



## Venezuela

# Letter to the Venezuelan people, to the peoples of Latin America and the world, to the international left

18 August 2017, by **Marea Socialista**

Marea Socialista strongly rejects Trump's military threats and all kinds of interference from the US government as well as economic sanctions. We close ranks with our indignant and courageous Venezuelan people, appealing to the victorious struggle for independence that made us a free nation. That does not mean that we endorse the policies followed by Maduro and the ANC in any way.

Although the crazed Trump does not seem very bothered about it, he is reaping a wave of repudiation of his armed blackmail and his invocation of war. We are seeing how other nations, even those most hostile to Maduro, strongly condemn this possibility, repudiated by the governments of Latin America and other parts of the globe, as it would only contribute to making the world more unstable and dangerous and could even ignite the whole of Latin America. It has also been rejected by spokespersons for international organizations and UN bodies, which criticise economic sanctions because they would only serve to worsen the situation of Venezuelans, and could even be harmful to those who apply them. From the international left, including the American left, voices are raised against interventionism, although a

good part of them do not support Maduro.

The United States has for many decades crushed and invaded countries in Latin America and throughout the world for the imposition of its domination and in the dispute for imperialist hegemony. It has often got away with it but has also had huge failures, as in Vietnam and Cuba. These actions which they pretend to justify falsely in the name of "freedom" or "democracy" have always been at the cost of enormous suffering for the peoples attacked and even for their own people.

Within Venezuela, a broad diversity of parties and social organizations, regardless of their sympathy or antipathy towards the government and the "supra-power" established with the ANC [National Constituent Assembly], has come to express a strong rejection of imperial threats, and even sectors of the pro-imperialist right who have at some point supported external interference, have been forced to take a stand against an invasion or warlike action against Venezuela, even though they avoid expressly condemning their gringo strategic ally. But we believe that it is not enough to issue statements; it is

necessary to contextualize and try to explain what is happening, as well as discuss ways to defend our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In order to do so, we must examine the international situation in which the stage of Venezuela's transition is taking place, where the polarization between the right-wing opposition and a government that has lost its way also reflects the inter-imperialist dispute, where one and the other try to take advantage and appropriate our resources.

The government, with its bad policies, weakens and makes the country more vulnerable, by distorting the sovereign course that predominated in economic matters during the Chávez period and at the same time losing the support and confidence of the people, which was one of the main sustainers and sources of strength of the Bolivarian revolution. This is what has given opportunities for recovery to the right opposition, clearly pro-imperialist, and has opened the way to the risk of intervention.

Hence the need to restore the unity of the Venezuelan people for the defence of the country, and this is done with more democracy and not less, as well

as effective political responses to face the situation that the people suffer with the scarcity of food and medicines. But the government prioritizes the payment of foreign debt and its commitments to (imperialist) financial capital, leaving aside attention to the urgencies of the crisis. The unity of the people cannot be forced with abuse and repression.

The government of Maduro and the bureaucracy is now implementing economic policies that are retrograde in the matter of sovereignty and independent development, in comparison of what was achieved with the Bolivarian revolution in the time of Chavez. Now these policies are acquiring an anti-national character and they damage sovereignty. Government policy is not consistently anti-imperialist, although it may sometimes have a provocative style, with verbal challenges to the empire. This does not strengthen us against imperialism.

Also, North American banks and “tax havens” have benefited from continued embezzlement in Venezuela and the criminal flight of capital. The USA intervenes partially and selectively for political manipulation, but in no way seeks to aid to the people of Venezuela in their most urgent needs.

## **Venezuela in the context of the world capitalist crisis and the inter-imperialist conflict**

The world capitalist system has not been able to recover from the chronic structural crisis that has been underway since the end of the first decade of this century. In the face of signs of a possible explosion of new bubbles created by speculative capital in the financial sector, investments seek to take refuge in a redoubled exploitation of natural resources (gold, silver, diamonds, coltan, among others), which also respond to the requirements of technological

advances and new market areas. At the same time, capital uses the spirals of external debts to appropriate more assets and wealth from the countries and their territories.

All this is part of a re-colonizing escalation, in which the old and the emerging empires, together with the transnationals, dispute hegemony and positions of advantage in assaulting the riches of the planet, even at the expense of the destruction of the equilibriums of climate and of life, in the midst of growing geopolitical chaos, the disintegration of nations, wars and the proliferation of governments with the corrupt and criminal bosses of capital accumulation, which immerses societies in arbitrariness. There is no solution within the capitalist framework. What appears to be an attempt to establish a “new order” is actually part of a worldwide disorder, with an economic and political dispute over hegemony, with military tensions and conflicts that indirectly include Russia and China, and where regional confrontations extend.

Part of this international tableau is the prolonged instability in the Arab countries, the revolutions and counterrevolutions and invasions and resistances within them, the growing hostility with North Korea, possessor of nuclear weapons as well as the imbalances in Europe itself and in the periphery of the former USSR. In many of the scenarios in which the United States intervenes, we see a tragic disintegration as a result, because even though it is economically and politically weaker, its action is more aggressive and relies on its continued military supremacy.

This re-colonizing dynamic, within countries, dismantles social conquests and annihilates democratic rights to impose the implementation of new architectures and economic and financial mechanisms, serving the needs of a changing capitalism; and though they have contributed to these rights also, each in its measure, the so-called “progressive governments” in Latin America have remained subject to the capitalist model. In this general context, the so-called progressive governments, which once

sought to barter the conditions of distribution established by the big imperialist powers and companies, have been declining and succumbing. This has affected the sustainability of social benefits and the enjoyment of democratic rights, already unsustainable by rentier economies that did not become consistently transformed and because the processes of change were frustrated by the growth of parasitic bureaucracies and the assimilation of such progressive governments to the logic of capital. That is why the cycle of revolutions and processes of change that began in Latin America seems to be in the terminal phase, to be reabsorbed in the world capitalist readjustment that recaptures its possessions and areas of domination, despite the continuation of social struggles, and this mainly because of the renunciation of the political leaderships that have overseen the conducting of those processes.

This does not escape Venezuela, where the revolution is being stifled by Hugo Chavez’s own political heirs, like the key elements that marked the Bolivarian process and the efforts undertaken for Latin American integration with truncated or semi-truncated projects such as the Banco del Sur, the monetary union with the Sucre, the expansion and strengthening of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas, the creation of an independent military framework with respect to the United States, the progress of the Union of South American Nations and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

The problem is not only the United States’ struggle to regain space and economic control in Venezuela; It is also the geopolitics established by Chávez, who disturbed the international tableau with adverse or uncomfortable positions, capable of dragging other countries behind him against US plans and objectives, while favouring the entry of China and Russia affecting it in its closest area of ??interests, considered by imperialism as a “backyard.”

So we must ask: is the policy of the Maduro government really anti-

imperialist? In the economic field, the orientation goes in the opposite direction, because although it announces the vague idea of ??a new "post-oil" economic model and the replacement of the rentier system, all concrete actions are directed at the reinforcement of rentier, extractivist and dependent capitalism, tied to transnational corporations and international financial capital, as expressions of imperialism, as well as to the reinforcement of the mechanisms of subjection with respect to the imperialist countries properly so called, both the oldest and those that have been emerging as competitors of the United States and Europe, including China and Russia, with very clear interests within the country.

An expression of this is the exploitation of the Orinoco Mining Arc, with 112,000 square kilometres offered to the transnational megaminer of diverse origins, in a vast and very delicate area, vital for the climatic and ecological balance, containing a great part of our water sources and hydroelectric power, where indigenous peoples live and much of Venezuelan biodiversity is concentrated. For these exploitation projects, the government did not even present environmental impact studies, nor did it consult indigenous peoples as mandated by the current Constitution of 1999. This has even been done with debt-generating financial arrangements aimed at paying the already existing debt, owing to the lack of foreign exchange due both to the reduction of oil revenues and to the embezzlement and criminal flight of capital that has occurred in the country. This is also evident in the Oil Strip and in the designation of the "15 Motors" of the economy, linked to the opening of Special Economic Zones that contemplate forms of greater flexibility and de-regulation favourable to capital and harmful to labour and national sovereignty. Instead of advancing along the path of "endogenous development" of which Chavez spoke so much, the old path of neo-colonial capitalism is resumed.

An expression of all this are the most recent contracts, amid the crisis and the street protests, with China

National Petroleum Corporation, Rosneft, Schlumberger, Horizontal Well Drillers, Baker Hughes, Halliburton, among others, in the oil field, and big gas projects with companies such as Repsol or Shell. In mining, we have witnessed the return of companies that had been thrown out by Chavez, such as Gold Reserve, and the granting of extensive concessions to Barrick Gold Corporation, among other mining deals agreed with Chinese, Russian, Canadian, North American, South African enterprises and corporate countries under whose flag transnational capitals operate.

In these "strategic alliances" more than 90% of investment is in mining and the rest destined to tourism, without being an axis in productive reactivation related to food, agricultural development or medicines, to face the most serious problems which are affecting the people with the economic situation of the country. Food and medicines, on the other hand, are being affected even in imports, having been reduced by between 60% and 70% in order to secure most of the foreign exchange for the payment of an illegitimate external debt and with a high component of corruption, which the government refuses to audit and make transparent.

The right-wing opposition, for its part, has not made the slightest effort since its parliamentary control in the National Assembly to question or block these agreements and economic conduct of the government, since it does not oppose these policies and at the most it could disagree with the preferential partners or compete for business management. An eventual government of this opposition would have a similar orientation even if it changed the composition of the capitals.

Thus, beyond blackmail and threats directed at influencing the country's political control, imperialism, whether in its nation-state form (USA, European countries, China, Russia and so on) or through the transnational corporations and financial capital that are its economic expression, is regaining a strengthened power in our economy and in our territory, through

the government itself, which rhetorically agitates anti-imperialist and revolutionary slogans, but which in fact has been opening the doors to it for some time through the appetite of a bureaucracy that has become part of the capital in society with sectors of the bourgeoisie.

Hence the first measures of anti-imperialist defence and national sovereignty should start from the review and rectification of this entire economic orientation, which is the main factor of vulnerability to external threats.

And faced with this, another question has to be asked: Are the constitutionalists of the ANC going to propose a truly anti-imperialist, consistent and responsible policy? They have not shown any signs of that and little can be expected of a "Constituent Power" made up of the same constituted power responsible for the economic policies applied to the detriment of the Venezuelan nation. If they really wanted to liberate the country from imperialism and move towards our Second Independence, they would have to take decisive steps in this direction.

Chávez was able to advance in his anti-imperialist positions because at the same time he relied on the social achievements of the Bolivarian revolution and a democracy that maintained the confidence of the great majority of the people. This does not happen with Maduro, who does not go beyond anti-imperialist discourse and opens space for transnationals and the looting of foreign powers in the country, while losing social and political support for the mistreatment and deprivations to which the population is subjected by the bureaucratic and authoritarian government.

Obviously, then, asking for support for Venezuela in the face of Trump's threats does not mean support for the policies of Maduro and the ANC. On the contrary, the changing of these dire policies is a precondition for the real defence of our country.

## To face the threats of imperialism and defend our sovereignty

Therefore, for the defence of our sovereignty we need to reverse all the economic policies described and resume the path of the Second Independence, since it is not only a problem of military defence.

We need to address the food and drug emergency that the people are suffering, giving priority to supply and the reactivation of the production of basic consumer goods. The bulk of foreign exchange should be used for this purpose and not the payment of the foreign debt (with which even the imperialist aggression itself is financed) and the recovery of the capital which has left the country is required, something the government has made no effort to do, making it

responsible for the continuity of embezzlement from the nation.

The recovery of democracy and the rule of law is fundamental to reunify our people and restore their mechanisms of participation, today usurped and totally monopolized by the power set up installed in the ANC, by the bureaucratic apparatus of the state and by the government of the PSUV. This is another weakness in which imperialism relies on pressure on Venezuela under the pretext of democracy.

One way of doing this would be to submit the installed Constituent Assembly to a referendum so that it is the entire people and not a minority and one-party partiality which approves or rejects it. But in no way can this disputed Constituent Assembly and the government continue acting outside the Constitution, still in force, adopted with Chavez in 1999.

The bourgeois opposition, whether or not participating in the MUD, must

submit to the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and abandon definitively the violent and insurrectional methods or the attempts to implant a dual power to overthrow the government and pronounce itself unequivocally against the interventionism that it has been sponsored from its ranks.

For all this, it is necessary to recover the autonomous social force of the working people and the inclusive multi-dialogue of all sectors of society in full freedom, with the cessation of mistreatment and repression.

To the international left we propose an active campaign against the threats and US interventionism, and at the same time, that it demand that the government of Nicolás Maduro return to the Venezuelan people all their rights and constitutional guarantees that were conquered with the revolution.

*National Operative Team of Marea Socialista*

## All the peoples of the world reject Trump's threats against Venezuela

17 August 2017, by **LUCHAS**

We, the Liga Unitaria Chavista Socialista (LUCHAS), call on all workers, social movements, unions and left-wing politicians in the different continents of the world, to express their rejection of these discourteous statements and to mobilize to repudiate and repel Trump's unacceptable pretensions.

## We are leading the Solidarity Days with Venezuela!!!

Beyond the arrogant behavior of this nefarious personage that occupies the presidency of the USA today, his

personality disorders and the narcissistic traits that all psychiatrists say he suffers from, we must take into account and be aware that US imperialism, in the hands of this sick president and through the interests of some economic sectors, can even dare to a criminal adventure against Venezuela.

Imperialism as a whole and the lackey governments of the region are tired of enduring the behavior of the Venezuelan people who have committed themselves, against the will of successive governments over the last 18 years in the USA, to going ahead with their revolutionary Bolivarian process and to continue to

set an example to all other countries to fight and enforce their sovereignty, independence and freedom.

This irreverence and political firmness of the people of Bolívar and Chávez to enforce their autonomy, and the eagerness of the imperialists to have control of the immense mineral riches of our lands, is a great challenge for them, seeing that, despite the political and economic crisis that we now experience, we are not capable of being scared or bending.

It is no coincidence that this desperate declaration of Trump was made a few days after more than 8 million Venezuelan people, on July 30,

participated in supporting the National Constituent Assembly at the initiative proposed by President Maduro, ignoring the warnings and threats to promote an economic blockade against our country. These pressures were also made through spokespersons from the world's banks and with the use of blackmail messages from representatives of oil companies, airlines and shipping companies. They could count also for this psychological war on the complicity of some sepoym governments of the region.

The role played by the US government and its complicit governments in the region, in the role of financing, advising and directing the Venezuelan opposition in the MUD, is revealed once again. These have had the treasonous nerve to request the military intervention of the OAS and

even of the US army itself.

These stateless people, since they have not been able, with "guarimbas", blockades and burnings of innocent people, to impose a fratricidal war between ourselves, now seek a military intervention and occupation, as a copy of what has happened with Iraq, Libya and Syria. They want to be Yankee partners in the war business and then be part of the rebuilding of the country's infrastructure and the exploitation of oil and other mineral wealth with the big corporations around the world. For those reasons, they are almost the only ones who have not rejected Trump's statement of military intervention.

Today as we receive support of international solidarity, we have to assume the commitment with the peoples of the world to carry forward this Bolivarian process. The revolution

needs the Constituent Assembly to impose the Communal State to advance the democratic socialism of the 21st Century, as Chavez demanded of Maduro. The revolutionary process has to be continental. We must now constitute a great national and continental front in defense of the Bolivarian revolution and to promote the socialist revolution of Our America.

**BEFORE THE THREATS OF THE EMPIRE WE WILL PREPARE, NOW, THE WORKERS' AND POPULAR MILITIAS!!**

FOR LUCHAS: Stalin Pérez Borges; Ismael Hernández; Nieves Tamaroni; Marcos Garc a; Jes s Vargas; Christian Pereira; Osman Ca izales; Vilmas Vivas.

*August 14, 2017.*

## ??"We congratulate the Venezuelan people for the high participation in the election of the National Constituent Assembly"

### 17 August 2017

??Now what we need is a Change of Course... to the left!

The high electoral participation of more than 8 million voters, over 41% of the electoral register, gives a clear legitimacy to the continuity of the Bolivarian Process initiated by Hugo Ch vez, while at the same time constitute a clear repudiation of the attempts of the extreme right to overthrow by any means, even to produce a coup d tat by appealing to violence and economic sabotage.

?These 8 million votes are a slap in the face to the threats and aggressions of US imperialism and its European allies and Latin American puppets, entrenched in the OAS, led by the miserable Mr. Almagro. Those millions of people who, despite all the terrorist

threats of the extreme right, went to vote, gave much more political legitimacy to the government of Maduro than the abject lackeys of Donald Trump in the continent, starting with Enrique Pe a Nieto, following with Santos, Varela or Kuczynski.

?The great citizen participation also constitutes a lie to the spokesmen of the so-called "critical chavismo" that called for the abstention and the blank or void vote. If the Venezuelan people had followed them, the Bolivarian process, the social conquests and the political strength of the working class would have weakened; today we would not be celebrating a popular triumph, but a defeat that would have emboldened the pro coup and criminal rightwing.

?However, foreign aggression has not stopped. There they are, high spokesmen of the White House, declaring that they study all sorts of possibilities to overthrow the government of Maduro. The pro coup and violent Venezuelan rightwing has not stopped. They, through their portal Dollar Today, since Monday, July 31 have led the exchange of the parallel dollar - which had been in something more than Bs, 8,000 per dollar - to a figure close to Bs 20,000 per dollar. Five days after the NCA's election, the prices for food, telecommunication services and other products had risen by 200%. That is, not having achieved their objectives with a coup, now they seek to do it with an economic coup.

?For these reasons, backroom



negotiations, maintenance of the unjust rules of capitalism, concessions of any kind, or the renunciation of socialist principles cannot be allowed. The electoral result shows at the outset a new relationship of forces that should rule out any negotiations that demoralize the Chavista people who showed up on J30. Any agreement has to be transparent, but above all that does not prevent the Change of Course (Golpe de Timón) to the left. This must be done without delay, without further postponement, for the deepening and radicalization of the process. The way is the mobilization of the Chavismo bases. It has been once again demonstrated that, when workers and peoples mobilize, the right pulls back and imperialist aggressions fail. It is proven that the salvation of the Bolivarian Process, and of any revolutionary process, is in the hands of the people when it is appealed to its mobilization, when it is called to participation, when it is given true democratic decision-making power, when it goes out into the streets to defend their conquests.?

The signatories of this Second Declaration urge the Venezuelan government, presided by Nicolás Maduro, to listen to the voice of the people who, gathered on the night of July 30 in Caracas' Plaza Bolívar to celebrate the election results, shouted the famous expression of Commander Hugo Chávez when he referred to a turn to the left and to revolutionary measures: ¡Golpe de Timón! (Change of Course)

?Yes, Venezuela needs a Change of Course to the left. The only possible salvation of the Bolivarian Process and its social and democratic achievements is that the peoples and workers' mobilizations continue, so that the government takes drastic measures to disarm the coup plotters and the economic sabotage.

Beginning with the nationalization of the banking and the foreign trade; a radical change in the currency policy that allows corruption and sabotage; a real workers' (non-bureaucratic) control of industry; the punishment and expropriation of the corrupt businessmen of the boliburguesía (businesspeople passing as Chavistas) and the opposition; the non payment

of the external debt, and the cancellation of the handing over of the concessions for the indiscriminate extraction of gold in the Orinoco Mining Arc. To achieve this, it is also necessary to promote the democratic self-organization of the popular masses and the working people.

?With the election last Sunday there is a new opportunity for the Constituent Assembly to make the Change of Course that in 58 months the government of Maduro has not done.?

Those of us who signed this Second Declaration call upon the workers and youth of the United States, the European Union, Spain, Mexico, Canada, Colombia, Panama, Peru, Brazil and Argentina to demand that their governments respect the democratic decision of the people of Venezuela and its National Constituent Assembly.

?None of these governments has moral authority, political legitimacy, or support from their peoples to interfere in the sovereign affairs of the Venezuelan people, nor to apply sanctions to their government. These governments must get their dirty hands off the Bolivarian democracy.

### **?Long live the people of Venezuela and its Constituent Assembly!**

?Stop foreign aggression and internal coup violence!

?We demand respect for the democratic decision of the Venezuelan people!

?August 2017

#### *First Signatures:*

Guillermo Almeyra, escritor y militante socialista.

LUCHAS (Liga de Unidad Chavista Socialista): Stalin Pérez, Nieves Tamaroni, Jesús Vargas, Christian Pereira, Osmari Canizales, Angel Narvaez e Ismael Hernández.

Polo Democrático de Panamá: Olmedo Beluche, Félix Villarreal, Salomón Samudio Briseida, Barrantes Euclides Buitrago y Abdiel Rodríguez.

Partido Revolucionario de los

Trabajadores (PRT) de México: Edgard Sánchez, Luis Rangel, Josefina Chávez, José Martíáñez Cruz, Andrés Lund y Diego Luz.

Ricardo Napurã, diputado constituyente y senador peruano.

Mario Hernández, periodista y escritor argentino.

Carlos Ghioldi, secretario general de la CTA-T de Rosario, Argentina y referente de La Toma, empresa recuperada por sus trabajadores.

Claudio Katz (Economista EDI, UBA). Argentina.

Eduardo Lucita, integrante de EDI (Economistas de Izquierda) Argentina.

Nora Ciapponi. Militante socialista, colabora con FPDS-Corriente Nacional. Argentina.

Aldo Casas. Luchador socialista, colaborador de FPD-CN, consejo editorial de Herramienta.

Martin Mosquera, Democracia Socialista. Argentina

James D. Cockcroft, escritor y militante socialista

Berna Menezes, Membro da Direcao Nacional do PSOL-BR

Mário Azeredo- Membro da Executiva Estadual do PSOL-RS

Neiva Lazarotto-Membro da Direcao Nacional da Intersindical - Central da Classe Trabalhadora

Rejane Aretz- Membro da Setorial de Mulheres do PSOL-NR

Rosa Marques-Dirección Nacional de COMUNA-PSOL-Sao Paulo

Valnz Bittencourt, advogada da intersindical

Luisa Muniz, e Fernanda Reis, Coordenacao da Juventude do Movimento Contestacao

Adriano Ricold. Dirigente do Fortalecer o PSOL Viamao/RE-BR BR

Modesto Emilio Guerrero, Periodista, Escritor venezolano y militante socialista en Argentina

Sergio Moura-Dirección Nacional de COMUNA-PSOL, Rão de Janeiro Brasil  
Alberto Wiãazky, integrante del Consejo de Redacción de la revista Herramienta, Argentina.

Ricardo Cajigas, integrante del Secretariado Ejecutivo del PIT-CNT, Uruguay.Â

Federico Fuentes, editor revista Links

International Journal of Socialist Renewal, Australia

Coordinadora Socialista Revolucionaria (CSR) de México: Blanca Radillo Murguãa Héctor Armando Valadez George José Luis Hernández Ayala Carlos Ferra Martãnez Violeta Cangas

Bruna Menezes - Ex Âncora da

Telesur e atual assessora da bancada nacional do Psol. Valnez Bittencourt-Advogada da Intersindical. Luisa Muniz e Fernanda Reis - Coordenaãõ da Juventude do Movimento Contestaãõ. Adriano Ricold- Dirigente do Fortalecer o PSOL de Viamãõ/RS-BR.

Source [Aporrea](#).

## In Defense of Venezuela

**11 August 2017, by Boaventura de Souza Santos**

In this new text, he clarifies his support for the Bolivarian process:

Venezuela is living one of its most critical moments in its history. I have followed the Bolivarian Revolution from the start, critically and in solidarity. The social achievements of the last two decades are indisputable. To prove this one only needs to consult the 2016 UN report on the evolution of the Human Development Index.

The report states: “The Human Development Index (HDI) of Venezuela in 2015 was 0.767 — which places the country in the high human development category —, positioning it in the 71th place out of 188 countries and territories. This classification is shared with Turkey. From 1990-2015, the HDI of Venezuela increased from 0.634 to 0.767, an increase of 20.9%. Between 1990 and 2015, life expectancy at birth increased by 4.6 years, the average level of education increased to 4.8 years and the years of general education increased, on average, by 3.8 years. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita increased by 5.4% between 1990 and 2015.”

It must be noted that these advances were obtained in a democracy, only momentarily interrupted by the attempted coup d’etat in 2002 organized by the opposition with the support of the United States.

The premature death of Hugo Chávez in 2013 and the fall of the price of petroleum in 2014 caused a profound commotion in the processes of social transformation currently underway at that time. The charismatic leadership of Chávez did not have a successor, the victory of Nicolás Maduro in the following elections was by a narrow margin, the new president was not prepared for the complex tasks of the government and the opposition (profoundly divided internally) felt that their moment had arrived. A moment that was, once more, supported by the United States, especially when in 2015 and once again in 2017, President Obama considered Venezuela a “threat against the national security of the United States,” a declaration that many considered an exaggeration, if not ridiculous, but that, as I will explain below, was completely logical (from the point of view of the United States of course).

The situation continued to deteriorate until December 2015 when the opposition reached a majority in the National Assembly. The Supreme Court (or Supreme Tribunal of Justice) suspended four members for alleged electoral fraud which the National Assembly disobeyed and from that moment the institutional confrontation worsened progressively spreading in the streets. It was also fed by the grave economic crisis and the lack of provisions which has since exploded. In this chaotic situation more than 100

are dead.

Meanwhile, President Maduro has taken the initiative to invoke a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elected on July 30th and the United States has threatened with more sanctions if the election continues. It is known that this initiative looks to overcome the obstruction of the National Assembly dominated by the opposition.

This past May 26, I signed onto a manifesto written by Venezuelan intellectuals and politicians from various political tendencies appealing to the political parties and social groups in conflict to stop the violence in the streets and initiate a dialogue that allows for a non-violent, democratic solution without the intervention of the United States. I decided then to no longer comment on the Venezuelan crisis.

Why do I do it today? Because I am alarmed with the bias in European social media, including Portugal’s, regarding the crisis in Venezuela. There is a distortion that runs through all media that demonizes a legitimately elected government to stir up the social and political fire and legitimize a foreign intervention that’d have incalculable consequences.

The Spanish press has reached the point of embarking on the future diffusing false news about the position of the Portuguese government. I

declare myself encouraged by the good sense and equilibrium the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Augusto Santos Silva, has shown regarding this topic. Recent history will show us that economic sanctions affect innocent citizens more than governments.

One must only remember the more than 500,000 children that, according to the UN report in 1995, were killed in Iraq as a result of sanctions imposed after the Gulf War. We must also remember that in Venezuela live half a million Portuguese or Luso-descendants. Recent history also reminds us that no democracy is strengthened by foreign intervention.

The mistakes of a democratic government must be resolved democratically. This will be most consistent with the least amount of foreign interference. The government of the Bolivarian Revolution is democratically legitimate. Throughout many elections during the last twenty years it has never given signs of not respecting election results. It has lost some elections and it can lose the next and it would only be worth criticizing if the results are not respected.

But, it cannot be denied that President Maduro has constitutional legitimacy to call for a National Constituent Assembly. Of course Venezuelans (including many critical Chavistas) can legitimately question this opportunity especially taking into account that they have the Constitution of 1999 promoted by Chavez and they possess the democratic means to manifest this

questioning next Sunday. But nothing justifies the insurrectional climate the opposition has radicalized in these last weeks and whose object is not to correct the errors of the Bolivarian Revolution but to put an end to it, impose neoliberal reforms (like what is happening in Brazil and Argentina) alongside everything this would mean for the poor majority of Venezuelans.

What must worry democrats, although this does not worry the global media who have already taken the opposition's side, is the form in which the candidates are being selected. If, as is suspected, the bureaucratic apparatus of part of the government has hijacked the participatory impulse of the popular classes the objective of the National Constituent Assembly to democratically amplify the political force of the social base of the revolution will have been frustrated.

To comprehend why there will probably not be a non-violent solution to the crisis of Venezuela one must know what is at play in the global geopolitical plan. What is at stake are the largest existing oil reserves in the world in Venezuela. For the global dominance of the United States it is crucial to maintain control of the largest oil reserves in the world. Whatever country, however democratic it may be, has this strategic resource and does not make it accessible to the multinational oil companies, a majority of which are North American, will become the focus of an imperial intervention.

The threat to national security of

which the presidents of United States speak of is not solely in access to petroleum but above all in the fact that the global exchange of oil is denominated in U.S. dollars, the true nucleus of power of the United States since no other country has the privilege of printing the bills they wish without this significantly affecting their monetary value.

This is the reason why Iraq was invaded and the Middle East and Libya razed (in the last case with the active complicity of France's Sarkozy). For this same motive there was interference, now documented, in the Brazilian crisis because the exploitation of the pre-salt oil fields was in the hands of the Brazilian people. For this same reason Iran returned to being in danger. Likewise, the Bolivarian Revolution has to fall without having the opportunity to democratically correct its grave errors its leaders committed in recent years.

Without foreign intervention, I am sure that Venezuela would find a nonviolent and democratic solution. Unfortunately, what is underway is using all available means to set the poor against Chavismo, the social base of the Bolivarian Revolution and those which most benefit from it. And, in concomitance, provoke a rupture between the armed forces and as consequent military coup to depose Maduro. Europe's foreign policy (if one can speak about such) could constitute a moderating force if, in the meantime, it had not lost its soul.

[Telesur](#)

## Which Way Out of the Venezuelan Crisis?

11 August 2017, by **George Ciccariello-Maher**

When revolutions stagnate, confusion reigns, and both are palpably true of Venezuela today. Amid a deep economic, political, and now institutional crisis, many on the ground in Venezuela and even more observing from abroad don't know what to think or to do. But rather than

abandon the Bolivarian Process by echoing mainstream denunciations of the government of [Nicolás Maduro](#) as undemocratic, repressive, and even authoritarian, it is precisely in this most difficult of moments that revolutionaries must think clearly and carry the fight forward.

### An Institutional Crisis

The causes of the crisis are many and their explanations well-worn. The 2013 death of Hugo Chávez left a



symbolic crater at the heart of the Bolivarian Revolution, and coincided with a collapse in global oil prices that severely limited the maneuvering space of a Maduro government already faltering out of the gate. Seizing upon this weakness, conservative elites at the head of the US-backed opposition went on the offensive in the streets in [April 2013 protests](#) that left eleven dead and set into motion a strategy of tension that continues four years later.

Rather than acting decisively from the outset, the beleaguered Maduro government opted for a pragmatic approach. A failing system of currency controls governing the distribution of oil income was never fully dismantled. The result was a destructive feedback loop of black-market currency speculation, the hoarding and smuggling of gasoline and food, and an explosion of already rampant corruption at the intersection of the private and public sectors. Confronted with street protests and food shortages, Maduro responded erratically, supporting grassroots production by communes while simultaneously courting private corporations in a bid to keep food on the shelves.

The whirlwind that has ensued is not the one we had hoped for. As is often the case, the pragmatic path promised to be safest when it was in fact the most treacherous, and Maduro's hesitance backfired spectacularly when the opposition won a decisive victory in the [December 2015 National Assembly elections](#). What has followed is a full-blown institutional crisis in which the [opposition has sought to stoke crisis](#), destabilize the government, and to make the country ungovernable.

Having seized one branch of government, opposition forces immediately demanded all three, constantly violating Supreme Court rulings and brazenly attempting to topple the executive. They continue to encourage violent protests in the streets that have left more than one hundred dead — where the cause is known, most have been killed directly or indirectly by the protestors themselves. This is not the picture of government repression painted by the

international media, and in a country where 55 percent of Venezuelans continue to approve of Chávez and nearly half are opposed to the opposition's violent tactics, those seeking to overthrow Maduro do not enjoy any great popular legitimacy.

The international media has played its role, framing the question as simply a matter of time: when will the democratically elected and legitimate president step down? Never mind that, even amid the crisis, Maduro is still more popular than Mexico's Enrique Peña Nieto, Colombia's Juan Manuel Santos, and the unelected and illegitimate Brazilian coup-president Michel Temer. These important details disappear in the fog of a relentless media onslaught, backed by both the CIA and the Trump administration.

## Which Way Out?

It's difficult to find a path forward. There is talk of dialogue — the liberal panacea of panaceas — but it remains unclear with whom the dialogue should take place, or what kind of solutions it might bring. While arguably necessary to stop the violence, absent concrete solutions to the underlying contradictions of the petro-state, such dialogue would merely ease the political crisis at the expense of resolving the economic crisis. The situation that prevails is not the result of too much socialism, [but too little](#), and any path that attempts to split the difference between socialism and capitalism will endure the worst of both worlds.

In the context of this acute institutional crisis, Venezuelans go to the polls this Sunday to elect a Constituent Assembly empowered to revise the nation's Constitution for the second time since the emergence of Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution. In the elections, Venezuelans will elect not only 364 regional representatives, but also 8 indigenous representatives and 173 additional sectoral representatives, including workers, farmers, disabled people, students, retirees, and representatives of businesses, communes, and communal councils.

This process is far from perfect and

faces many obstacles, including an unresolved legal debate fostered by an apparent contradiction over who can convene a constituent assembly: is it "the people" (Article 347) or the president among others (Article 348)? Claiming that Maduro has violated the former but refusing to cite the latter, the opposition is threatening to boycott Sunday's election and even physically obstruct polling places. After previously courting the idea of calling a constituent assembly to undermine Chavismo, opposition leaders now recoil at the idea of an assembly that might deepen the Bolivarian process rather than rolling it back.

The opposition has suffered the disastrous consequences of electoral abstention in the past: after boycotting the 2005 Assembly elections, they were left without a voice in the legislature. But 2017 is not 2005, and the ebullience of early Chavismo has given way to a deep and sustained crisis that has its opponents looking for an endgame to bury its gains once and for all. Months of street blockades and looting have developed into bombings and infrastructural attacks on public transport, hospitals, state television and, recently, state milk production facilities. The opposition has threatened to name a new government-in-resistance, and promises heightened clashes this weekend, including a possible march on the presidential palace much like the one that provoked the 2002 coup against Chávez.

## Being Dishonest About Venezuela

In such difficult circumstances, what is a revolutionary to do? The Constituent Assembly is not perfect, but we are not in the terrain of perfect solutions. Blind support is not useful, but nor is the opposite path, what we might call — borrowing a phrase from Lenin — an "uncritical criticism" that refuses to get to the heart of things and grasp revolutionary change as a dynamic process. Nothing is harder than making a revolution, and little is easier than prematurely forecasting

failure.

In a recent article, Mike Gonzalez pronounced the Bolivarian Revolution dead: "This project has failed." Needless to say, this cavalier suggestion would come as a surprise to those on the ground still fighting for revolutionary change, precisely because they have no other option. For an article entitled "Being Honest About Venezuela," Gonzalez begins with a strange conspiracy theory: that a helicopter attack against government targets was really a false flag operation carried out by the government itself. Unfortunately for him, this unsubstantiated innuendo "which echoed right-wing talking points" didn't age well: less than a week later, [Oscar Pérez](#) made an appearance at an opposition rally.

Gonzalez's goal is to reveal Maduro's "betrayal" of the Revolution, but this betrayal takes the form of a catch-22: the government is ineffective, but if it attempts to act, it is authoritarian; when it defends itself in a far less heavy-handed fashion than most governments would, it is repressive; it is fiscally irresponsible, but criticized for turning out of desperation to extractive projects like the Arco Minero; if it fails to fill the shelves, it is useless, but collaborating with private companies to do so is high treason; and when an admittedly problematic socialist party (the [PSUV](#)) acts in a partisan way "this being, after all, what revolutionary parties are meant to do" it becomes an "instrument of political repression."

Amid hyperbolic denunciations of the "systematic undermining of democracy, the demonization of dissent," Gonzalez dismisses the Constituent Assembly in a paranoid fashion: "There will be no debate, no transparency," he tells us, with no need to explain. And for a revolutionary socialist, the author seems to hold liberal democracy in high esteem, misleadingly decrying Chavismo's "packed institutions" and deeming the government "increasingly antidemocratic" without specifying by what measure. Gonzalez claims that the government is "prevent[ing] the constitutionally protected right to protest" "this would come as a surprise to those whose

neighborhoods have seen nothing but protest for months on end.

With little more than a nod to imperialism, global capital, or the brutality of the Venezuelan opposition, Gonzalez heaps blame on Maduro's shoulders. Corruption thus appears as state policy with no mention of the private "briefcase companies" that simply took billions in government funds before disappearing into thin air. Empty shelves are left to speak the truth of a failed political project, with no mention of capitalist sabotage of production. And Gonzalez points cryptically to the murder of indigenous cacique Sabino Romero, while failing to mention that he was killed by wealthy landowners. The "gains of Chavismo" are indeed slipping away, but this does not absolve us from the task of explaining why.

Ultimately, for Gonzalez, Chavista elites and the bourgeoisie who have "happily colluded" with them are one and the same. But this leaves him unable to answer the most basic question of all: if they are the same, then why are they fighting a bloody battle in the streets? The answer is that, however imperfectly, the Maduro government still stands for the possibility of something radically different, as the many grassroots revolutionaries that continue to support the process can attest.

By portraying a chaotic constellation of facts without explaining their causes, by heaping blame onto the government while letting the opposition and imperialism off the hook, Gonzalez's account shares much with its professed adversaries. Like the mainstream media, he doesn't tell us who is responsible for the deaths in the streets, and like the mainstream media, he offers decontextualized tragedies as proof of the government's failure. But most of all, like the mainstream media, he erases the very same revolutionaries that he claims to speak for: left almost entirely out of this picture are the hundreds of thousands [struggling for socialism on the grassroots level](#) and having to make difficult decisions "amid the crisis of the present.

"We should support those in struggle in rebuilding the basis for a genuinely democratic society," Gonzalez writes. In order to do that, he might heed José Miguel Gómez, a revolutionary organizer from the P'ao Tamayo Commune in Barquisimeto who has long been struggling for communal power:

The government is not the Bolivarian project, which goes far beyond the presidency "this is why they haven't been able to defeat it and why it is still in the streets today. We need to continue to resist and to build a truly revolutionary option that can transform the very structure of the state. The Constituent Assembly is a step toward this, but we also need to cleanse the government and the institutions, where there is too much corruption and bureaucracy. We have to wrest power away from the military. There are too many financial mafias "we need to eliminate the currency controls and nationalize banking and foreign exchange. The Right will never be an option. We must be critical toward the government and build a true alternative capable of governing.

Here, Gómez expresses many of the same critiques voiced by Chavismo's critics, but he tethers them to a revolutionary vision of social change and an understanding of what would happen if the opposition were to seize power.

## The Right Waits in the Wings

We should be clear about the stakes of the coming weeks and months: victory for the Right means austerity at best, and civil war at worst. We know this because we know exactly who they are: the opposition leadership is drawn from the most reactionary sectors of the old elites, and the masked youth in the streets "as I show in Building the Commune" are the fruit of a dangerous alliance with the forces of Latin American fascism under the leadership of Colombian death squad guru [Álvaro Uribe](#). Their return, which promises to reestablish the smooth functioning of capitalism, would only do so "as Marx insists that it always has"

through the most brutally repressive means.

Of course, the opposition's undemocratic aspirations come draped in the language of democracy. A recent opposition "consultation," carried out entirely informally and without official support from the electoral council, spoke of defending the 1999 Constitution. Meanwhile, it tacitly asked the Armed Forces to take a side in the conflict by "supporting the decisions of the National Assembly" (one branch of government), and called for "the establishment of a government of national unity" through early elections "in clear violation of constitutional norms.

Despite opposition claims about government repression, few can forget the bloody retribution exacted by the opposition during the brief 2002 coup, in which Chavista leaders were hunted and beaten, and sixty were killed in less than two days. The fact that several people have been lynched, burned to death, and even killed with homemade mortars in recent months for looking too much like Chavistas (i.e., too dark-skinned and poor) is only a taste of what is to come if the opposition destabilization campaign succeeds.

## Building a True Alternative

There is no coherent understanding of revolution that doesn't involve defeating our enemies as we build the new society. Corruption, bureaucracy, and the complacency of new elites are all plagues to be fought and defeated "but merely criticizing these does not make a revolution. We cannot defeat such dangers without weapons, the most important of which are the [weight of the masses in the streets](#), popular grassroots struggles for self-determination, and control of territory and production. While the Bolivarian government "from Chávez to Maduro" has helped to sharpen those weapons, it has also relied on them for its own survival.

Revolutions are made by the masses in motion, gripped by revolutionary ideas. No single individual was more effective at helping to set the Venezuelan masses into motion than Hugo Chávez. And yet that motion collides inevitably with obstacles in its path to be struggled with and overcome, from economic realities to the ferocious enemies of change. In that process, and even without it, a certain slow exhaustion is inevitable. This goes by the name *desgaste* in Venezuela today "a wearing-down of revolutionary fervor, especially when times are tough.

For the Trinidadian revolutionary [C.L.R. James](#), there existed an

undeniable gap between the Jacobin leadership of the French Revolution and the grassroots fury of the *sansculottes*. The former, like Robespierre, were authoritarians; the latter, radical democrats. But they coincided momentarily and strategically toward the goal of defeating a brutal enemy on the field of battle: "Never until 1917 were masses ever to have such powerful influence "for it was no more than influence "upon any government."

No one would claim that the Venezuelan masses are in power today, but the past twenty years have seen them come closer than ever before. Their enemies and ours are in the streets, burning and looting in the name of their own class superiority, and we know exactly what they will do if they are successful. The only path forward is to deepen and radicalize the Bolivarian process through the expansion of the radically democratic socialism embodied in Venezuela's grassroots communes, which help to overcome the economic contradictions of the petro-state while expanding participatory political consciousness.

The only way out of the Venezuelan crisis today lies decisively to the Left: not in the neither-nor of "que se vayan todos" ("out with them all"), but in the construction of a real socialist alternative that will emerge alongside the Maduro government if possible, but without it if necessary.

# Being Honest About Venezuela

11 August 2017, by [Mike Gonzalez](#)

Venezuela descends deeper into a political and economic crisis every day. The death toll rises relentlessly, and the vicious street battles show no signs of abating.

On June 27, looters trashed the city of Maracay; they burned shops, public transport stations, government buildings, and homes in a single night of destruction. Two days later,

Barquisimeto had its turn.

The world's media, overwhelmingly hostile to the Bolivarian process, [sneer at President Nicolás Maduro's rhetoric](#) while presenting the right-wing parties, which certainly launched this wave of violence, as [defenders of democracy](#). This definition of democracy apparently allows whole populations to fall into poverty and

illness, with nearly one hundred people left to die in the streets.

Meanwhile, the international left has accepted the explanations government spokespersons offer, still believing that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Thus, when a [helicopter attacked](#) government buildings on June 28, some observers simply added the event to the catalog of right-wing



violence.

It is, unsurprisingly, far more complicated than that.

Oscar Pérez, a retired officer of the state security services, piloted the helicopter. Pérez has close ties to ex-Interior Minister Miguel Rodríguez Torres, whom [Maduro dismissed](#) in 2014. Torres, like the majority of the current cabinet and around half of Venezuela's state governors, belongs to the military. He also leads one of a number of Chavista factions angling for power.

Behind a façade of governmental unity, another struggle is developing, but none of the groups are fighting to continue the revolutionary project or to reconstruct the mass movement that saved it after the attempted coup and the bosses' strikes of 2002-3.

The opposition is also split into rival factions. Some advocate dialogue with the president, while others, especially the group that Leopoldo López and his partner Liliana Tintori lead, almost certainly support the most violent street fighters. They aim not only to get rid of Maduro but also to destroy Chavismo itself.

Most Venezuelans know the major players on the Right: they belong to the wealthiest and most powerful families, who controlled the economy until Chávez arrived. Since the first street barricades went up, Maduro has tried to work with representatives of these right-wing sectors. In 2014, for example, he called in Lorenzo Mendoza, head of the Polar multinational and one of the richest Venezuelans.

Gustavo Cisneros, another member of that exclusive clan, has remained untouched in the nearly twenty years of Chavismo. [He recently claimed](#) that Venezuela needs a Macri, referring to the militantly neoliberal Argentine president, who is currently working to dismantle that country's public sector. Cisneros likely speaks from knowledge of the Right's strategic thinking.

As the economic and political crisis deepens, it's become obvious that neither the government nor the opposition will offer any real solutions.

While Maduro betrays the revolution by courting the bourgeoisie and sliding backwards into neoliberalism, right-wing forces have brought in violent mercenaries to try and disrupt the country even further. As these two groups struggle for power, ordinary Venezuelans are watching the gains of Chavismo slip away.

## The Crisis

The depth of Venezuela's economic crisis cannot be overstated. [Poverty levels](#), which were still falling just three years ago, now threaten to return to pre-2012 levels.

Inflation has already pushed above [700 percent](#), and the real value of wages continues to fall. At the end of last year, the teachers' union estimated that it took seventeen minimum-wage jobs to pay for the basket of basic goods and services. The shortage of even the [most basic medication](#), let alone resources for the health-care system, brings that figure even higher in real terms. The daily appeals on radio and television for medicine say it all.

Those who are bearing the brunt of the crisis are also those who most passionately supported Chávez's Bolivarian project and its promise that the nation's oil wealth would go to social programs in health, education, and housing. Chávez promised to invest the surplus for the future, diversifying the economy and escaping from the trap of oil dependency.

This project has failed. Today, [95 percent](#) of Venezuela's external income comes from oil, as opposed to 67 percent twenty years ago. Meanwhile, [GDP has fallen by 18 percent](#) as industrial and agricultural production has collapsed in many sectors. [State reserves](#) have fallen to 40 percent of their 2012 levels. Almost 90 percent of the population cannot buy enough food, which explains the [average weight loss](#) -> <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/20/venezuelas-crisis-cause-its-people-to-cut-meals-and-lose-weight.html>] of eight kilos. Milk consumption has dropped by half. No data is yet available on the impact of the medicine shortages.

The situation was already very serious when Venezuelans went to the polls for the December 2015 National Assembly elections, in which the Right won just under a two-thirds majority.

This result did not represent a major ideological shift. Rather, two million Chavista voters abstained - a message to the leadership and a clear expression of pain and despair from those who had to wait for hours for basic goods at rocketing prices.

Although voters didn't have access to the hard data - the National Bank does not publish current economic information - they could see that the gulf between rich and poor was once again widening. Last year, Chávez's ex-minister of finance, Jorge Giordani, published a statement showing that \$500 billion [had disappeared](#) from the state's coffers. The news simply confirmed what most people already knew: Chavismo had provided massive opportunities for corruption and graft, as the state bureaucracy diverted state funds into private bank accounts.

The currency exchange system's complexity allowed importers to apply for dollars at an extremely low rate - around twelve bolivars per dollar until very recently - and then sell imported goods at prices based on a market rate hundreds of times higher. Many of those goods simply passed through Venezuela on their way to Colombia, where the profit rates rose even higher. The bank bosses, state bureaucrats, the customs service, and the National Guard all took their cut. En route, fortunes were made.

It came as little surprise that the commercial bourgeoisie hoarded goods and raised prices at will or that the industrial and financial sectors sent their capital abroad to starve the national economy. But it is surprising that those who were responsible for transforming the Venezuelan state - for attacking corruption and for introducing redistribution policies - also took their share.

Just before he died in 2013, Chavez [wrote a preface](#) to the 2013-19 national plan that acknowledged that the state had not changed and called for the tiller to be pulled in a new

direction. Unfortunately, those he hoped would act were already embedded in the state bureaucracy and were benefitting from the systemic corruption.

Chavismo's defenders will argue that the fall in the price of oil caused this crisis, but that is simply not true. While oil profits have dropped, the preceding boom should have allowed the government to save enough money to deal with the present crisis and then some, as [Manuel Sutherland's careful math](#) has demonstrated.

The government based its budget on selling oil for sixty dollars a barrel even when prices were double that. This additional income disappeared into a corrupt system that the Chavista state administers and sustains.

Of course, the bourgeoisie have fared well. They happily colluded with the new Chavista elites to embezzle public funds, speculate in the currency markets, and invest their profits abroad.

A recent issue of the Spanish magazine *Tiempo* ran a cover story called "The Venezuelan Invasion." The article did not engage in the expected attack on immigrants, but rather celebrated the wealthy Venezuelan families now investing in Spain. The names are familiar — Capriles, Cohen, Otero Silva, Baute — and their fortunes came from pharmaceuticals, media, retail, restaurants, and gold trading. The magazine tells us that the Venezuelan super-rich are safely ensconced in Madrid's wealthiest districts, well protected from their country's social collapse.

The crisis in Venezuela represents a complete rejection of the Bolivarian revolution: the gains made by the poor and working classes have all but disappeared while the capitalist elite have maintained their wealth and power.

Rather than resisting this worsening crisis, however, the Maduro government has instead mobilized its forces to protect itself.

## Revolution in Reverse

At no point during the crisis has the Maduro government offered any kind of coherent response, reacting chaotically instead. The administration has replaced ministers frequently and announced commissions that then simply faded away. Its actions seem designed to solve internal battles rather than address the growing poverty and discontent.

That said, we can pull three clear themes out of the government's behavior: a revival of foreign investment in extractive industries, a growing militarization of the government, and the transformation of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) into an instrument of political control.

Maduro has suggested one solution to the massive hole in the state budget: the Arco Minero, Venezuela's Amazon region. The area represents 12 percent of the national territory and holds a cornucopia of minerals, oil, and gas. Additionally, it is the country's principal source of freshwater.

Chavez rejected a development proposal some years ago for environmental reasons and in recognition of indigenous communities' human and territorial rights. But last summer, [Maduro began inviting](#) multinational corporations to bid for concessions.

He made the first offer to Barrick, the giant Canadian gold-mining concern that had been excluded from Venezuela a decade earlier. After Chávez nationalized the mines, the company demanded hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation payments. As a gesture of his good faith, Maduro has agreed to pay this debt as well as offer a ten-year tax holiday and develop the regional infrastructure at the state's expense.

We can already see the environmental consequences of opening the region to the rapacious mining industry — populations displaced, land and rivers poisoned, fragile rain forest and

mountain ecologies destroyed. In the Arco, the military began to expel the residents soon after the government's announcement.

Indeed, the Maduro administration immediately placed the region under military control, suspending constitutional rights. A newly formed company, Camimpeg, will administer the resources. Although the ministry of defense will run this new organization, the enterprise is autonomous — that is, private — and not publicly accountable.

The military has become a uniformed sector of the ruling state bourgeoisie, with both political control and a central economic role. Even before [the recent changes](#), over half the cabinet belonged to the military as well as half the state governors.

We should not confuse this with Chavez's original project for a civil-military alliance in which the military would serve the interests of the majority. Rather, Maduro has turned to the military in hopes of protecting his power.

At the same time, his political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), has become an instrument of political control. When Chavez announced the PSUV's formation in 2006, it was part of his plan for twenty-first-century socialism. The party was supposed to represent the next step forward for the popular participatory democracy enshrined in the country's new constitution. He intended PSUV to be an open, democratic party that would hold both government and state accountable.

What emerged, however, was the very opposite: a top-down authoritarian structure that rigidly controlled dissent and debate from the outset. Indeed, the party's architects modeled the PSUV on the Cuban Communist Party.

For example, as the crisis deepened, the government developed a program to bring food parcels to poor homes at guaranteed official prices. The PSUV took over distribution and would only deliver the food in exchange for political allegiance. (Ironically, the scheme was riddled with corruption



and failed.)

Since then, a so-called patriotic card has been introduced, also obtainable from the PSUV, without which it is impossible to get access to state services, pensions, or passports. In a word, it is an instrument of political repression.

## Right-Wing Fightback

Immediately after the 2015 elections, Maduro declared a state of emergency and suspended both gubernatorial and trade-union elections.

The new National Assembly, led by the right-wing Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), couldn't offer any solutions to the economic crisis, the electricity and water shortages, or the rising tide of crime either. Instead, it had two obsessions – the release of [Leopoldo Lopez](#), who had been imprisoned in 2014 on charges of incitement to violence, and the removal of Maduro. Whatever its politicians said in public, they only wanted to gain power and overthrow Chavismo – a project that Washington vigorously supports.

In 2016, the Right launched a recall referendum to bring down Maduro. Ironically, the 1999 constitution – a central aspect of the Chavista revolution – allowed them to make this move.

The constitution's recall clause was emblematic of Chavismo's commitment to holding public officials accountable. It allows for 20 percent of the electorate to call a referendum halfway through a politician's term.

Chávez himself had faced such a referendum in 2004 and won decisively. After the 2015 election, however, Maduro could no longer rely on public support, so he used heavily packed public institutions – like the election commission – to block the initiative.

Of course, the Right was exploiting the situation for its own purposes, but Chávez had emphasized that the ability to recall elected officials played a key role in a participatory

democracy. Further, we should remember that every level of society discussed and debated the 1999 constitution. The referendum to elect the constitutional congress and to approve the new document was based on these same principles.

Maduro was using bureaucratic maneuvers to sidestep the Chavista constitution. He claimed that an economic war was being waged against Venezuela. While external forces have clearly deepened the crisis, largely internal developments – not to mention the government's failure to deal with the situation – produced it.

In March, when the National Assembly refused to vote for the Arco Minero project, Maduro once again tried to avoid democratic measures, by having the Supreme Court strip the body of its powers. Luisa Ortega Diaz, who has served as attorney general since 2005 and who has unquestionable loyalty to Chavismo, declared the government's actions unconstitutional. Maduro quickly withdrew his tame court's decision.

The Arco Minero vote clearly demonstrates the paradox of Venezuela politics. A Chavista government was negotiating its return to the global market and to the [extractive industries](#) it had fought to escape. The deal will lay waste to the country and return the majority of the population to the misery of the pre-Chavez years.

The bourgeoisie whose purpose was to hasten that process were simply concerned that they should administer the surrender and destroy even the memory of Chavismo at the same time.

Throughout all of this, the MUD has been calling for protests. The initial marches, led by dramatically masked members of the upper class, also attracted many middle-class Venezuelans. Other protesters, however, didn't belong to any right-wing party: frustrated, angry, and desperate, many who would describe themselves as Chavistas marched behind the nation's elite.

In some key Chavista areas, like Caracas's La Vega and El Valle, where

the local population drove out government ministers, have seen marches and looting, which have multiplied in recent months. How else should we expect people to react, when the National Guard, the police, the military, and the PSUV all try to prevent the constitutionally protected right to protest?

Now Maduro has called for a new Constituent Assembly to convene at the end of July. This will barely resemble the 1999 meeting. Then, discussion was open and public, and people engaged with the process optimistically. This time, the Maduro administration will carefully orchestrate the event, making sure whatever changes the government chooses to introduce will be approved. There will be no debate, no transparency.

What Maduro intends remains unclear, but it will certainly involve pushing through the Arco Minero plans and privatizing parts or perhaps all of PDVSA, the state oil corporation. It may also legitimize the increasing concentration of power in fewer and fewer hands, selected not by a participatory process, but by an internal war between powerful groups thirsting for control.

Other more sinister forces have been responsible for some of the more barbaric actions that have been reported. They wear balaclavas and have taken to firing ball bearings into the chests of young men, passing pedestrians, drivers.

Their actions go beyond protest; these thugs almost certainly draw a paycheck from the far right. They are likely paramilitaries who work for the drug traffickers whose influence is growing.

They do not narrowly support the right: they aim to make the country ungovernable, to deepen the despair and the fear that affects growing numbers of Venezuelans. At the same time, the state security forces, the National Guard in particular, are increasingly involved in the violence. It is hard to tell how far these networks have interpenetrated.

Meanwhile, multinational corporations

are waiting to seize the country's enormous oil, gas, and mineral wealth under the complacent eye of an openly neoliberal government. This includes not just the United States but also China, Russia, and the other giants of global capitalism.

Some on the Left have called for violence, but it is hard to imagine a more irresponsible and cynical posture. Indeed, it doesn't amount to much more than posturing, since the mass movement that grew around Chávez and that fought to defend his vision has been disarmed and demoralized.

Faced with the systematic undermining of democracy, the

demonization of dissent, the death of [trade unionists](#) and of grassroots leaders like [Sabino Romero](#), the erosion of popular confidence in the government, and the growing violence, committed Chavistas can do very little. A call to arms simply invites the military to intervene.

Others on the Left have chosen to say nothing or ignore the complex reality. Whatever their motives, their silence amounts to complicity with a new ruling class that hides behind the language of socialism.

These elites have helped demobilize the grassroots movement that defended its revolution in 2002-3, and whose diverse forms of community

organization could have grounded a successful Chavista project.

Despite this setback, the memory of those years persists wherever people operate cooperatively in their own defense and keep the traditions of solidarity alive — even if many of them have fallen momentarily silent.

The Left outside Venezuela can help rebuild the movement by participating in an honest accounting of what went wrong. As socialists, we are not required to choose the lesser evil. Rather, we should support those in struggle in rebuilding the basis for a genuinely democratic society.

[Jacobin](#)

# The Left and Venezuela

11 August 2017, by [Claudio Katz](#)

But the statistics do not corroborate that narrative, especially when it comes to those who have fallen. When the number had risen to 39, an initial report pointed to only four who were victims of the security forces. The remainder had died in looting or shoot-outs within the opposition mobilizations. [1] Another assessment noted that 60 per cent of those killed had absolutely nothing to do with the clashes. [2]

These characterizations are consistent with the estimates that attribute most of the murders to snipers linked with the opposition. More recent inquiries report that most of the victims lost their lives through vandalism or settlements of accounts. [3]

There are numerous denunciations as well of incursions by paramilitary groups linked to the Right. And there are indications that much of the violence enjoys local protection from municipalities governed by the opposition. [4]

Those death tolls are consistent with the fascist brutality that led to setting afire persons associated with

Chavismo. [5] Burning alive a partisan of the government is a practice more closely linked to the Colombian paramilitaries or the criminal underworld than it is to the traditional political organizations. Some analysts even estimate that out of a total of 60 deaths, 27 were of sympathizers of Chavismo. [6]

Others say that within the opposition marches there are some 15,000 persons trained as shock groups. They are using balaclavas, shields and home-made weapons to create a chaotic climate and establish "liberated territories." [7]

## Assessing the Violence

The assessments presented by the opposition are diametrically opposite, but have been refuted by detailed reports on the victims. [8] Since no one acknowledges the existence of "independent" assessments, it is appropriate to judge what is happening, bearing in mind the antecedents. In the guarimba of

February 2014, 43 persons died, the great majority of them unrelated to the political clashes or police repression.

Similarly, we need to assess how the opposition reacted when faced with an equivalent challenge. Its governments finished off the "Caracazo" of 1989 with hundreds of deaths and thousands of wounded.

The situation in Venezuela is dramatic but this does not explain the centrality of the country in all the news reports. Situations of greater seriousness in other countries are totally ignored by the same media.

In Colombia, since the beginning of the year, 46 social movement leaders have been assassinated and in the last 14 months 120 have perished. Between 2002 and 2016 the paramilitary forces massacred 558 mass leaders, and in the last two decades up to 2,500 tradeunionists have been murdered. [9] Why no mention by any broadcaster of repute of this ongoing bloodshed in Venezuela's nearest neighbour?

More terrifying is the scene in Mexico. Every day some journalist is added to the long list of students, teachers and social fighters who are assassinated. In the climate of social warfare imposed by the "anti-drug trafficking actions," 29,917 people have disappeared. [10]. Should not this level of killings attract more journalistic attention than Venezuela?

Honduras is another hair-raising case. Along with Berta Cáceres 15 other militants have been murdered. Between 2002 and 2014 the number of assassinated environmental defenders has risen to 111. [11] The list of victims of the horror who are ignored by the hegemonic press could be extended to Peru's political prisoners. Moreover, very few know of the suffering confronted by the Puerto Rican independence leader Oscar López Rivera during his 35 years of imprisonment.

The majority of the Latin American population simply does not know of the tragedies prevailing in the countries governed by the Right. The media's double standard confirms that Venezuela's prominence on the television screens is not due to humanitarian concerns.

## Forms of a Coup

The media coverage shores up the opposition's promotion of a coup. Since they cannot carry out classic disturbances like those that led to Pinochet's coup, they try to remove President Maduro through the dislocation of society. They repeat what was attempted in February 2014 in order to commit an institutional coup similar to the ones carried out in Honduras (2009), Paraguay (2014) or Brazil (2016). They hope to impose through force what they will later validate in the ballot boxes.

The Right lacks the military force used in the past to return to government. But it is trying to recreate such intervention by staging skirmishes at military barracks, setting fire to police stations or marching on military headquarters.

Its plan combines sabotage of the economy with riots by armed groups

which, in contrast to Colombia, act anonymously. These actions are mingled with the criminal underworld and they terrorize merchants. [12]

The actions include fascist methods sponsored by the most violent currents of anti-Chavismo. They appropriate the insurgent symbolism forged by the popular movements and present their pillage as a heroic gesture. Their leader Leopoldo López is not some innocent politician. Any court operating under the rule of law would have sentenced him to life imprisonment for his criminal liability.

The Right promotes a climate of civil war in order to demoralize the Chavista bases, affected by the lack of food and medicine. It is explicit in its call for foreign intervention and negotiates with the creditor banks an interruption in the country's access to credit.

The opposition hopes to lynch Maduro in order to bury Chavismo. It takes its battle to the streets, in the conquest of public opinion and the collapse of the economy. It considers elections as nothing more than a simple coronation of this offensive.

But it is confronting growing obstacles. The predominance of the violence in its marches alienates the majority of those who are discontented and wears down its own demonstrators. As it did in 2014 the rebuff of the fascists undermines the entire opposition. Maduro's steadfastness, moreover, deters attendance in the marches. They have not managed to penetrate the popular neighborhoods where they still confront the risk of an adverse armed conflict. [13]

The big bourgeoisie in Venezuela incites the coup with the regional support of Macri, Temer, Santos and Peña Nieto. For months it has been promoting a destabilizing plan in the OAS. But it has failed to get results in that area. Proposed sanctions against Venezuela have been unsuccessful because of the opposition of various foreign ministries; they have failed to achieve the unanimity with which Cuba was expelled from the OAS in the 1960s.

Notorious, as well, is the United States' promotion of coups with the aim of regaining control over the major crude oil reserve on the continent. The State Department wants to repeat the operations it used in Iraq or Libya, in the knowledge that after overthrowing Maduro no one will remember where Venezuela is. It suffices to see how the media omit any mention in the news of the countries where the Pentagon has already intervened. Once the adversary is liquidated, the news turns to other issues.

The strategic goals of imperialism are not registered by those who highlight the flirtation of some U.S. newspaper with the Venezuelan president or the verbal ambiguities of Trump. [14] They imagine that those irrelevant facts illustrate the absence of any conflict between the United States and Chavismo. But it does not register with them that the immense majority of the press is maliciously attacking Maduro and that the multimillionaire in the White House denies each day what he said the previous day.

Trump is not indifferent or neutral. He simply delegates to the CIA and the Pentagon the implementation of a conspiracy that is designed through the Sharp and Venezuela Freedom 2plans. Those operations include espionage, troop deployment and cover for terrorism. [15] They develop in a stealthy way while the major media outlets discredit any condemnation of those preparations. They question especially the "exaggerations of the left" so that no one will disturb the conspirators.

Some analysts think the presence of Chevron in Venezuela - or PDVSA's continued business in the United States - illustrate a tight association between the two governments. [16] They conclude from this relationship that there is no coup scenario. But those connections do not alter in the least the Empire's decision to overthrow the Bolivarian government.

The activities of U.S. corporations in Venezuela (and of their counterparts in the United States) have persisted from the outset of the Chavista process. But Bush, Obama and Trump have sought to recover direct imperial

control over the oil. They cannot get this through a strained relationship between partners or clients. They want to install the model of privatization that prevails in Mexico and to expel Russia and China from their backyard.

## Attitude of the Left

If the diagnosis of a reactionary coup is correct, the position of the left should not give rise to disagreements. Our main enemies are the Right and imperialism, and to crush them is always a priority. This elementary principle must be reaffirmed at critical times when what is obvious can become confused.

Whatever our criticisms were of Salvador Allende, our central battle was against Pinochet. Similarly, we adopted a corresponding line of conduct toward the Argentine gorillas of 1955 or the saboteurs of Arbenz, Torrijos and the various anti-imperialist governments of the region. This position in Venezuela today points to the need for common action against the rightist escalation.

When a coup is on the horizon, it is indispensable to single out those who are responsible for the crisis. Those who cause a disaster are not the same as those who are powerless to resolve it.

This distinction applies in the economic field. The errors committed by Maduro are both numerous and unjustifiable, but those guilty of the present damage are the capitalists. The government is tolerant or incapable, but it does not belong on the same plane. Those who commit the monumental error of drawing a line of identity between both sectors [17] confuse responsibilities of a different nature.

The government's mistakes have been demonstrated in the inoperative system of currency exchange rates, the unacceptable external debt, or in the lack of control over prices and smuggling. But the collapse of the economy has been caused by the affluent who manipulate the currencies, trigger inflation, handle imported goods and limit supplies of

basic goods.

The Executive is unresponsive or acts mistakenly for many reasons: inefficiency, tolerance of corruption, protection of the bolibourgeoisie, connivance with millionaires disguised as Chavistas. That's why it does not cut support to the private groups that receive cheap dollars in order to import dear. But the collapse of production has been carried out by the ruling class in order to overthrow Maduro. Not to recognize that conflict is to display an unwonted level of myopia.

This blindness prevents recognition of another key fact at this time: the resistance of Chavismo to the rightist onslaught. Albeit with methods and attitudes that are highly questionable, Maduro is not surrendering. He maintains the vertical structure of the PSUV, he favours the banning of the critical currents, and he preserves a bureaucracy that strangles responses from below. But unlike Dilma or Lugo he does not give in. His conduct is the exact opposite of the capitulation carried out by Syriza in Greece.

This stance explains the hatred of the powerful. The government has made the excellent decision to withdraw from the OAS. It has abandoned the Ministry of Colonies and carried out the rupture that the left has always demanded. This decision should arouse the overwhelming support that very few have expressed.

Like any administration under attack from the Right, the government has resorted to force in its self-defence. The establishment media denounce that reaction with unusual hysteria. Forgotten are the justifications habitually made by governments of another character when they face similar situations. But Maduro has also been challenged conversely for his relative indulgence toward the fascists. He has simply adopted guarded measures in response to the opposition savagery.

In its response the government has of course committed injustices. That's the regrettable cost of any significant confrontation with the counter-revolution. These mishaps have been present in all battles with the reaction,

from Bolívar to Fidel. There is a need to avoid self-indulgence in this delicate terrain, but without repeating the slanders propagated by the opposition.

Maduro is directing his fire against the Rightist brutality and not against the people. So it makes no sense to compare him with Gaddafi or Saddam Hussein. He has not carried out any massacre of left-wing activists or participated in war-mongering adventures instigated by the United States. The analogy with Stalin is more ridiculous, but it reminds us that the spectre of Hitler hovers over many of the opposition leaders associated with Uribe or nostalgic for a Pinochet.

## Social-Democratic Positions

In recent months, as well, among the adversaries of the Right there has been an increase in views that blame Maduro for Venezuela's agony. These opinions repeat the old social-democratic posture of joining with the reaction at critical moments.

They question the legitimacy of the government, using the same arguments as the opposition. Instead of accusing the CIA, the escuálidos [the squalid ones, a Venezuelan phrase for the filthy rich], or the OAS, they concentrate their objections against Chavismo. They do this in the name of a democratic ideal that is as abstract as it is divorced from the battle to determine who will prevail in the running of the state.

This position has affected various "critical left" thinkers [pensadores del post-progresismo] linked to autonomism. Not only do they accuse Maduro for the present situation, they say he has reinforced an authoritarian leadership in order to maintain the model based on hydrocarbon rents. [18]

This characterization is very similar to the liberal thesis that attributes all of Venezuela's problems to populist politics, implemented by tyrants who are squandering the resources of the state. Only they use language that is more diplomatic in its diagnosis.



Other views of the same order point more categorically to the responsibility of the Chavista leader. They call on us as well to avoid “the conspiratorial over-simplification of blaming the Right or imperialism” for the country’s troubles. [19] But are the conspirators of the reaction imaginary? Are the murdered, the paramilitaries and the plans of the Pentagon paranoiac Bolivarian inventions?

Without answering this elementary question, that position also dismisses any comparison with what happened in Chile in 1973. However, it does not explain why that analogy is inapplicable. It takes for granted that the two situations differ without noting the huge similarities in respect to the shortages, the conservative irritation of the middle class or the intervention of the CIA.

The disputed parallels with Allende are, however, accepted in the case of the first Peronist government, which is viewed as a direct antecedent of Chavismo. But is the resemblance located in the years of stability or in the moments prior to the coup of 1955? The preoccupation with the escalation of violence suggests that the similarity is in relation to that latter period. And in a situation of that type what was the priority? Confront Perón’s authoritarianism or resist the gorillas?

The social-democrats and “critical left” point to the authoritarian Maduro as the main cause of the current situation. [20]. That’s why they downplay the danger of a coup and reject the need to prepare some defense against the Right’s provocations.

But the consequences of this attitude are demonstrated whenever the oligarchs and their bandits return to government. The recent events in Honduras, Paraguay or Brazil do not even arouse alarm among those who demonize Chavismo.

They object as well to the extractivism, indebtedness and contracts with oil companies. But they do not explain if they are demanding anticapitalist and socialist alternatives to these obvious failings of Maduro.

The same applies to the shortages and the speculation. Are they urging him to act with greater firmness against the bankers and the big commercial cartels? Do they propose confiscations, nationalizations, or direct popular control?

By adopting these initiatives one could imagine building bridges with the government, but never with the opposition. The detractors of Chavismo sidestep this difference.

## â€˜Critical Left’ Appeals

The social-democratic viewpoint characterizes the urgent call for peace signed by numerous intellectuals. This statement promotes a peace process, rejecting both the authoritarian turn of Chavismo and the violent attitude of right-wing sectors. [21].

The call favours equilibrium to overcome the polarization and resorts to a language closer to that of the foreign ministries than to the popular activists. The tone is in conformity with the implicit attachment to a theory of two evils. Against both extremes it proposes to take the middle road.

But this equidistance was immediately belied by the fundamental responsibility it assigned to the government. And not only does it overlook the harassment of the Right, but imperialism is barely mentioned in passing.

The text was met with a [powerful reply sponsored by the REDH](#) [Network of Intellectuals, Artists and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity] and signed by many intellectuals. This criticism rightly objected to the fascination with conventional republicanism and noted the pre-eminent gravitation of extra-constitutional forces in critical situations. [22]

The liberal relapse of the post-progressive or “critical left” thinkers recreates what happened with the social-democratic Gramscians in the 1980s. The animosity of that group toward Leninism and the Cuban

revolution is comparable to the present hostility to Chavismo. A number of those who signed the call have passed through both periods.

But the present social-democratic variant is late and lacks the political reference once contributed by the Spanish PSOE. The social-liberal turn of that party has completely demolished its initial progressive imaginary. That it is now orphaned explains, perhaps, the present re-encounter with the old liberalism.

In some cases this evolution is the culmination of the division that has affected distinct variants of autonomism. The positions taken toward the Bolivarian process have triggered this fracture. Those who chose to line up with the opposition are suspicious of those who “cling to Chavismo. [23]

But this latter sector has thought through the previous insufficiencies and has come to understand the need to fight for the state power with socialist perspectives related to Latin American Marxism.

In contrast, the other segment continues navigating in the ambiguity of generalities about anti-patriarchism and anti-extractivism without offering any concrete example of what is proposed. Absorbed by the liberal universe, their enigmatic vagaries no longer enrich left-wing thinking. Between their forgetfulness of the class struggle and their fascination with bourgeois institutionality, their denunciations of extractivism are becoming a picturesque curiosity.

## Absent-Minded Dogmatism

A discourse that is convergent with social democracy is also disseminated using sectarian arguments. In this case Maduro’s is portrayed as a corrupt government, submissive and adaptable, that is consolidating a dictatorial regime. [24] On other occasions that same illegitimacy is described with more indirect or sophisticated categories (de facto president, Bonapartist chief).



But all the variants coincide in underscoring the fundamental responsibility of an authoritarian government that is tearing apart the country. The harmony of this focus with the media narrative is striking. The main problem, however, is not in the rhetoric but in the practice.

Every day there are marches of the Right and of the government. The champions of socialist rigour have to ask themselves: Which of the two mobilizations will we join? With whom will we identify? If they think the government is the main enemy they will have to make common cause with the *escuálidos* of the *guarimbas*.

In Buenos Aires, for example, they called last May for a mobilization demanding the ouster of Maduro. [25]. All the passers-by who observed this march understood clearly who would immediately occupy Venezuela's presidency if the present head of state were overthrown. And they noted the total coincidence between this demand and the messages issued daily by the news media.

This is not the first time that sectors of the left have so clearly converged with the Right. An antecedent in Argentina under the Kirchner governments was the presence of red flags in the soy farmers' marches and the demonstrations of the *caceroleros* [middle- and upper-class opponents of the government banging pots and pans]. But what was pathetic in Buenos Aires can turn to tragedy in Caracas.

Other visions compare Maduro with the opposition, arguing that under the masquerade of an apparent contraposition hide huge coincidences. So they speculate about the moment when this convergence will become explicit. [26]

This curious interpretation contrasts with the pitched battles between both sectors that everyone else sees. So it is a bit difficult to interpret the *guarimbas*, assassinations and Pentagon threats as a fictitious quarrel between two relatives.

The sole logic of this presentation is to downplay the seriousness of the current conflict, to interpret it as a

mere inter-bourgeois fight over the appropriation of the rent. That is why Maduro's totalitarianism is seen as a danger equivalent to (or worse than) the opposition.

The major problem in this focus is not its absent-mindedness but the implicit neutrality that it promotes. Since everyone is equal, the self-coup attributed to the government is compared with the coup promoted by the Right.

That equivalence is obviously false, however. In Venezuela there are not two reactionary variants in contention like, for example, jihadism and the dictatorships in the Middle East. Nor is it the type of competition between troglodytes that in Argentina opposed Videla to Isabel Perón.

The clash between Capriles-López and Maduro resembles the confrontation of Pinochet with Allende, of Lonardi with Perón or more recently of Temer with Dilma. Similarly the triumph of the Right over Maduro, far from an engagement between equals, would entail a terrible political regression.

Confronted with this alternative, neutrality is a synonym for passivity and represents a huge degree of impotence in the face of great events. It means renouncing participation and commitment to genuine causes.

Since this attitude takes for granted that Chavismo is finished, it limits its entire horizon to writing a balance sheet of that experience. But the biggest failure in political action never affects unfinished or frustrated processes. The worst thing is narrow-mindedness in the face of major epic events.

Whatever one's questions about Maduro, the outcome in Venezuela will define the immediate destiny of the entire region. If the reactionaries triumph, the result will be a scenario of defeat and a feeling of impotence in the face of the Empire. The end of the progressive cycle will be a fact and not a subject for evaluation among social science thinkers.

The Right knows this and for that reason is stepping up the campaigns against the intellectuals who defend

Chavismo. The recent broadside attack in Clarín is a foretaste of the assault that is being prepared for a post-Maduro regional setting. [27]. The sectarians do not register that danger.

## Spurious Elections

In the immediate future there are two political options at play: the Right demands that the general elections be moved forward, and the government has called a Constituent Assembly. The opposition is only willing to participate in elections that will ensure it first place.

Of the 19 elections carried out under Chavismo, the Bolivarians won 17 and immediately recognized the two that they lost. In contrast, the Right never accepted their adverse results. They always claimed there was some fraud or resorted to a boycott. When they won in by-elections they demanded the immediate fall of the government.

In December 2015 they obtained a majority in the National Assembly and proclaimed the overthrow of Maduro. Then they attempted in various ways to disregard the constitution, even by swearing in deputies illegally elected and falsifying signatures on petitions to recall Maduro.

Capriles, Borges and López are now calling for spurious elections amidst the economic war and provocation in the streets. They want elections like those in Colombia where, in one election after another, hundreds of popular activists are murdered. They hope to gain at the ballot boxes as in Honduras under the pressure of the murder of Berta. They want the kind of elections that are held in Mexico over the dead bodies of journalists, students and teachers.

It would be a terrible error to join in elections designed to prepare a Chavista cemetery. Maduro is being asked to carry out elections in a climate of civil war that would be unacceptable to any government.

Venezuela is going through a situation that bears some resemblance to the scene in Nicaragua at the end of the first Sandinista electoral term in

office. The military siege and shortages wore out an exhausted population who voted for the Right out of simple fatigue. In those conditions elections have a pre-established winner.

On the other hand, comparison with the scenario that led to the fall of the Soviet Union makes no sense. Venezuela is not a big power imploding internally at the end of a lengthy divorce between the regime and the population. It is a vulnerable Latin American country under attack from the United States.

Some thinkers take for granted the oppressive role of imperialism and suggest that this is not a decisive factor in the present crisis. [28] They assume that the persistent denunciations of that domination constitute "a fact already known" or a mere ritual of the Left. But they forget that it is never pointless to emphasize the devastating impact of aggression from the North on governments that have become enemies of Washington.

The entire spectrum of ex-Chavistas who are joining in the call for general elections confuse democracy with liberal republicanism. They have lost sight of the way in which the right to self-government is systematically blocked by bourgeois institutionality.

This impediment is why the great majority of constitutional regimes have lost legitimacy. It becomes more and more evident that the ruling class uses voting systems to consolidate its power. It uses this control to run the economy, the justice system, the news media and the repressive apparatus. Real democracy can only emerge in a socialist process of transformation of society.

It is true that Maduro cancelled the recall referendum, suspended regional elections and proscribed some opposition politicians. These measures are part of a blind reaction to the harassment. But the Chavista leader is confronting the hypocrisy of greater import exhibited by the defenders of the present electoral regimes.

It suffices to see how in Brazil the impeachment was carried out by a group of outlaws with the cover of the

judges and parliamentarians who manipulate the system of indirect presidential selection. It never occurred to the OAS to intervene against that vulgar violation of democratic principles.

Nor did the establishment get indignant when the Electoral College anointed Trump after he had received a few million votes less than Hilary Clinton. A ruling monarchy in Spain or England seems natural to them, as do the clumsy schemes that are used to manipulate each election in Mexico. The sacrosanct democracy they ask of Venezuela is completely absent in all capitalist countries.

## Possibilities of the Constituent Assembly

Obviously, the best opportunity for a transformative Constituent Assembly was lost several years ago. The present call is purely defensive and is an attempt to contend with an exasperating situation.

But it is useless to discuss only what has not been done. There is still time left for those balance-sheets. The important thing now is to determine how this call can reopen a road for popular initiative.

Before the call for the Constituent Assembly the government was limiting itself to developing a purely bureaucratic confrontation between one state power and another. It relied on a struggle from above by the Executive or the Supreme Court against the National Assembly. Now it is finally calling on the communal power and we will have to see whether this idea translates into a real mobilization.

There are numerous signs of weariness and skepticism within Chavismo. But no one chooses the conditions in which to fight and the main dilemma turns on whether to continue or abandon the struggle. Those who have resolved to dig in their heels are calling for a revival of the popular project.

Some left currents that are very

critical of Maduro's management think this convening of a Constituent Assembly could unleash a dynamic of communes against the bureaucratic operations. [29]. They see the Constituent Assembly as an imperfect instrument to disentangle the dispute with corrupt bourgeoisified and bolibourgeois Chavismo.



The Constituent Assembly could also help to break the stalemate in recent months between guarimbas and pro-government mobilizations. If it is adequately tasked it could break down the opposition front, separating the discontented from the fascists.

But it is obvious that without drastic measures on the economic and social front the Constituent Assembly will be an empty shell. If the disaster in production is not attacked through nationalization of the banks, foreign trade and the expropriation of the saboteurs, there will be no recovery in popular support.

The palliative measures attempted in order to increase participation of the base organisms in the distribution of food are insufficient. Radical measures cannot be postponed.

Whatever the alternative, it will not be easy to redirect the economy after so many mistakes in regard to the debt, the creation of special investment zones or the tolerance of capital flight.

Chávez achieved a big redistribution of the rent through new methods of popular politicization, but he never managed to lay the foundations for a process of industrialization. He clashed with the opposition capitalists but not with the internal bolibourgeoisie and he was unable to deactivate the rentist culture that undermined all attempts to build up a productive economy. The hesitation to break with the capitalist structure explains the adverse results.

The present context is more difficult because of the sharp drop in oil prices and the blockage of regional integration projects under the conservative restoration. But it should also be noted that all revolutionary

processes take off in adversity and the Constituent Assembly can provide a framework for regaining the initiative.

Some critics of this call object to the sectoral and communal form of election. They say that with this format the “assembly will be tricky, corporatist or illegitimate.” [30] And here they repeat the endorsement the Right makes (when it suits them) of conventional constitutionalism. That demand is not surprising when it comes from establishment commentators but it is disturbing when it comes from enthusiasts of the Russian revolution.

After three decades of post-dictatorial regimes, many have forgotten the duplicities of bourgeois democracy. It might be remembered how Lenin and Trotsky defended in 1917 the legitimacy of the soviets and withdrew recognition of a Constituent Assembly that rivalled the revolutionary power.

The context in Venezuela today is very different. However, the Bolshevik revolution not only taught us to note the social background, the class conflicts and the interests at stake, it also indicated a path by which to go beyond the hypocrisy of bourgeois liberalism and it confirmed that acts of force against the reaction form part of the confrontation with rightist barbarism.

The Left will have to determine

whether it converges with the opposition in the boycott or participates in the Constituent Assembly. There is also a third option, with a very small audience: “yes, no and the very opposite.”

In the rest of the region the need is for solidarity. As in Cuba’s special period, we have to put our shoulders to the wheel in difficult situations. Let us hope that many compaÑeros adopt this approach before it is too late.

## Intellectual Regroupment

Venezuela is not only giving rise to intense debates. It has also brought about significant regroupments of intellectuals that endorse counterposed appeals. This positioning has been more relevant than the controversial details of the distinct declarations. It has resulted in a great division between camps.

The REDH text refuting the social-democratic call was complemented by other compelling responses. [31].”The political demarcation has been very rapid.

Despite the tension created by the manifestos, a number of signatories ask that the fraternal dialogue be maintained. That respect is

indispensable but the indignant reactions are explained by what is at stake. If the Right prevails, there will be plenty of time for the lamentations and the seminars investigating what happened.

Since the social-democratic statement contains an appeal for peace, many thinkers rallied to it in the spontaneous hope of slowing down the violence. Taking a closer look at the contents of the document, some withdrew their support and others maintained it with defensive arguments. They highlight their continuing solidarity with the Bolivarian process or point out their differences with other signatories.

But most significant has been the rapid and generalized reaction that the anti-Chavista document aroused and the great rejection the social-democratic statement generated. That instinctive reaction led to a sudden convergence between left-wing intellectuals and radical nationalism. If this interface were to be consolidated, Venezuela will have awakened a re-encounter of critical thinking with the revolutionary traditions of Latin America.

Translated from the original article by Richard Fidler (with assistance from Federico Fuentes) and first published in *Life on the Left*.

[Life on the left](#)

# The Crisis and the Intelligentsia

11 July 2017, by **Sergio García**

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 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".

# Venezuela Socialist Speaks on Challenges to Bolivarian Process

11 July 2017, by **Stalin Pérez Borges**

We are faced with the need to find or quickly give birth to another event like April 13, 2002.

An important debate has opened up among the left, both within Venezuela and internationally, as a result of the recent turmoil in the country.

In an attempt to bring the views of grassroots Venezuelan militants to an English-speaking audience, Green Left Weekly's Federico Fuentes interviewed Stalin Perez Borges.

A lifelong union and socialist activist, Perez Borges is today a member of the United League of Chavista Socialists (LUCHAS), a radical current within the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

LUCHAS was formed by a group of former leaders and activists of Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide), including many of its trade union militants. The decision to form LUCHAS came after Marea Socialista resolved to leave the PSUV and began taking an increasingly hostile approach to the Bolivarian process.

Perez Borges is also on the consultative council of the Bolivarian Socialist Central of Workers (CSBT), Venezuela's largest trade union confederation.

**What are the fundamental explications for the current situation in Venezuela today? Is this the end of the Bolivarian process?**

No, I don't believe that this is the end of the Bolivarian process. We are, however, passing through one of its most difficult moments, as today it seems very likely that the right could return to power.

The popular sectors, as the social subject of the process, have in its immense majority remained faithful and true to the political project that (late President Hugo) Chavez began to build following his eruption onto the Venezuelan political scene. And even in the midst of this crisis, Bolivarian Chavismo continues to have a strong social base.

Much more difficult than the situation we face today were the 48 hours when the right was in power, after carrying out a coup in April 2002. That moment had its April 13: the day in which the people came out onto the streets and together with the core of the armed forces toppled the dictatorship and rescued Chavez.

We are faced with the need to find or quickly give birth to another event like

April 13, 2002.

We are in a situation of uncertainty, given the multiple problems we face. The impacts of bureaucracy, corruption and improvisation are big. We are feeling the effects of these evils and the fact that after more than 10 years since Chavez declared the government and Bolivarian process to be anti-imperialist and socialist, we have not been able to transcend capitalism.

We are suffering the perverse effects of bureaucracy, corruption, improvisation, all within a framework of capitalism.

And from the actions of those capitalists who never agreed with the Chavista project and that today, like never before, are conspiring to bring down the government of President Nicolas Maduro.

The old capitalists are desperate to recuperate control over the state to have control over the distribution of the oil revenue; control that they lost with Chavez's victory in 1998.

The old capitalists have been driven crazy and in these last three years more so because this revenue has been reduced due to the fall in oil prices.



In distributing this revenue, the government continues to prioritize spending on social programs that were developed when oil prices were much higher. Meanwhile, another slice is lost in corruption and another part goes to the so-called "Bolibourgeoisie," new capitalists who claim to support the process.

The local capitalists have the support of the rest of the capitalists in the continent, and especially that of U.S. imperialism. The U.S. government, together with other countries that have a special interest in Venezuela, are financing the campaign to bring down the Maduro government.

The U.S. government is obsessed with getting rid of the Maduro government, no matter what it takes.

If they are successful, they will deal a final blow to the process of change that began more than a decade ago in South America and that began to be reversed with the coups in Honduras and Paraguay, the electoral defeat of Cristina Kirchner in Argentina and the parliamentary coup by Michel Temer in Brazil (against President Dilma Rousseff).

Just like its lackey capitalists in Venezuela who want to recover control over the oil revenue, the U.S. wants to recover control over its backyard. They are twins when it comes to their shared interest in getting rid of Maduro and will be like Siamese twins in terms of their interests when forming a new government if they hypothetically defeat the Maduro government and the Chavista project.

So this explosive cocktail of, on the one hand bureaucracy, corruption, improvisation, capitalism, and on the other, the war being waged by the capitalists who continue to sabotage the economy, explains the discontent that exists within a large section of the population and which the government is paying for, as it is viewed as the sole culprit for the situation.

Right-wing parties are making use of this, together with the discontent created by the violent actions of the fascist gangs they have trained, and the criminal neighborhood gangs that

they pay to create situations of violence and deaths in certain cities and regions in the country, principally in municipalities where opposition mayors govern.

All this is then greatly magnified through social networks, the endless media outlets (newspapers, TV channels, radio stations) they continue to own and international news agencies.

**What position have the trade unions and social organizations that support the Bolivarian process taken in the current situation?**

The majority of trade unions and social organizations are in the hands of sympathizers and militants of the left and Chavismo. The workers and popular sectors support these leaderships because in their majority they have been consistent fighters within their specific sector.

But it is a fact that the grassroots have been hit hard by the situation that I have referred to. That is, they are victims of the political, economic and social crisis, a big crisis, that has penetrated people's morale and that "what is for me the saddest and most dangerous aspect" has become a crisis of perspective.

One senses that among a big portion of worker comrades there is scepticism towards continuing to believe what the government says, and the youth see no immediate future for themselves, which is why a large number of them have emigrated to other countries, to the point where even in Australia there is now a significant number of Venezuelans.

Nevertheless, Chavismo continues to maintain a respectable level of support among workers and popular sectors, which can be seen in the mobilizations it has carried out.

It also counts upon a militia, made up of a very large group of volunteer reservists who maintain their morale.

**What is your view on the proposed Constituent Assembly?**

I will confess that, prior to May 1, when the president spoke of it as a

possible way forward, it did not strike me as a coherent and appropriate proposal for the moment, when the correlation of forces is not so favorable for Chavismo.

However, since May 1, reflecting on the dimension that the crisis has taken, and above all, the escalating spiral of violence, I now see this proposal as something more like a challenge that could help halt the violence that seems to be imposing itself and open a path to improving the current economic situation.

The reality, which is there for everyone to see, is that the right is not seeking to frighten or pressure the government into negotiations, rather it is fighting on the military terrain, with weapons, snipers and armed gangs, to militarily defeat the government.

That is why we think it is naive that people could be alarmed by the fact that security forces have tried to put an end to the violence generated by these groups.

It is in this context that the proposal for a Constituent Assembly takes shape and could provide a way out of the economic situation the country finds itself in.

And this is the sentiment I have noticed in many workers' assemblies and one that many comrades from various workplaces have relayed to me.

Together with other comrades from LUCHAS, we have put ourselves forward as candidates for the Constituent Assembly. We don't know if we will be elected.

Once we are confirmed as candidates, we will campaign hard with our proposals for what the Constituent Assembly should do. We will campaign to be elected as new faces, people capable of proposing the changes that the country needs, which we believe need to be democratic, revolutionary and socialist measures.

These are the only measures that can get us out of the crisis.

We hope that it is not the same old faces, those already in positions of

power, who end up being elected; otherwise we will just have more of the same.

**What position do you think socialist and internationalist organizations should take towards the situation in Venezuela?**

Revolutionaries in Venezuela and in all parts of the world have to look at reality and tell the truth to the working people of Venezuela.

And we all have to learn from this

process, no matter what happens next. It is a unique process. Books are of little use, it is something that has been built and written in the class struggle, in which we always have to be clear about who are our irreconcilable enemies and who we should never fight side by side with.

We also have to know that bureaucracies, sooner or later, are fatal to revolutionary processes. That is why, since the start, we have raised the slogan: Neither capital nor

bureaucracy.

We are celebrating the fact that we have been able to draft up a statement together with other organizations across the world, among those, the Socialist Alliance in Australia, which makes it clear that the way out of the crisis that the Venezuelan process finds itself in has to be democratic, revolutionary and socialist.

June 11, 2017

[Green Left Weekly](#)

## A challenge for the left

11 July 2017, by **Claudio Katz**

But the facts of what happened do not corroborate that story, especially with regard to the dead. When the total number of dead was 39, a first report noted that only four of these were victims of the security forces. The rest died in looting or confusing shootings inside the opposition mobilizations. [32] Another assessment noted that 60% of those killed were totally unrelated to the confrontation. [33]

These characterizations are consistent with estimates that attribute many of the killings to snipers linked to the opposition. More recent investigations highlight the fact that the bulk of the victims lost their lives through vandalism or settling of accounts [34]. There are also countless reports of incursions by paramilitary groups linked to the right and evidence of a high degree of violence with local protection in opposition-run municipalities. [35]

These assessments chime with the fascist brutality used against those attached to Chavismo. [36]. Burning a government supporter alive is a practice more closely linked to Colombian paramilitaries or the underworld than to traditional political organizations. Some analysts even estimate that out of a total of 60 dead, 27 were sympathizers with

Chavismo. [37]

Others say that some 15,000 people trained as shock troops took part in the opposing marches. They used hoods, shields and homemade weapons to create a chaotic climate and establish “liberated territories”. [38]

The evaluations presented by the opposition are diametrically opposed, but have been refuted by detailed reports on the victims. [39] As no one recognizes the existence of “independent” assessments, it is appropriate to judge what happened by recalling the background. In the *guarimba* of February 2014, 43 people died, most of the deaths being outside the context of political clashes or police repression. We should also consider how the opposition reacted to an equivalent challenge. Their governments settled the “Caracazo” of 1989 with hundreds of dead and thousands of injured.

The Venezuelan situation is dramatic, but this does not explain the centrality of the country in the news. Situations of greater gravity in other countries are totally ignored.

Since the beginning of the year in Colombia, 46 social leaders have been murdered and 120 have died in the last 14 months. Between 2002 and

2016 paramilitary forces massacred 558 popular leaders and the number of trade unionists annihilated in the last two decades amounts to 2,500. [40] Why no mention of this continued bloodshed in Venezuela’s main neighbour?

The outlook for Mexico is more frightening. Every day a dead journalist is added to the countless number of murdered students, teachers and social activists. In the climate of social war imposed by the “actions against drug trafficking” 29,917 people have disappeared. [41] Should this level of massacre not give rise to more journalistic attention than Venezuela?

Honduras is another example. Together with Berta Cáceres, fifteen other activists have been killed. Between 2002 and 2014 the number of environmental defenders killed was 111. [42] The list of victims of the horror ignored by the hegemonic press could be extended to the political prisoners of Peru. Also, very few know about the suffering faced by the Puerto Rican independence leader Oscar López Rivera during his 35 years in prison.

The majority of the Latin American population simply doesn’t know about the tragedies prevailing in the

countries governed by the right. This double standard of information confirms that Venezuela's role in the media is not due to humanitarian concerns.

## Modalities of a coup

Media coverage underpins the opposition's coup. As they cannot perpetrate a classic Pinochet-like assault, they attempt disempowering processes centred on the dislocation of society. They return to what was attempted in February 2014, to complete an institutional coup similar to those carried out in Honduras (2009), Paraguay (2014) or Brazil (2016). They intend to impose by force what they would later validate at the polls.

The right lacks the military force used in the past to bring down governments. But it tries to recreate that intervention with skirmishes in front of barracks, setting fire to police stations or marches towards the military headquarters.

Its plan combines sabotage of the economy with street violence through armed groups, which unlike the case of Colombia, act anonymously. They mingle with the underworld and terrorize traders [43].

These actions include the fascist methods espoused by the most violent currents of anti-Chavismo. They appropriate the insurgent symbols forged by popular movements and present their predatory actions as heroic deeds. The leader of the right, Leopoldo López, is not an innocent politician. Any court adjusted to law would have sentenced him to life for his criminal responsibilities.

The right favours a climate of civil war to demoralize the bases of Chavismo, affected by the lack of food and medicines. It explicitly presses for a foreign intervention and negotiates with the creditor banks an interruption of the credits to the country.

The opposition intends to lynch Maduro to bury Chavismo. It addresses its battle in the streets, in

the conquest of public opinion and in the collapse of the economy. It considers the elections as a simple coronation of that offensive.

But it faces growing obstacles. The predominance of violence in its marches alienates most discontented people and wears out the demonstrators themselves. As happened in 2014, the rejection of the fascists undermines the opposition as a whole. They have failed to penetrate popular neighbourhoods, where they always face the risk of an adverse armed confrontation. [44]

The Venezuelan big bourgeoisie instigated the coup with the regional support of Macri, Temer, Santos and Peña Nieto. It has been promoting a destabilizing plan for months at the OAS. But it has not achieved results in that area either. The sanctions against Venezuela did not thrive due to the opposition of several foreign ministries and the unanimity that in the 1960s had led to the expulsion of Cuba has not existed.

The US supports the coup in an attempt to regain control of the main continental oil reserve. The State Department seeks to repeat the operations in Iraq or Libya, knowing that after Maduro is overthrown no one will remember where Venezuela is. It is enough to observe how the media avoid any mention now of those countries where the Pentagon has already intervened. Once the adversary has been liquidated, they concern themselves with other issues.

The strategic goals of imperialism are not registered by those who highlight the flirtation of a Yankee newspaper with the Venezuelan president or the verbal ambiguities of Trump. [45] They suppose that these irrelevant data illustrate the absence of conflict between the US and Chavismo. But they do not note that the vast majority of the press virulently attacks Maduro and that the billionaire in the White House denies every day what he affirmed the previous day.

Trump is neither indifferent nor neutral. He simply delegates to the CIA and Pentagon the implementation of a conspiracy designed through the Sharps and Venezuela Freedom 2

plans. [46] These operations include espionage, deployment of troops and terrorism. They are operated in secrecy, while the mainstream press disqualifies any denunciation of such preparations. They especially question the "exaggerations of the left" so that no one annoys the conspirators. Some analysts estimate that Chevron's presence in Venezuela - or the PDVSA's continued negotiations with the US - illustrates a close partnership between the two governments [47]. They deduce from this the absence of a coup scenario. But these connections do not alter in the slightest the imperial decision to overthrow the Bolivarian government.

The activities of Yankee companies in Venezuela (and their counterparts in the United States) have persisted since the beginning of the Chavista process. But Bush, Obama and Trump have all sought to regain direct imperial oil management. They intend to establish the model of privatization in Mexico and expel Russia and China from their backyard.

## The Attitude of the Left

If the diagnosis of a reactionary coup is correct the position of the left should not cause divergences. Our main enemies are the right and imperialism and to defeat them is always a priority. This elementary principle must be reaffirmed at critical moments, when the obvious can become diffuse.

Whatever our criticisms of Salvador Allende, our central battle was against Pinochet. And it was appropriate to adopt the same behaviour against the Argentine gorillas of 1955 or the saboteurs of Arbenz, Torrijos and the various anti-imperialist governments of the region. This same position applies in Venezuela today, to support a common action against the right escalation.

In crisis scenarios, it is also essential to distinguish those responsible for the crisis. The mistakes made by Maduro are as numerous as they are unjustifiable, but the culprits of the present deterioration are the

capitalists. The government's errors are not on the same level. Those who make the enormous error of identifying the two sectors confuse responsibilities of a different nature. [48]

The government's mistakes have been verified in the inoperative change of banknotes, the inadmissible external indebtedness or the lack of control of prices and contraband. But the collapse of the economy has been caused by the wealthy who manipulate currencies, trigger inflation, manage imported goods, and discourage the provision of basic goods.

The government does not respond or responds badly for many reasons: inefficiency, tolerance to corruption, protection of the BoliburguesÃa, collusion with millionaires disguised as Chavistas. That's why it does not cut support to the private groups that receive cheap dollars to make expensive imports. But the collapse of production has been an action of the ruling class to overthrow Maduro. Not acknowledging this portrays an unusual level of myopia.

This blindness prevents us from recognizing another key fact of the moment: Chavismo's resistance to the rightist onslaught. With very questionable methods and attitudes, Maduro does not give up. He maintains the verticalism of the PSUV, favours the proscription of critical currents and preserves a bureaucracy that suffocates the responses from below. But unlike Dilma or Lugo he does not surrender. It is the opposite of the capitulation that consumed Syriza in Greece.

This position explains the hatred of the powerful. The government made the excellent decision to withdraw from the OAS and made the break that the left has always demanded. This decision should give rise to overwhelming support, which very few have made explicit.

Like any administration harassed by the right, the government uses force to defend itself. The communicators of the establishment denounce that reaction with an uncommon degree of hysteria. They forget the justifications that they usually contribute to

governments of another character facing similar situations.

In its response, the ruling party has surely committed injustices. It is the unfortunate cost of any significant confrontation with the counterrevolution. These adversities have been present in all the battles against reaction from Bolivar to Fidel. Self-indulgence must be avoided on this delicate terrain, but without repeating the slanders that the opposition propagates.

Currently Maduro directs his guns against right-wing brutality and not against the people. That is why comparisons with Gadaffi or Saddam Hussein are meaningless. He has not perpetrated any massacre of leftist militants, nor has he participated in US-instigated warlike adventures. The analogy with Stalin is more ridiculous, but remember that the spectre of Hitler haunts many opponents associated with Uribe or the nostalgics for Pinochet.

## Social democratic postures

In recent years many opponents of the right have come to blame Maduro for Venezuela's plight. These views repeat the old social democratic attitude of joining in with reaction at critical moments.

They question the legitimacy of the government with the same arguments as the opposition. Instead of accusing the CIA or the OAS they focus their objections on Chavismo. They adopt this position in the name of an abstract democratic ideal divorced from the battle to define who prevails in the management of the state.

This position has influenced several post-liberal thinkers linked to autonomism. Not only do they blame Maduro of the current situation. They affirm that he has reinforced an authoritarian leadership to maintain the oil rentier model. [49]

This characterization is very similar to the liberal thesis that attributes all the problems of Venezuela to populist policies, implemented by tyrants who waste the resources of the state. In

more diplomatic language, the diagnosis is similar.

Others emphasize more categorically the responsibility of Chavista leadership. They also call for avoiding the "conspiratorial simple-mindedness of blaming the right or imperialism" for the country's problems. [50] But are the conspiracies of reaction imaginary? Are the assassinations, the paramilitaries and the Pentagon plans paranoid Bolivarian inventions?

Without answering this elementary question, this position also rules out any comparison with what happened in Chile in 1973. But it does not explain the invalidity of that analogy either. It presupposes the differences between the two situations without noticing the enormous similarities that exist in the areas of shortages, the conservative irritation of the middle class or the intervention of the CIA.

The parallels objected to in the case of Allende are accepted in the case of the first Peronism, which is seen as a direct antecedent of Chavismo. But is the resemblance in the years of stability or in the times before the coup of 1955? Concern about the escalation of violence suggests that the similarity is related to this last period. And in such a situation: What was the priority? Confronting Peron's authoritarianism or resisting the gorillas?

The social democrats and post-progressives emphasize Maduro's authoritarian guilt. [51] That is why they minimize the coup danger and dismiss the need to prepare some defence against the provocations of the right.

But the consequences of this attitude will be verified when the oligarchs and their bandits regain the government. What has happened recently in Honduras, Paraguay or Brazil, does not even raise alerts among those who demonize Chavismo.

They also object to extractivism, indebtedness and oil contracts. But they do not explain whether they postulate anti-capitalist and socialist alternatives in the face of these evident failures of Maduro. The same is true of shortages and speculation.



Do they propose to act more firmly against the bankers and the commercial octopuses? Do they promote measures of confiscation, nationalization or direct popular control?

For the adoption of these initiatives could conceivably be arrived at with the government, but never with the opposition. The detractors of Chavismo evade this difference.

## Post-progressive appeals

The social democratic perspective marked the urgent call for peace signed by many intellectuals. This declaration promotes a process of pacification, rejecting both the authoritarian drift of Chavismo and the violent attitude of sectors of the right. [52]

The call propitiates a balance to overcome polarization and resorts to a language closer to the chancelleries than to popular militancy. This tone is in line with the implicit attachment to a theory of two demons. A middle way is advocated in opposition to both extremes.

But this equidistance is immediately denied by the primary responsibility assigned to the government. It underlines that guilt not only by ignoring the harassment of the right. Imperialism is hardly mentioned in passing.

The text received a resounding response sponsored by REDH and subscribed to by many intellectuals. This critique rightly objects to the fascination with conventional republicanism and recalls the pre-eminent gravitation of extra-constitutional forces in critical situations. [53]

The liberal relapse of post-progressive thinkers recreates what happened with the social democrats of the 1980s. This group's opposition to Leninism and the Cuban revolution resembles the current hostility to Chavismo. Several signatories of the appeal have travelled through the two periods.

But the current social democratic trajectory is belated and lacks the political reference provided by the Spanish PSOE. The social-liberal drift of that party has completely demolished the initial progressive imagination. This isolation may explain the current reunion with the old liberalism.

In some cases this ends up crowning the division that affected different variants of autonomism. The positions in relation to the Bolivarian process unleashed this fracture. Those who chose to stand on the opposition path question those who "cling to Chavismo". [54]

But this second sector has overcome the previous inadequacies and has understood the need to fight for state power, with socialist perspectives similar to Latin American Marxism.

The other segment, on the other hand, continues to navigate the ambiguity of generalities about anti-patriarchy and anti-extractivism, without offering any concrete examples of what it proposes. As they become absorbed by the liberal universe, their enigmatic vagaries no longer enrich the thinking of the left. Between forgetting the class struggle and fascination for bourgeois institutionalism, their denunciations of extractivism become a picturesque curiosity.

## Dispensers of dogmatism

A convergent discourse with social democracy is also propagated with sectarian arguments. In this case, Maduro is presented as a corrupt governor who is consolidating a dictatorial regime. [55] On other occasions this same illegitimacy is described with more indirect (de facto president) or sophisticated (Bonapartist leader) categories.

But all the variants coincide in underlining the primary responsibility of an authoritarian government that is ripping the country apart. The harmony of this approach with the media story is obvious. But the main problem lies not in rhetoric, but in practical action.

Every day there are marches of the right and the government. As for the standard-bearers of socialist rigor, which of the two mobilizations do they attend? With which are they identified? If they consider that officialism is the main enemy they should make common cause with the *guarimbas*.

In Buenos Aires, for example, a mobilization demanding the departure of Maduro was held in May. [56] All the passers-by who observed this march clearly perceived who would immediately take over the presidency of Venezuela if the current president is overthrown. They also noticed the total coincidence of this call with the messages emitted daily by the news programs.

It is not the first time that sectors from the left converge so sharply with the right. An antecedent in Argentina under Kirchnerism was the presence of red flags in the soy producers marches and in the demonstrations of the *caceroleros*. But what was pathetic in Buenos Aires can become dramatic in Caracas.

Other visions equate Maduro with the opposition, estimating that under the masquerade of an apparent contraposition major convergences are hidden. That is why they speculate on the moment when this convergence will become explicit. [57]

This curious interpretation contrasts with the pitched battles between both sectors observed by other mortals. It is a little difficult to interpret the *guarimbas*, murders and threats by the Pentagon as a fictional quarrel between two close friends.

The only logic of this presentation is to remove drama from the current conflict, to interpret it as a simple inter-bourgeois struggle for the appropriation of income. For this reason Maduro's totalitarianism is seen as an equivalent (or superior) danger to that of the opposition.

The biggest problem with this approach is not its misunderstanding, but the implicit neutrality it provides. Since all are equal, the auto-coup attributed to the government is equated with the coup from the right.



But that equivalence is obviously false. In Venezuela, the two reactionary sides of the same coin, embodied for example in the Middle East by jihadism and dictatorship, do not exist. Neither is there the type of counterpoint between troglodytes which prevailed in Argentina between Isabel Perón and Videla.

The clash between Maduro and Capriles-Lopez resembles Allende's confrontation with Pinochet, Peron's with Lonardi, or more recently Dilma's with Temer. As they are not equal the triumph of the right would imply a terrible political regression.

Neutrality in the face of this dilemma is synonymous with passivity and betokens a degree of capital impotence in the face of great events. It implies giving up participation and commitment to real causes.

As this attitude assumes that Chavismo is finished, it limits its whole horizon to writing a balance sheet of that experience. But the greatest failure in political action never affects unfinished or frustrated processes. The worst is the lack of transcendence in the face of great deeds.

Whatever the problems with Maduro, the denouement in Venezuela defines the immediate destiny of the whole region. If the reactionaries succeed, a scenario of defeat and a sense of helplessness against the empire will prevail. The end of the progressive cycle will be a given and not an issue of evaluation among social scientists. The right wing knows this and that is why it is accelerating the campaigns against the intellectuals who defend Chavismo. *Clarín's* recent barrage is an advance of the onslaught they prepare in a post-Maduro regional scenario 2017. [58]. Sectarians do not even register this danger.

## Fictitious commitments

Immediately, there are two political options at stake: the right demands an advance to general elections and the government is convening a Constituent Assembly. The opposition

is only willing to take part in elections that will secure it first place.

Of the 19 elections held under Chavismo, the Bolivarians won 17 and immediately recognized the remaining defeats. On the other hand the right never accepted adverse results. It always claimed fraud or resorted to a boycott. When it triumphed in partial elections it demanded the immediate fall of the government.

In December 2015 they obtained a majority in the National Assembly and proclaimed the overthrow of Maduro. They tried several subsequent repudiations, resorting to the installation of fake deputies and falsifying signatures for a recall election.

Capriles, Borges and López are now promoting fictitious elections, in the midst of economic warfare and street provocation. They are sponsoring Colombia-type elections, where hundreds of popular activists are murdered from vote to vote. They intend to go to the polls like Honduras under the pressure of the crime of Berta. They promote the vote that prevails in Mexico among the corpses of journalists, students and teachers.

It would be a terrible mistake to join in elections designed to prepare a cemetery of Chavistas. Maduro is being asked to hold elections in a climate of civil war, something no government usually accepts.

Venezuela is going through a situation similar to that prevailing in Nicaragua at the time of the first Sandinismo. The military siege and the shortages depleted a people who voted for the right through simple exhaustion. In these conditions the elections have a pre-established winner.

On the other hand, the comparison with the scenario surrounding the fall of the Soviet Union is meaningless. Venezuela is not a power that faces internal implosion, after a long divorce of the regime from the population. It is a vulnerable Latin American country harassed by the United States.

Some thinkers take this oppressive role of imperialism for granted, to suggest that it is not determinative of

the current crisis. [59] They suppose that the insistent denunciations of that domination constitute "a known fact" or a simple ritual of the left. But they forget that it is never enough to underline the devastating impact of the aggressions of the North against governments in conflict with Washington.

The whole spectrum of ex-Chavistas who support the demand for general elections confuse democracy with liberal republicanism. They have lost sight of how the right to self-government is systematically obstructed by bourgeois institutions.

Because of this impediment, the vast majority of constitutional regimes have lost legitimacy. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the ruling class uses voting systems to consolidate its power. It exercises control by controlling the economy, justice, the media and the repressive apparatus. Real democracy can only emerge in a socialist process of transformation of society.

It is true that Maduro cancelled the recall referendum, suspended regional elections and outlawed opposition politicians. These measures are part of a blind reaction to harassment. But the Chavista leader is confronted with the greater hypocrisy displayed by the proponents of current electoral regimes.

It's enough to observe that in Brazil impeachment was imposed by a group of bandits, with the support of the judges and parliamentarians which manipulate the system of indirect presidential election. There was no question of the OAS intervening to correct this gross violation of democratic principles.

Nor is the establishment indignant at the election that anointed Trump, after receiving several million votes less than Hilary Clinton. It seems natural to them that monarchy prevails in Spain or England while they accept the manipulation that surrounds any election in Mexico. The sacred democracy they demand for Venezuela is completely absent in all capitalist countries.

# The possibilities of the constituent assembly

It is evident that the best opportunity for a transforming Constituent Assembly was lost several years ago. The current call is purely defensive and tries to deal with an exasperating situation.

But it is useless to discuss only what was not done. There will always be time for those balance sheets. The important thing is to decide now to what extent the call can reopen a path of popular initiative.

Prior to the call for the Constituent Assembly, the government confined itself to developing a purely bureaucratic confrontation between one state power and another. It sponsored the clash of the executive against the legislature or the Supreme Court against the National Assembly. Now it appeals formally to communal power and it will be necessary to see if this proposal is translated into a real mobilization.

There are countless signs of weariness and scepticism within Chavismo. But no one chooses the conditions in which to fight and the main dilemma revolves around the continuation or abandonment of the struggle. Whoever has resolved not to lower their arms bets on the resurgence of the popular project.

Several leftist currents who are very critical of Maduro consider that the current call could unlock a dynamic of communes against bureaucratic manoeuvres. [60] They see the Constituent Assembly as an imperfect instrument to develop the conflict with the sectors of bourgeois, corrupt and Boliburgués Chavismo.

The Constituent Assembly could also contribute to breaking the tie of recent months between *guarimbas* and government mobilizations. If properly addressed, it could break the front of the opposition, separating the discontented from the fascists. But it is evident that without drastic measures on the economic-social plane, the Constituent Assembly will

be an empty shell. If the productive disaster is not attacked by the nationalization of the banks, foreign trade and the expropriation of the saboteurs, there will be no recovery of popular support.

The palliatives tried are insufficient to increase the participation of grassroots organizations in the distribution of food. There are radical measures that cannot be postponed. In any alternative it will not be easy to redirect the economy after so many mistakes in the area of debt, the creation of special investment zones or tolerance to capital flight.

Chavez carried out a large redistribution of income with novel methods of popular politicization, but failed to cement a process of industrialization. He collided with the opposition capitalists and with the internal Boliburgués and did not know to deactivate the rentier culture, that undermines all the attempts to forge a productive economy. The hesitations in breaking with the capitalist structure explain these adverse results.

The current context is more difficult because of low oil prices and the blockade of regional integration projects under conservative restoration. But it should also be remembered that all revolutionary processes start in adversity, and the Constituent Assembly provides a framework for resuming the initiative.

Some critics of this call object to the sectorial and communal modality of choice. They say that with that format the "assembly will be fraudulent, corporate or illegitimate." [61] Here, too, they repeat the right wing's deification (when appropriate) of conventional constitutionalism. That claim is not surprising among establishment communicators, but it is disturbing among enthusiasts of the Russian revolution.

After three decades of post-dictatorial regimes, many have forgotten the duplicities of bourgeois democracy. It should be remembered how Lenin and Trotsky defended the legitimacy of the soviets in 1917, disregarding a constituent assembly that rivalled the revolutionary power.

The current Venezuelan situation is very different. But the Bolshevik revolution not only taught us to register the social background, class conflicts and interests at stake. It also indicated a way to overcome the hypocrisy of bourgeois liberalism and confirmed that acts of force against reaction are part of the confrontation with right-wing barbarism.

The left must define whether it converges with the opposition in the boycott or participates in the Constituent Assembly. There is also a third option for a tiny hearing, with "yes, no and the opposite" messages.

Solidarity is urgent in the rest of the region. As with Cuba during the special period, it is necessary to put the shoulder to the wheel in difficult situations. It is to be hoped that many comrades will take this attitude before it is too late.

## Intellectual regroupment

Venezuela does not only raise intense debates. It has also determined significant clusters of intellectuals who have signed opposing appeals. This positioning has been more relevant than the controversial details of the different statements. A broad division has been completed.

The social democratic appeal challenged by the text of the REDH was supplemented by other strong responses. The political delimitation has been dizzying. Faced with the tension created by the manifestos, several signatories called for preserving fraternal dialogue. That respect is indispensable, but indignant reactions are explained by what is at stake. If the right is imposed, there will be time for laments and research seminars about what happened.

As the first declaration contained a call for peace, many thinkers spontaneously joined in favouring a halt to violence. In assessing more closely the content of the text, some withdrew their adherence and others made defensive arguments. They highlight their continued solidarity with the Bolivarian process or their

differences with other signatories.

But what has been most significant has been the rapid and widespread reaction of the anti-Chavez document

and the great rejection generated by the social democratic proposal. That impulse led to a sudden convergence of left intellectuals and radical

nationalism. If this interweaving is consolidated, Venezuela will have awakened a reunion of critical thinking with the revolutionary traditions of Latin America.