people constitute a right, which must be all the more respected if we are going towards socialism.

Within the framework of this process of organization at the base, the communal councils continue to develop, but not without contradictions. The best example is undoubtedly provided by Carora, where 100 per cent of the communal budget is discussed and decided by the councils, on the basis of the needs that they have evaluated. This is the path which should be followed all over the country. The question of the formation of workers' councils is under debate in the workers' movement. Unfortunately, certain sectors of the state and the trade-union movement (FSBT) are aiming at a controlled and anti-trade union model. That does not prevent class-struggle militants from proposing their own model of workers' councils: democratic, unitary and acting in common with the democratic and legitimate trade-union organizations, towards workers' power in industry. The debate about the councils, whether they be communal, workers' or student, must be conducted and decided by the base. And so that they do not lose their capacity for initiative, as well as their right to put forward needs and to impel the struggles of those who form the base of the revolution, it is necessary to act in such a way that they are protected from projects aiming to tie them to decisions of the state and the civil servants who deal with them.

PSUV - perspectives and challenges

The PSUV is at present holding its first assemblies at the base, in preparation for its first congress. We have seen, over recent months, the desperate attempts at sectors of the government to control the whole process. But at the same time, there is the strength and the aspirations of the base, which has begun to take over many assemblies of the socialist battalions. [14] There is no doubt that a serious confrontation is approaching. As the newspaper *Las Verdades de Miguel* wrote, "a railway collision will happen in the PSUV, between the Right and the Left of the process".

As revolutionaries, we do not place ourselves on the margin of this struggle, which will decide the political course that the country will follow for months and years to come. We take an active part in each assembly, by presenting our proposals, by listening to the base and by acting in unity with all honest sectors. By converging with those who want an anti-capitalist development and who defend a democratic type of party, without bureaucracy, top-down functioning or a military structure. The revolution needs a party of the base, equipped with a programme to finish with capitalism in Venezuela, a party that the workers, in unity with all the non-exploiting sectors of society, lead in order to be able to decide on their future.

The organizers of the CCURA current and the newspaper Marea Clasista y Socialista are engaged on the road of the deepening of the revolution, of confrontation with imperialism and the bourgeoisie, against all the bureaucratic sectors which are putting brakes on the revolution. We invite all socialists who are engaged in the struggle and all the members of the PSUV to prepare with us with the big struggles that are on the horizon. "Educate yourselves, because we will need all our intelligence, get involved because we will need all our enthusiasm, organize yourselves, because we will need all our strength", said Gramsci. It is in the service of these needs and towards a socialist objective that there has been formed, around the newspaper Marea Clasista y Socialista, a space for participation, for an exchange of opinions and experiences as well as building together, open to all those who want to join it.

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[1] The television channel RCTV had been the information channel of the failed military putsch against Chávez. The tensions, struggles, debates and contradictions within the revolutionary process are deepening. In April 2002, after the failure of the putsch, no measures were taken against it and it continued to emit its reactionary propaganda. When its licence ran out in 2007, it was not renewed. The anti-Chavista Right tried to seize on this decision to mobilize against "the dictatorship", without success. However RCTV continues to broadcast by cable.

[2] PDVSA is the national oil company, whose former management tried to block oil production in December 2002 (see on this subject Édouard Diago, "The Oil Curse", International Viewpoint nÂ° 353, September 2003).

[3] Haiman El Troudi, Ser capitalista es un negocio (to be a capitalist it is not a good bargain (Euros)).

[4] Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), Argentinean writer and poet, considered as one of the founders of the Latin-American school of magic realism (along with Gabriel García Márquez).

[5] Broadcast "Alá Presidente" of July 22, 2007.

[6] Simón Rodríguez (1769-1854) was the teacher and guide of Simón Bolívar. His ideas in the field of education constitute, along with the ideas of Bolívar and Ezequiel Zamora, "the tree of the three ideological roots" of the Bolivarian Revolution.

[7] El Universal, July 16, 2007.

[8] Fedecámaras is the Venezuelan employers' organization.

[9] El Universal, July 30, 2007.

[10] www.aporrea.org, July 23, 2007.

[11] Martin Hart-Landsberg and David Burkett, China and Socialism: Market Reforms and Class Struggle, Monthly Review Press, New York 2005.

[12] The Class-struggle, Unitary, Revolutionary and Autonomous Current (CCURA), is in a majority at the base of the new trade-union confederation UNT (National Workers' Union), but not within its provisional leadership structures, established at the time of its formation. For this reason the FSBT (Bolivarian Workers' Trade Union Force), supported by the Ministry of Labour and in general by the state bureaucracy, has until now tried by all means to prevent the holding of internal elections which, by choosing a representative leadership, would definitively establish the existence and the legitimacy of the new confederation. In July, the CCURA made an agreement with the four other currents existing in the UNT, in order to launch this electoral process. Representatives of the FSBT then declared that the UNT could no longer represent the interests of the revolution and that perhaps it was necessary to build another trade-union body. The confrontation within the UNT centres on the question of "autonomy" with respect to the government, in other words the independence of the trade unions from the state. A public polemic has also opposed, on this point, Chávez (who expressed an opinion in a rather virulent way against the autonomy of the UNT) to

the principal spokespersons of the CCURA and the UNT.

[13] This is in particular the case of Orlando Chirino, national coordinator of the UNT and his political current, linked to the Argentinean organization Izquierda Socialista.

[14] The "socialist battalions" formed in the neighbourhoods and localities are the rank-and-file structures of the PSUV.