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Venezuela

The Crisis and the Intelligentsia

- Debate - Venezuela -

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Venezuela is experiencing a major crisis. Every day, mobilizations, social discontent, hunger, repression, death and social decay haunt its streets. Nothing like the boom years of the Bolivarian phenomenon that opened the doors to political change and to important social measures in favour of the majorities. Today that same population experiences in its daily life the disaster provoked by the Maduro government and at the same time the attempts of the right opposition to seize political power.

Now different sectors of the intelligentsia have entered into debate, positioning themselves in various ways. While in Venezuela there are debates and discrepancies in the ranks of Chavismo, with growing discontent, in the international arena the debate is more open.

One sector of the intelligentsia has expressed in an international declaration the need to stop the current course of violence and death, without supporting the right-wing opposition and at the same time questioning the antidemocratic and repressive character of the Maduro government, marking the central responsibility of the state in the crisis. Questioning the functional polarization to the party leaders and asking that other voices are heard, while arguing that the left should fight for more participatory democracy and not for less. The statement: "Urgent international call to stop the scale of violence in Venezuela" reflects, even with its contradictions, the deep crisis of Madurismo that raises critical voices of various kinds.

The "Declaration on Venezuela" has also circulated in direct criticism of the other sector. This part of the intelligentsia defends the Venezuelan government, completely minimizes its responsibility in this crisis and argues a false similarity between the original project of Bolivarianism and those who have destroyed it from within. They denounce correctly the right wing MUD and the plans of imperialism, and they cover the regressive action of the government by anachronistic phrases about Chávez, the process and social conquests of yesterday, that do not exist today. The declaration brings together various sectors, including clear spokespersons of neo-Stalinism like Atilio Borón and others.

In our case we start this debate from two central parameters. On the one hand, it is clear that we must repudiate all the policies and actions promoted by the right-wing and pro-imperialist opposition. No positive path will come for the Venezuelan people from these sectors who want to ensure, directly, the complete surrender of the country, sectors that also have their extremist wings which must be completely repudiated. At the same time, we also disagree with Maduro and the PSUV project and with the left-wing intellectual sector that makes deep political mistakes in supporting Maduro and not recognizing the real situation in Venezuela.

Three errors of analysis for a mistaken politics

The analysis of the sectors of the left that support Maduro starts from three mistaken assumptions: 1) Maduro is the continuation of the Bolivarian process. 2) He makes mistakes and there is more bureaucracy but he has to be supported and corrected. 3) On one side there are the people and on the other those who want to surrender the country to imperialism. The three definitions are wrong. Let's look at these three points.

In the first place it is impossible to apprehend reality and see continuity between the most positive years of the Bolivarian model and the present. Every process reaches a point where quantitative changes become qualitative.

That transformation already happened a long time ago. If with Chávez we were facing an anti-imperialist nationalist government even within the framework of capitalism, today there is an involution. We are facing a government that has moved from its initial position to the right, applying adjustment measures on the one hand and the delivery of strategic resources to imperialism on the other. As its political model turns increasingly to an undemocratic course. It is a clear break with the previous model, not its continuation.

Secondly, it is not true that the government makes "mistakes" or that there is a bit more bureaucracy. The government has a global anti-popular plan and it is not a question of somewhat more bureaucracy, but of a new Mafia caste enriched at the head of a bourgeois oil and rentier state. That is the government we are talking about. As Carlos Carcione of Marea Socialista explains: "In economic terms you can see two clear periods of the government of Nicolás Maduro. A first phase of gradual macroeconomic adjustment that fails dramatically. This we can locate in the time between the devaluation of February 2013, a month before the death of Chavez and the second half of 2014 where a first package of Enabling Laws was sanctioned, in an attempt to adjust fiscal spending and social investment in the Missions downwards; the reduction of imports; and a reduction of real wage levels via the stimulus of inflationary process. This policy, which has a clear regressive tendency, of economic counter-reforms, because the adjustment is mainly charged on income and the possibility of access to basic goods of working families and the most deprived sectors, has failed ...

... The second period that we point out began at the end of 2014 with the sanctioning of a new authorization that allowed the president to govern by decree. These laws enabled the creation of Special Economic Zones where Venezuelan legislation does not govern. And this took a strong momentum from the fall in oil prices. And above all, since the beginning of 2016 with the so-called 15 motors of the productive economy, presented as a plan to overcome oil rentierism, when what they actually do is to expand in a colossal way the extractivist frontier and the primarization of the country's economy. The Motor Minero with the Orinoco Mining Arc, the Motor Energético with the total opening of the Oil Belt, the Forest Motor and the Tourist Motor, all are characterized by a policy of ferocious opening to transnational capital".

With this economic situation and the regressive policy of the government the social missions were liquidated and wages were pulverized. Whoever defends the government and justifies it remains, like it or not, in support of the primary cause of social decay and of a project that hurts the people.

Thirdly, it is very wrong to believe that on one side there is the people and on the other those who want to give the country over to imperialism. That is not the current division. The real division is a fight between two sectors alien to popular interests, over who controls the millions from the oil trade in agreement with the imperialist corporations. The MUD and the PSUV are determined to continue the delivery and dismantling of social achievements. At stake is who drives and in what way. As Carcione puts it: "the characterization of the current confrontation between the leaders, unlike in 2002/2003, and contrary to what those who support the government leadership repeat and adorn with rivers of ink, like the intellectuals who support it at an international level, is not a fight between the popular sectors against the oligarchs. On the contrary, it is a struggle to define which of the leaderships is guaranteed control of the state in the next period to manage and distribute income. These are two sectors of the elites, subordinated to international financial capital, one which is traditional and another which is emergent. And neither side is democratic, both are clear that they need a completely authoritarian political system to successfully implement the ongoing economic counterrevolution and counter-reforms to the political and social achievements achieved, which with all their deficiencies and limitations, in the best years of the Chávez period".

For a third space

We must open the way to a new emerging politics that originates from the Bolivarian process itself and is positioned

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as a left opposition to the government. This task brings together our comrades of Marea Socialista a sector of the Venezuelan intelligentsia, social referents, students, workers, former Chavista ministers and other popular sectors. There lies a possible future located on the left, taking the best Bolivarian banners extended towards an anti-capitalist process.

In the Madurista decadence a dividing line is demarcated; to support it or to promote the new from below and in opposition to the MUD and the PSUV. In this dilemma a sector of the left is tied to the worst of the ruling bureaucracy, losing any anti-capitalist and socialist perspective. For our part, we reaffirm our support for Marea Socialista and those who with all political courage confront the MUD and the PSUV, without being tied to private interests or opportunistic political or economic alliances.

* Sergio Garcia is a political journalist and a co-founder of the socialist organization Marea Socialista, which now the main point of reference for "critical Chavismo".