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World Social Forum

"A breath of red air"

- IV Online magazine - 2006 - IV375 - February 2006 -

Publication date: Monday 27 February 2006

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The revolution on the march and under discussion.

The Caracas component of the polycentric 2006 World Social Forum took place from January 24th to 29th. Its exceptional character derived from the fact that it was taking place at the heart of the revolutionary process that Venezuela is experiencing. The Forum provided an illustration of the depth of this process, the vitality of the global justice movement and the importance of international solidarity.

The sixth stage of the WSF in Venezuela was a success. The radical wind that is blowing across the country was felt by the tens of thousands of Latin Americans and the Europeans who were present.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/wsf061.jpg>]

The eternal prognosis of the death of the WSF or its absorption by social democracy failed to materialise. The WSF is continuing on its way and in Caracas it received a breath of red air. The question of whether the WSF should take decisions about action or content itself with discussions remains posed.

But though the WSF did not make a choice, Chavez had no hesitation in giving his own opinion to the 15,000 people who were present at the meeting on Friday January 27th, which was shown live on television. He basically came down on the side of taking action in the face of the offensive by neo-liberalism and its wars.

The Venezuelan social movements had obviously not been included in the official framework of the WSF, and the opening march was to a large extent dominated by foreign delegations. The principal trade union organisation, the National Workers' Union (UNT) was conspicuous by its absence, suspicious as it was that the WSF might appear as an event that was too much organised by the government.

But on the fringe of the official framework, in the popular neighbourhoods, in the barrios, in the factories, links were established. The meetings with the inhabitants of the La Vega barrio, Olivier Besancenot's visit to the SEL-FEX factory, occupied by its 240 women workers, the visit to the Fuerte el Tuna cultural project (self-managed and financed by the municipality), the discussions in the streets of the old city in which militants dressed in red took part, the people from the co-operatives, or the fact of taking part in television programmes...all that enabled us to confirm the importance of internationalism in order to resist and then to build a society radically opposed to capitalism. Here in Caracas, no one is afraid to call it socialism and questions of strategy are at the heart of the discussions.

We discussed these questions with hundreds of people. The Party of Revolution and Socialism was one of the organisations we discussed with, alongside militants from the "Our America - April 13th Movement" project, sectors taking part in the government, organisers of social missions...And that enabled us to improve our understanding of the revolutionary process that is at work and the forms that our activity in solidarity and cooperation with it should take.

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Venezuela was able to show the world its recent successes and the enormous challenges it will face in the coming period. The WSF also served to increase direct solidarity between Venezuela and the rest of the world. The rise of the Left in Latin America, in terms both of governments and of popular movements, the first measures taken by Evo Morales and the debates linked to the situation in Brazil meant that the questions concerning the anti-imperialist struggle were not simply a matter of posturing. They are having immediate consequences.

The Latin American situation is exciting, full of potential and full of risks. The potential is linked to the rise in the level of political consciousness of the masses. And the risks? There is in particular the risk of seeing the governments that are "reformist without reforms" get the upper hand in relation to the more radical and transforming projects in Venezuela and Bolivia. Lula's Brazil is going through a difficult phase and the outcome will weigh heavily on the entire sub-continent.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/wsfo62.jpg>]

For Chavez, it is indispensable for the Left, even social-liberal, to win, so as to avoid an axis being created between the Brazilian giant and the United States, with the military implications that this would have. Chavez is not, however, sowing any illusions about the ability of the government in Brasilia to carry out real changes.

As Plinio Sampaio, a Brazilian theologian who recently left the governing Workers' Party to join the PSOL, put it concisely, "one of Chavez's big problems is Lula...".

This article was published in the February 2nd issue of the LCR's weekly, Rouge.