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Venezuela

Economic chaos, violence and the search for alternatives

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In Venezuela the polarisation between supporters and opponents of the Maduro government is sharpening, with tragic consequences, on the basis of a deep economic crisis and a changed political conjuncture across South America.

For several weeks Venezuela has seemed to be plunged into chaos, with demonstrations and counter-demonstrations by the opposition and the Maduro government, followed by violent confrontations, leading to the death of more than 20 people. The MUD (Mesa de la Unidad - Democratic Unity Roundtable), a heterogeneous coalition, demands the holding of immediate general elections to put an end to Nicolás Maduro's government. The situation worsened when, on March 30 of this year, the Supreme Court of Justice (where government sympathisers have a majority) stripped the National Assembly (where the opposition have a majority) of its prerogatives, because of the presence inside it of three deputies who were fraudulently elected. Faced with the scandal aroused by this move, the Venezuelan authorities finally backed down while sentencing the opposition candidate at the last two presidential elections, Henrique Capriles, to fifteen years of ineligibility.

The government's authoritarian drift does not only concern the opposing political elites. The regional and trade union elections have also been postponed without any date being assigned for when they will take place. The "People's Liberation Operation" aimed at restoring security in the popular neighbourhoods, is accused of dozens of killings by human rights organisations. And political formations which until now were close to "critical Chavismo" and independent of the PSUV (Maduro's party), like Marea Socialista or the Venezuelan Communist Party, are now obliged to submit to draconian conditions to maintain a legal existence.

As for the MUD, it is clearly dominated by neoliberals and centred on a political project of social revenge, pro-imperialist and restoration of a "stable" government in the service of the dominant classes and international capital. Remember that during the aborted coup of April 2002, this same opposition had immediately overthrown the legal authorities and exerted an immediate repression against the people and supporters of Chávez.

Whether Maduro remains in power or a "national unity" government is put in place, the situation of Venezuela's popular classes remains very worrying. The country's economy, a prisoner of extractivism and the oil rent, has been hit full on by the rapid fall in oil prices since summer 2014. In a desperate gamble, the government has accelerated its mining mega-project in the Orinoco, under the control of the army and in alliance with the multinationals, which affects around 12% of the national territory, to the detriment of the environment, the exceptional biodiversity of this area and the numerous indigenous communities who live there.

Meanwhile, the explosion of the black market, the collapse of the national currency, the "economic war" waged by many big private companies, the immense corruption of many senior civil servants and an ever more arrogant "Bolivarian bourgeoisie" mean that Venezuelans are confronted by immense shortages of food, services and medical supplies: hunger is reappearing in several Caracas neighbourhoods. Another phenomenon runs alongside the weakening of Maduro: the coming to power of the conservative right in several Latin American countries, thus a loss of regional support.

This general situation of political and social regression means nothing positive for the Venezuelan masses. If we obviously denounce any attempt at external destabilisation, our solidarity is above all with the social, indigenous and workers' movement of the country, with those at the bottom and the forces of the critical left who, while denouncing the projects of neoliberal restoration of the opposition and the "Boli-bourgeois", seek to chart a path independent of the government, clearly anti-capitalist and self-managing, in very difficult conditions.