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Venezuela

Voices from Venezuela

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In mid-June 2010, Jeffery R. Webber and Susan Spronk interviewed three revolutionary socialist activists, Gonzalo Gómez, Stalin Pérez Borges, and Luis Primo in Caracas, Venezuela to discuss their views on the contradictions and prospects of the Bolivarian process.

ATC: Can you tell us a little bit about your political lives?

GG: I am a co-founder of the radical web-zine *aporrea.org* and a militant in the radical left Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide) tendency within the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, formed on the initiative of president Hugo Chávez "ed."). Marea Socialista is the furthest left current within the party.

SPB: I am also a militant in Marea Socialista as well as a national coordinator of the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (National Union of Workers, UNT).

LP: I am a member of the leadership of the Unión Regional de Trabajadores (Regional Union of Workers, URT) Caracas-Miranda (the regional organization of the UNT). I am currently based in the state of Bolívar working on the Guayana Socialist Plan and re-constituting the UNT, which has fractured in recent years.

ATC: What are the principal social forces driving the Bolivarian process and what are the major contradictions in the current period?

GG: We are continuing to push forward in the revolutionary process, a process whose momentum is determined by the class struggle. Given the fact that we still live in a capitalist society, we confront many contradictions in the process. The bureaucratic, bourgeois state gives rise to many of these contradictions. Indeed, one of the largest threats to the revolution is the conservatism of the thick bureaucratic layer of civil servants, who have centralized political power and material benefits and act as a break on the process.

We still do not have control over the economy, which rests in the hands of private capital. Only by consolidating worker and peoples' power can we destroy the bourgeois state and break definitively with the capitalist system. To do this, we need to build alliances that include activist members of the National Assembly, the working class, peasants fighting for agrarian reform, community and popular movements.

We also have to fight the bureaucratization of the labor movement itself and build popular power within the workers' movements. There have been many positive examples of workers organizing "from below," such as in Guayana [a region in Venezuela south of the Orinoco River] and in the electrical sector, where the rank-and-file have fought for workers' control, forming their own councils under the rubric of "co-responsibility" with the State, where the state owns the means of production but decisions are made by the workers. In many cases, however, one of the foremost challenges that these workers face is the civil servants, who do not want to surrender control and who try to sabotage the process.

SPB: Class struggle in Venezuela has intensified over the past two decades, indicated by the Caracazo rebellions in 1989, and then another spike in 1998 with the electoral triumph of Chávez. More recently, the intensification of the class struggle has been expressed in the movement for workers' control and the nationalization of various enterprises, such as companies that make coffee and food, and also the earlier experiment in Inveval [a valve

manufacturer taken under workers' control in 2005]. These examples point to a new situation. The state, which is still a capitalist state, is being challenged.

Right now we are living in a kind of "state capitalism," but this situation can be overcome by deepening the experiences of workers' control, as long as the party or the government do not interfere. Eventually, companies such as PDVSA, the petroleum company, and other companies which remain in private hands, should also be put under workers' control.

The past few years have been characterized by the counter-offensive of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie, who use their control of the press to spread their propaganda and to defend their class interests.

LP: We have found ourselves in a labyrinth. In 11 years of the revolution we have not been able to control the economy. The economy is still controlled by the national bourgeoisie, which is tightly linked with the transnational capitalist class. Evidently, more than 50% of production, distribution and commercialization processes remain in private hands, in the hands of the bourgeoisie. We are waging an economic war with the food producers, for example.

From my perspective, we are not really in a transition to socialism. Rather, we have a progressive government that has been promoting important reforms, especially through the social missions, such as in health, education and the provision of subsidized food. These reforms are fundamental "Euros" they are needed to resolve the material conditions of the population. But this is not enough. These missions tend to lose their momentum after a number of years.

There is a problem with continuity and permanence. And while the progressive government confronts the bourgeoisie on some issues, the state remains totally capitalist because the social relations of production remain capitalist.

GG: There are two more contradictions that are important to mention. First, Venezuela is inserted in a global capitalism which is in crisis, which has given rise to expressions of sharp class conflict in many of the advanced capitalist countries, as we see in Europe. It is difficult to develop a revolution in isolation, as we are trying to do in Venezuela.

Second, we confront contradictions of a cultural character. Although some of the cultural and material aspects have changed and there have been advances in the level of consciousness [since the onset of the Bolivarian process], capitalist hegemony is still pervasive; the political and cultural characteristics of capitalism continue to dominate people's consciousness.

There are many spaces where people can now exercise popular power, but they fail to use them. Instead, many people rely on the old way of doing things. For example, in the area of communication: There are many tools, such as the Aporeia website, which could be used more effectively by the popular movements. But people are used to being informed instead of learning to inform themselves.

For example in Guayana, workers are elaborating a rich experience of workers' control in the heavy industries, such as aluminum, metal working, and steel. We need information about this experience that is produced by the communities and the workers themselves in order to be able to challenge the information that is being produced by the bourgeoisie and the state bureaucracy (which usually does not acknowledge the true advances in the process). The television stations are owned by capitalists; the workers do not have control over the press in that state.

I do not think that you can simply "inform" people and they will change. We must continue mobilizing, encouraging popular participation and organization and also political formation. But we confront serious roadblocks in this process given the continuing control of the capitalist class over the media.

ATC: What are the tensions and synergies that emerge in articulating the forces "from above" and "from below"? For example, what has been the role of the state in creating or closing the space(s) for the exercise of "popular power" in the community and in the workplace?

SPB: The principal forces behind the process that have supported President Chávez are the popular sectors: the unemployed, workers, people who live in the barrios, the poor population. But today we also see the increasing importance of the organized working class. Workers have always participated in the process because they live in the barrios, but as a class with their own expressions and forms of organization, they are participating more and more.

Speaking of the class struggle that I mentioned earlier, the right wing has launched a campaign regarding the largest corporation in cereals and foodstuffs, the Polar Group. [The organized workers] threw out bureaucratic leaders and others who were supposedly going to help the company to avoid nationalization. I think that this struggle will intensify.

Also, recently in Caracas there was a mobilization against FEDECAMERAS, the top business federation in Venezuela, which supported the coup against Chavez in 2002, and afterwards workers demonstrated their support for the process in Maracaibo, Valencia, Puerto Cabello, Puerto La Cruz, Cumaná and Barquisimeto, protesting against FEDECAMERAS.

This is related to the problem we talked about in the first question, that the bureaucracy has too much power and sometimes they make mistakes. One example is when the president threatened to nationalize the Polar Group in Barquisimeto, which is an industrial zone located in state of Lara, and the government initially made the mistake of not talking to the workers and showing their commitment to support them in their struggle against the food giant. The bosses took advantage of this situation, and the Mendoza family, which controls Polar, bought off a section of workers.

Right now this situation is being corrected and the recent mobilizations are proof of this. The demonstrations against FEDECAMERAS were an important demonstration that today there is a higher level of participation of workers.

As a result of the bosses' strike in 2003 [the lockout in the oil sector], workers have started to form independent unions, replacing the undemocratic unions that never held elections and had the same leaders for 40 years. In this sense, there has been a "revolution" within the unions in terms of worker participation. The peasants are also part of this confrontation with the Polar Group, which owns large tracts of land where they grow corn, cotton and other basic agricultural products.

GG: Revolutionary processes cannot simply be implanted from above; they must come from below. It is all very well and good to have a state that supports the struggle, which backs up the workers against their employer, for example. But the state shouldn't pretend that it is guiding the revolutionary process. Rather, the state should let the revolutionary processes unfold from its own roots.

There are real processes that are occurring from below, such as the conflict in La Gaviota [a canned food company that was recently nationalized]. In this case, the workers confronted their bosses and took over the factory. From the beginning they were running the factory under their own control. But often nationalization has been a government-led process. In the best case scenario they name some responsible leaders from a Ministry. But in most cases, they appoint the workers who have not been real protagonists in the process.

The [revolutionary] process cannot be imposed by bureaucrats: at the best, they can be facilitators or catalysts, but in the worst case they impede the process. For this reason, it is necessary to let the processes develop and unfold themselves, while stimulating them, feeding them, and facilitating them.

I say this because yesterday in the news it was reported that the Communist Party of Venezuela has proposed a law to form a Workers' Council and to mandate Workers' Control. The proposal for a Workers' Council has been around for a while, and there are already several workers' councils established in the country. There are also several situations where there is real workers' control. But do we really need a law approved by the deputies of the National Assembly, or would it be better to let the process unfold and create a law based upon this experience?

If the law is born before the experience, we will find ourselves at a dead-end. It is impossible to try to mandate an organic process that is by its nature very open-ended, particularly to create a law that pushes forward the revolution rather than reproducing old patterns.

SPB: What is going on is that the revolutionary process in Venezuela is distinct from other revolutionary processes: this is a revolution that is trying to unfold in the middle of a bourgeois state. The revolutionary elements of this process have always emerged from the base, from the workers, not from legislatures and bureaucrats. But here we face many contradictions as we try to transform the system from within.

Laws can be important. For example, in a given private company there might be a bureaucratic union, which is controlled by the bosses, but there is also another group of workers who want to confront this situation. How are these revolutionary workers going to obligate their boss to establish a workers' council that decides what to sell, what basic materials to use, how to produce? In this case, a law that obligates the employer will help these revolutionary workers. But we can't forget that the only thing that can change the situation is pressure from below. History suggests that we need a combination of these two things. In this sense we face a dilemma: the problem of dual power.

LP: Fundamentally, it is the class struggle that pushes the process forward, as well as the conflict between the state and the popular movements. Chávez is in the middle of this conflict, as a guide in the process, pushing for its radicalization. Currently, the forces that have been pushing forward this process are the popular forces, the people, not the labor movement in itself.

This also creates a certain weakness in the process. As Marxists, we consider that these unorganized classes are not sufficiently prepared to intervene in the transformation of the capitalist relations of production, because only the working class can intervene at the point of production. In spite of the important role that communities and the "pueblo" play in the struggle, they are easily demoralized. They get tired of waiting and find it difficult to sustain the initiative.

ATC: Luis and Stalin, could you elaborate further on the role of the UNT in trying to join together the forces "from below" and "from above"?

LP: The first element that needs to be considered is that the working class is highly segmented; workers are divided into different companies and there are divisions of labor. These divisions are a product of the capitalist system. Such divisions disorganize the struggle of the working class. At the moment, each struggle is isolated, in the workplace, or in the barrio. In other words, the working class is a class in itself but not a class for itself.

It is the role of the party to articulate these struggles, such as the PSUV. But before building this party, how do we achieve the unity of the workers? There are many different ideological and political tendencies within the labor movement today, Trotskyists, communists, etc. These different tendencies need some kind of articulating mechanism

to build unity in the struggle at the base.

The UNT has attempted to bring this kind of unity to working-class movements, but it ended up bureaucratizing the movement because it was imposed from above. Of course, we must consider that bureaucratization can give the working class a certain advantage, such as in Spain or Germany, where the workers have a lot of power vis-À-vis the employers and the state.

When Chávez dissolved the [reactionary Central de Trabajadores Venezolanos, Central of Venezuelan Workers] CTV, we founded an alternative, the Frente Bolivariano de Trabajadores [Bolivarian Workers' Front], which aimed to intervene in the struggle by bringing together the revolutionary elements that were formerly within the CTV. Currently the UNT is not effective at the national level, but there are elements where it is still strong, such as in Mitsubishi [MMC Mitsubishi plant in Anzoátegui state].

You never know how the struggle will unfold, however, or where it will emerge next. While the process of trying to bring together the labor movement [through the UNT] has failed because it was imposed from above, we have to find the "spark" that will build an autonomous process from below. The Socialist Plan of Guayana is an example of a process that has come "from above" but only as a response to demands "from below."

SPB: The UNT was born in the heat of the class struggle of 2003 with the bosses' strike. It continues to be the largest workers' central in the country. Recently, however, a group of dissident workers separated from the UNT to try to form their own central. In the past three years they have not been able to consolidate this organization. We think that the correct path is not to construct a new organization but to rebuild the UNT.

Either this year or next, 150 comrades from all sectors will be holding a congress. We have a lot of work ahead of us, including the writing of an internal statute that will mandate regular elections. Certainly there are a lot of different political currents in the workers' movements, such as Marea Socialista among others, but we need to unify these different currents within one central, the UNT. Workers are still a fundamental social subject to bring about social change.

ATC: What is the importance of workers' control in advancing the Bolivarian project?

GG: Workers' control is important from the perspective of democracy. It helps workers overcome their sense of alienation, to be considered a creative person whose opinion matters. Dignity is related to so much more than one's salary; it touches on fundamental aspects of our humanity. Workers' control is about having influence, feeling like one is more than a machine that simply follows orders. It is about being a member of a collective.

But workers' control is also fundamental in the redistribution of social wealth. Workers need to decide how, what and when to produce and what, how and when to sell. Workers' control permits the optimal use of resources in the society at large in order to respond to the needs of the communities.

It is also fundamental in defence of sovereignty. You cannot have an anti-imperialist practice without workers' control. The tendency of those who monopolize the decision-making is to concentrate power so that they can guard secrecy over economic decisions and receive personal benefits. For example, many bosses receive commissions from transnational companies when they negotiate contracts. In this sense, workers' control reduces waste and corruption.

To name one example, in Alcasa [an aluminum plant in Guayana], the bosses of transnational companies had established certain standards in the use of certain materials in the processing of aluminum. It was said that this

material would last less than 1,500 days and would have to be replaced regularly. The workers discovered that this was untrue, however, that the material could in fact last twice as long, which reduced the costs of production significantly.

The bosses were replacing these parts because they received benefits for these contracts, which put the entire industry at the service of foreign interests. If the workers do not participate directly in the decision-making processes, there is no way to discover bosses' looting mechanisms, such as this one.

In socialism, enterprises function based upon the needs of the society rather than profit. The state is supposed to be a transitory mechanism that allows for the development of the organizations at the base, the promotion of workers' participation, to guarantee that community organizations move beyond their local concerns.

Currently in Venezuela, these experiences of popular power are circumscribed. Comunas are restricted to intervening in their small, defined localities. To move forward, we also have to intervene at the national level. It is certain that there is a learning process. But there are social movements and organizations with a national reach, which could be intervening.

SPB: When workers have control over the workplace, it is not just an opportunity for the individual workers to learn, but for raising class consciousness. Workers learn that they do not need bosses, whether the company is owned by a private enterprise or by the state.

It also creates the possibility that Venezuela may convert itself from a country that only produces primary materials to a country that produces manufactured goods, such as in the case of aluminum. The workers start to ask themselves, what else can we do with aluminum besides exporting it? We have to review the possibilities within every enterprise that is owned by the state. In this sense, participation of the communities is doubly important because they also play a crucial role in mitigating the damage to the environment that the industrialization process implies.

The process of worker control is therefore opening the possibility of a new kind of socialism that has not been seen before, different from that of the Soviet Union or Cuba, for example. In the Soviet Union, everything was controlled by the state, by the party. There was no real workers' control. This has also been the case in Cuba. In Venezuela, on the other hand, it is primarily workers who are participating in the workers' councils and the communal councils.

LP: First and foremost, we must remember that workers' control is a socio-historical demand. It is worth repeating: We are not inventing anything! Worker management is a product of the struggles and traditions of the working class. The demand for a type of management which emancipates the working class is one of the fundamental products of the development of capitalism.

Under capitalist forms of work processes, the capitalists appropriate the products of workers' knowledge. Worker management entails an end of the division of labor, such that there is no division between intellectual and manual labor and an end to the ideology that legitimates domination. It is an historical demand, the same that was expressed in the 1871 Paris Commune, 1917 in Soviet Russia, 1919 in Germany and Italy, in the Spanish revolution, forms of worker management in Yugoslavia, and in 1956 with the workers' councils in Hungary. There is continuity with these struggles in Venezuela as the working class struggles to emancipate itself and create a new society.

More concretely, demands for worker control started with the petroleum strike in 2003 when workers named their own managers in assemblies since the bosses were on strike. This process has taken off since then, such as in 2005 with the appropriation of Invepal [a paper factory] and Inveval, Alcasa [aluminum enterprise] in 2005, CADAPE [electrical plant] in 2004, and other factories.

The experience of Sanitarios Maracay was particularly important because this was where the first factory council was established and elected by the workers, even before Inveval. Currently we are working on the Socialist Plan in Guayana in Bolívar, which is based upon workers' control.

Everybody is talking about "workers' control." We do confront problems, however, most of all when the petty bourgeoisie and state bureaucrats try to co-opt the notion. For example, in SIDOR, in one sector the workers wanted to implement a workers' council. Four unelected people wanted to join the workers' council: the chief of the section, the coordinator of the section, a delegate from the health and safety committee, and a delegate from the union. But the workers said, "This is not workers' control. All delegates must be elected by the workers, for each shift." There are many other examples of these kinds of shenanigans.

ATC: What is the role of the local *comunas* in the process?

GG: About 50% of the workers in Venezuela are employed in the informal economy. Many of these people were driven into the informal economy during the neoliberal period with the economic crash, when the options for working in the formal economy and the rural areas were incredibly limited. We also must consider, however, that there is a petty bourgeoisie within the informal economy of people who own their own small businesses.

The importance of the *comuna* is that people are starting to think about ways to transform society by producing in new ways, under a new logic. For example, in Catia [a poor barrio in Caracas] there is a longstanding tradition of shoe-making, which was organized by small- and medium-sized businesses. Production is currently being re-started under the logic of social production, controlled by the community.

This process of "co-management" is still in its early stages, but it may represent a route to overcome the problems of the informal economy, including instability, poor working conditions and the lack of social benefits, as well as problems related to the darker side of the informal economy, such as child labor, illegal trade, drug-trafficking and para-militarism, in which unimaginable activities occur.

LP: The fundamental role of the *comuna* is to bring together the organized working class with the other popular classes in order to be able to deepen the process. We have to build alliances with the organizations of the barrios and the peasant sectors, such as the Frente Campesino Ezequiel Zamora (Ezequiel Zamora Peasant Front).

In socialism, there are two central elements: the economic and the political. Socialism is democracy. Socialism does not exist without participation. For us, the National Assembly is a bourgeois assembly. The constitution has bourgeois elements still, such as the division of power between executive and legislative. This is why we are talking about a state made of councils "Euros" workers' councils, communal councils, students' councils "Euros" which would take on all of these functions. It is a transitional state that we are working on. We know that it is difficult because we are not talking about a *comuna* the size of a city, like the Paris Comune.

We also need to socialize the means of production. When the workers control the means of production, the society will control the means of power, meaning the judicial power, and the National Assembly. Right now a judge earns 40,000 Bolívares Fuertes, while a worker earns 2000 or 3000 Bolívares Fuertes. This creates an unequal power structure controlled by capitalists. We need to create a new economy and society from the ground up.

ATC: What has been the role of the PSUV in articulating or disarticulating the most radical sectors of the process? How cohesive is the party? How democratic are its internal structures? Should we think of the PSUV as a revolutionary party?

GG: It is an important accomplishment to have one party. We understand the importance of unity. The problem is that this type of organization is constituted as a kind of machine which is controlled by the public servants, mayors and governors, who are dependent on the state for their employment. The revolutionary subjects, such as the popular sectors and the peasants, have very little weight in the party.

We call this situation "administered militancy." What we really need, however, is a party that is directed by the working class, which will reduce the weight of the public servants. Of course, things do not change overnight; this is a struggle. We have to fight for a party that has internal democracy and guarantees the participation of the militant sectors in its programs and its statutes.

At the same time, we have to defend the independence of the popular sectors from the party; the party can facilitate, help to orientate the popular sectors, but should not impose its vision to prevent the total bureaucratization of the process. The popular movement has much to offer in the construction of the party. People in the party think that their primary role is to orient the popular sectors, but in fact the social movements are the forces that should build the party.

SPB: The party still bears many of the characteristics of the Movimiento Quinta Republica (MVR), which was primarily an apparatus for winning elections. There is little self-criticism. The workers and the communal councils should not be controlled by the party. In the recent congress, workers' patrols [workplace PSUV branches] were constituted to help select delegates, but their participation was merely symbolic.

There are elections this September. It is a shame that this party, which is supposed to be the hegemonic force, is not really based upon the participation of the workers. A few workers' representatives act as candidates or deputies, but party militants need to work closer with workers' movements. We need a revolution within the party to get rid of the old structure and organization of the MVR and the old parties.

LP: This is a party that has been built from above. I think that praxis is fundamental. Similar to the UNT, the party is bureaucratic. Such a process practically kills any movement at the base. We have to start with the masses. In the assemblies the masses rebel, but right now the student movement, the labor movement and the community movements are divided. So that the PSUV has a reason to be, to commit to the praxis of revolution, we are building workers' patrols, but these are still very small. I am involved in building these patrols.

The problems are structural. It is not productive to say, "This person is corrupt" or "this person is a disguised Chavista." We have to create a program. This is what is going to attract people to the party, when we show them that there is a plan, an alternative that represents them. In the last elections, we tried to identify people to be deputies. We achieved a few things, but each person was working by themselves and the bureaucratic apparatus won. This was not a surprise. We have to organize ourselves and overcome our individualism.

ATC: What are the transitional moves necessary to dislodge the economic power of the bourgeoisie and to upset more fundamentally capitalist social, property and class relations?

SPB: According to a recent study by Victor Ñ lvarez, published by the Centro Internacional Miranda, the majority of the economy remains in private hands. The banks, for example, have been profiting handsomely. Unfortunately these are official statistics. This situation is very troubling.

We have to continue to deepen workers' control and to control the amount of profit that the private companies are making. The workers' councils are important for this reason, to prevent scandalous profit rates. It is also necessary to exert more state control over the parallel dollarized economy, in which the rate of profit is about 60-70%. If there is no

control over this situation, the private companies will continue to profit at the expense of the rest of the economy.

The UNT is heading up this fight to make sure that the collective interests dominate over individual interests. The government needs to play a role here.

GG: There is a fierce debate within the PSUV, about the rhythm by which and the methods used to arrive at the transition to socialism. Sometimes we are taking steps backwards instead of forwards. We have to push forward to break the monopolistic control of the food companies.

We have made some advance by nationalizing and implementing workers' control in some companies, but the food sector continues to be dominated by the private sector, by companies such as the Polar Group, an enterprise which controls the production of cooking oil, grains, cereal and alcohol. This company needs to be socialized and place under workers' control.

Right now, there is also a debate about nationalizing the banking sector. Some banks have been nationalized, such as the Federal Bank and the Bank of Venezuela, but these banks have been nationalized in order to overcome crisis. The government still does not control the financial sector. There is a lot of corruption and bad management in this sector. Some people have been put into prison. We have to put more thought into the role of social movements and workers in this sector.

Another problem is that popular power is fragmented; we do not have popular power at the national level. We must start to build this process with the existing social forces. The peasants, indigenous communities, and communal councils need to create a national council to discuss the state's policies, so that they participate in decision-making at the national level. We need to continue to organize to stem the demobilization that happens when people get discouraged.

We have taken many knocks, especially from the bureaucracy, but there are still reasons to remain optimistic. We have to combine social forces to take power away from capital, and not transfer this power to a bureaucracy which is converting itself into new capitalists in a hidden form.

LP: We need to nationalize the banks and break the monopoly over the food system. As it stands, there are private monopolies that own the banks and the systems of food production, distribution, and commercialization. 72.5% of finance is still owned by national and international bourgeoisie. It is impossible to develop industry owned by the state if you do not control the banking system. Who else is going to provide credit for all of the projects?

We are not talking about nationalizing all of the companies, only the fundamental ones that have monopolies. This will help us build a national economy and also move from being an economy that exports primary materials towards a productive economy. The other aspect is to create a new idea of democracy. The workers' councils, the communal councils, and the comunas are the tools with which we will build the new society. Right now the bourgeoisie is controlling the state.

ATC: An imperial and right-wing counter-offensive against the left throughout Latin America seems to be intensifying. We see, for example, the new U.S. bases in Colombia, the Honduran coup, attempted destabilization in Bolivia and Ecuador, and the consolidation of right-wing electoral regimes in Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile. How would you characterize the imperialist threat to Venezuela under Obama, and in what ways is it similar and different from the threat under Bush?

SPB: Breaking the Bolivarian Revolution remains an obsession of the imperialist powers. They are doing everything they can to break the process politically. They support electoral forces like (outgoing Colombian president) Uribe and the right-wing forces in Mexico and Peru. They also apply pressure in other cases so that governments will follow moderate reforms like Lula in Brazil.

GG: Direct military threats are possible, but they have been concentrating their efforts on a media war. In Spain, for example, the media conglomerate Grupo Prisa presented Venezuela as a dangerous country where people die every day due to violence. This problem of crime and violence is not a new one, however; it has existed for decades and is a product of the inequalities of capitalism.

For the first time, the government is trying to confront the problem using a social approach rather than through repression, which is not acknowledged by the media who prefer to depict Venezuela as a "lawless" society. They never mention, however, the brutally violent situation in Colombia, which is a narco-state where social leaders and civilians are constantly being assassinated.

They are building bases on the border of Colombia in order to be able to launch a military offensive against Venezuela.

Right now they have the opposition, but they also have influence over the bureaucratic sectors that constitute another great threat to the [revolutionary] process. Imperialism has launched aggressive campaigns to destabilize the government. They have not yet opted to invade us, but if they decide that they have to do it, they will. So far they have focused on destabilization from within.

SPB: The right has a lot of faith in their expectation of victory in the September elections. The opposition will try to profit from whatever campaign to attack the Federal Bank, the PDVAL, the government's threats against the Polar Group and Globovisión to try to maintain their bases in the country and sustain their worldwide campaign.

We have to deepen the revolution, take over the strategic industries, and destroy the monopolies. This is the only way that the government can guarantee the provision of food, clothing and medicine, at fair prices. Currently we depend on private, transnational corporations and importers to provide these goods.

We are in a crucial moment where the revolution can advance or take steps backwards. The government has taken a positive step in signalling its support for workers' control, but this is not enough. There is a lot left to be done. The stranglehold that the private sector continues to have over the economy, as Victor Alvarez demonstrates, is very troubling.

LP: We will always be attacked. Imperialism does not sleep. Right now they are playing a waiting game, waiting for people to give up. The imperial power is in a delicate situation, tied up with two wars. This does not mean, of course, that direct military invasion is not possible, but it is less likely. Also, the correlation of forces in Latin America has changed. There is an interesting correlation of forces in Europe due to the crisis, as well.

Clearly, we do not think that socialism is possible in one country. We need socialism in Bolivia and Ecuador. As Trotsky says, uneven and combined development of the economic forces mean that some countries are more economically developed than others, but there can be revolutionary processes in some of these "backward" places. We have to build solidarity, solidarity that is also material to defend the revolutionary processes.

GG: The imperialist powers are also trying to divide the South American nations that are currently working together,

to separate Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, and also Argentina, for example. Argentina is a case where a government of the bourgeoisie has established alliances with the government of Venezuela.

Certain sectors have proposed the creation of the Fifth International as a counter-weight to the imperial offensive. This proposal risks creating an overly bureaucratic organization; we cannot construct a revolutionary government on this basis. The best defense is to develop the revolution in other countries, and then we would be able to launch an international campaign against the monstrosity of Colombia, for example.

There are four million Colombians in Venezuela. While some of them are with the process because they receive social benefits that they have never had before, many of them remain under the influence of Uribismo. Political transformation is a long process, and it takes time for people to leave behind what they have always known.

The last thing that I would like to say "Euros" unless there are other questions "Euros" is about the press. Right now Globovisión, which is linked with the Federal Bank, has a campaign to show the world that the government is trying to destroy them and that they are defending freedom of speech.

I participated in the Front of Bolivarian Lawyers against Globovisión on behalf of Aporrea, which is petitioning the Supreme Justice Tribunal to open legal proceedings against Globovisión for violating no fewer than 25 articles of the Constitution that protect human rights. The Tribunal recognized the petition in 2004 but has not yet held a hearing because the government is being blackmailed by Globovisión.

Globovisión was at the front of the coup d'etat in 2002. It is more than simply a television channel that promotes the cultural and ideological hegemony of capitalism; it is a conduit for the interests of imperialism, with close links to media outlets like CNN, etc. But the Venezuelan government has been very soft with Globovisión, even offering amnesty.

In whatever other country, these people would be in jail or would have been killed. If this were the United States, these people would not have been forgiven since they knew full well what they were doing; their actions were premeditated.

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