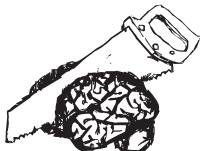


An antiauthoritarian-anarchist perspective about Venezuela's situation



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Venezuela 2006: Continued repression of popular protest

El Libertario, the voice of the Comision de Relaciones Anarquistas of Venezuela, analyzes the how and the why of the increasing state repression against the growing social discontent that belies the pseudo-revolutionary discourse of the Chavez regime.

From July 1 to November 30 there were 26 demonstrations repressed, impeded or otherwise hampered by the state's security organs; a greater number than the 18 cases accounted for in the report by the NGO Provea for the whole of 2005 (www.derechos.org.ve). This study likewise shows an increase in the number of violations to the right of physical integrity denouncing at least 71 injuries by bullets, bb's, blows, choking and other mistreatment, compared to 49 cases in 2005. In the same vein, cases of violations of the right to personal liberty show an increase of 60% with 130 arbitrary detentions versus 81 for the 12 months of 2005. In 55% of the cases, the repression was at the hands of regional police while 45% were committed by the National Guard (NG). Only 6 cases, 23% of the total, took place in the city of Caracas.

The latest Annual Report on the human rights situation in Venezuela also made by Provea estimates that between October 2005 and September 2006 58 demonstrations were repressed in the country. If we add to this the 16 protests violently dissolved between October and November, the number climbs to 74 cases. Two students, Jose Gonzalez (Cumana) and Dave Parker (Trujillo) died this year as a result of the police's repressive actions. These numbers are in contrast to the official declarations that affirm that the repression of protests is a thing of the past. «This is not a

government that tramples, that assassinates, tortures or represses anyone. That happened during the Fourth Republic, President Chavez's government does not have its hands stained with Venezuelan blood» said Vice-President Jose Vicente Rangel this past December 11 referring to the numbers published by the NGO's.

This tendency shows a slow, progressive and *sui generis* radicalization of popular protest, particularly those related to the right to shelter and public services, and to a lesser extent the demand for worker's rights. These expressions fall within a context and have some characteristics that make them different from similar others happening in the continent: any rapprochement to our reality that's neither propaganda nor mystifying, must take into account both the history and the cultural subjectivity of the country during the XX century.

Us vs. them: the logic of polarization

The high expectations created by the nation's executive and their scant materialization, with the exception of the Missions' assistance programs, start to wear out the charismatic domination represented by Hugo Chavez, in spite of the seven million votes that made his re-election possible. His first presidential period was characterized by, among other factors, a strong political polarization that created the favorable conditions for subordinating grassroots dynamics to the ballot. This unconditional loyalty has taken hold because the continuous reiteration of the binary logic: a revolutionary, patriotic and Bolivarian «us» perceived as the good guys; versus the adversary, the imperialist, counterrevolutionary and traitor «other» seen as the bad guys. Any opposition is interpreted as manipulation by the foreign enemy (imperialism) whose hypothetical confrontation demands the permanent reiteration of unity and loyalty. This reasoning prevents and subordinates not only the dialogue with the «other» but also regulates the interchange among «us» by subjecting it to the will of the leader. A clear example is the debate about the building of the so-called «united socialist party».

The executive's rhetoric has capitalized on the resentment against the distribution of wealth and power during the first forty years of the country's democracy. Actions on the strong will for change generated during the 80's and 90's have availed on the high oil prices and an aggressive fiscal policy that have allowed the government a sustained period of huge

income, one of the highest in Venezuela's history. Because of that, the timid advances in social matters do not correspond with the economic windfall which permeates the popular sectors while continuing to further enrich the wealthy globalized elites. As time goes by, love, even its Bolivarian kind, cannot endure on empty promises.

Up to now the popular protests have developed certain characteristics. They have been made in large part by actors formed under the influence of the «Process» and without previous political experience – this is due in part to the substitution and co-optation of the social fabric prior to 1998. As explained by Max Weber, charismatic domination means that the presidential figure embodies magic-religious attributes, and historical predestination. Governmental contradictions and shortcomings, therefore, are attributed to the mundane limitations of its functionaries. The demonstrators mobilize against ministers, mayors, governors and police and military agents, but, for now, not against the presidential figure. On the other hand, and to set them apart from the «other» protest, they claim in different ways their identity as «us».

Along with the country's centralization, the majority of the protests have happened in places other than Caracas, a city where the budget trickle down is greater and has greater accessibility. The executive knows that a demonstration in the capital, whatever its size, is exponentially more visible than if it happened in the provinces, which also explains their efforts to diminish them.

The retaining walls

During the first governmental period the cooptation and neutralization of protest was made possible due to a number of reasons. First, the high expectations created at Miraflores (the presidential palace in Caracas). Second, the imposition of polarization and the reduction of social conflicts to the electoral farce thus imposing self censorship upon expressions of discontent. Third, the idea of an external enemy and its hypothetical and imminent armed aggression. Fourth, the neutralization and bureaucratization of grass roots leaders. Fifth, the creation of a whole gamut of institutional channels to control participation and demands. And sixth, the progressive delegation of police and surveillance functions to the citizenry under the guise of «social intelligence» and «civil-military alliance».

The interaction of these elements means that in order to manifest itself, protest must pass a series of roadblocks and, only as a last resort, neutralization by the use of the state's security apparatus becomes necessary. About the latter we must remember that the «Bolivarian revolution» didn't substantially change any of its armed components, its structure or the traditional paradigms of control of citizen's protest. If, during its first years in power, the government could show very small numbers of detentions and injuries in popular demonstrations, it is simply because they didn't exist, and not because the police had assumed different strategies for the resolution of conflict than in the past. After eight years in power the government instituted a National Commission for Police Reform to perform a diagnosis and issue recommendations, with doubts about its effective implementation on the part of its promoters.

Some of the conflicts –demonstrations against carbon exploitation in Zulia, mobilizations of street vendors in Caracas in October and the recent occupation of the Guiria International Port – show that the greater part of the neutralization work has been done not by the police but by sectors of the «us». On 10/18/06 the street vendors of the capital called a demonstration to demand not the 10 million votes for Chavez but for an agenda of demands decided upon by themselves: the building of the promised commercial centers for street vendors, their inclusion in Social Security and the Communal Councils, as well as a pension for retirement. The demonstrators declared that the march was for worker's rights, and to avoid the electoral theme –although at times they did chant slogans in favor of the president – they wore grey shirts with the area where each works stamped on the back. The march passed calmly through the city center and ended under the rain with a rally at Avenida Urdaneta. 24 hours before the center of the city was blanketed by flyers, rich in expletives, accusing the demonstration of being an opposition protest in camouflage. The day of the march, the official newspaper VEA suggested the presence of dark interests behind the street vendors: «Groups of agitators would take aim at the informal workers that toil in the streets and avenues of Caracas». According to the paper «supposed paramilitaries would finance the street vendors at strategic locations of the Republic's capital to develop a plan to destabilize the democratic institutions». At the end of the march, the street vendors faced people identified as members of the official party Popular Union of Venezuela (UPV) who accused them of being «right wing infiltrators». During the day the National Guard and the Metropolitan police

only blocked access to the Palace of Government.

At other times, demonstrations are explicitly postponed by «voices» of the social movements in accordance with the political agenda imposed from above. At the November monthly assembly of the Community Housing Organization and homeless groups that takes place at the Foro Libertador de Caracas, they were repeatedly asking from the dais that any protest be postponed until after the elections.

Upward solidarity

Another characteristic of the mobilizations as well as of the social actors that carry them out is that vertical solidarity towards the charismatic leader supplants horizontal comradeship links and solidarity among equals. This complicates an understanding of these initiatives as social movements are traditionally understood: collective initiatives with a shared identity, discourse and objectives, with the ability to react to aggression against one of its parts. 36 homeless people were prosecuted in 2006 for crimes described in the Penal Code as trespassing and resisting authority. Some of them are, as of the time of this writing, still deprived of liberty. There have been no emails, demonstrations nor petitions for their release, neither from these homeless groups nor from other social organizations.

There also seems to be a lack of intra-class solidarity in initiatives explicitly more «revolutionary». This past October 23 Jose Miguel Rojas Espinosa was arrested, presumably after placing a low intensity detonator near the US embassy in Caracas. Three weeks later, in Maracaibo, Teodoro Rafael Darnott, aka «Commander Teodoro» is arrested, accused of being the mastermind. According to a web page in MSN groups, both belong to the Wayuu Islamic Autonomy organization, self-proclaimed founder of Hezbollah Latin America. The action was part of a Jihad called against the US for their belligerence towards Iraq and Iran. There are no graffiti to remind us, no flyers justifying them or asking for their freedom. In the champion country against the US, imprisoned anti-imperialists don't have anyone writing to them.

The poor against the poor

Several analysts agree that there will be an increase in social conflicts in 2007. With decreasing electoral activity, with the expectations still there and with promises doubled, an increase in mobilizations for housing,

services and jobs is conceivable. If we also take into account the predictable increase in internal conflicts between the party of Chavez, facing the homogenization of the «one party» and the build up of indulgences to the charismatic leader, president Chavez's second presidential period would face social convulsions different from those during his first period, owing to the social debt maintained and deepened by the previous government –the very same- and its inability to reform –not even revolutionize- people's every day experience. Oscar Schemel, sociologist in the employ of Hinterlaces Company, and whose predictions about the elections were totally on target, recapped this possible scenario as «the poor against the poor». But the turbulence may last as long as the ability of the president to keep his kingdom out of this world and to keep inconformity in struggle with the underlings' imperfect earthy world.

// THE FACTS //

November

11/21/06 the inhabitants of La Yaguara, located in the Libertador County of the state of Carabobo blockaded the Valencia – Campo Carabobo highway in both directions, protesting the lack of public services. The Valencia SWAT police dispersed the demonstration using tear gas and plastic bullets and arrested one person. The same day, in Caracas, the National Guard attacked people in front of the Banco Nacional de Vivienda y Habitat arresting several people.

Thursday 11/9/06 the State of Bolivar police dissolved a demonstration in Guayana City by workers of the Corporacion Venezolana de Guayana (CVG) using tear gas, bb's and fire arms. There were six arrests and six injured.

11/8/06 between 10 and 25 people from the OCV La Guzmanera were injured when the Aragua police blocked the way for a demonstration that attempted to go to Caracas to ask for help building homes.

11/1/06 28 adolescents and 11 adults were arrested in San Felix, state of Bolivar, when they protested outside the Banco del Libro demanding basic services and incorporation into Mision Sucre.

October

10/30/06 20 people were arrested when a group of unemployed workers tried to enter the Puerto La Cruz refinery to put pressure to receive the promised jobs. During the action the National Guard used tear gas and blunt machetes.

10/24/06 approximately 40 people were arrested in Coloncito, state of Tachira in the fourth day of protests for lack of public services.

10/23/06 four demonstrators were arrested and others suffered asphyxiation when the NG dispersed a demonstration with tear gas and bb's at the Caracas- Guarená highway. 100 people had blocked the road to demand repairs in their homes after the recent rains. The same day, 12 people were injured and 30 arrested in Coloncito, state of Tachira when the NG repressed a protest for lack of water and public services.

10/20/06 the taking of the Barinas – San Cristóbal highway left four demonstrators injured by the Barinas police. The inhabitants were protesting the lack of electrical service and potable water.

10/19/06 Two people were hurt by gunshots and six more by bb's when a group of traditional fishermen protested at the Guiria International Port demanding that the port be converted to a collective subsidized by the state.

10/14/06 The Carabobo state police dispersed a demonstration with tear gas when employees of the health sector demonstrated for their worker's rights.

10/13/06 Two people were shot in their feet when the neighbors of the Jacinto Lara district in Barquisimeto asked for the construction of a bridge. The Lara police and the NG used tear gas and bb's to disperse hundreds of demonstrators.

10/12/06 Caroni county patrols fired shots in the air to disperse street vendors that were protesting the eviction of an artisan's fair in Puerto Ordaz.

10/10/06 military troops occupied the village of Coloncito, state of Tachira after a patrol car was set on fire and some buildings were damaged by a population protesting abuses by the Tachira police.

10/4/06 the Rapid Response Team of Poli-Anzoátegui dispersed a demonstration by neighbors of the Punto Lindo community, San Juan Capistrano County, Boca de Uchire with tear gas and bb's.

September

9/16/06 Barinas state police arrested three people belonging to a group of 600 families that were protesting the lack of potable water in the Agustín Codazzi urbanization in the city of Barinas. Several others were injured by bb's and blows.

9/11/06 one person was arrested by the Aragua police when a group of families of El Campito, La Cabrera in Maracay protested the broken promises of housing.

August

8/17/06 a hundred peasant families were evicted in Guanare by the Portuguesa state police after squatting on land in the Paraiso Bolivariano neighborhood. The forced eviction left several people injured, among them a pregnant woman.

8/16/06 a demonstration at a parking lot at the Valencia City Hall ended with two council members and three police injured when two groups were protesting the lack of garbage pick up and the lack of parking spaces.

8/14/06 victims from the Las Casitas de Guatire, state of Miranda who were protesting in front of the headquarters of the Banco Nacional de la Vivienda were dispersed with tear gas by the NG, arresting alleged protest leader Vilma Macias.

8/10/06 two workers affiliated with UNT were hurt in a protest in front of the labor tribunal in Maracay. That day, a group of 500 neighbors of Catia la Mar blocked the street demanding plumbing repairs. There were two injured by bb's after the police acted.

8/9/06 five people were arrested by the NG during an eviction in Ojo de Agua in Baruta. Twenty small children were affected by tear gas. Three days later 11 people were arrested for «trespassing and resisting authority». That day two people were arrested when a group of 200 demonstrating for housing attempted to mobilize from Miraflores to the media.

July

7/28/06 a group of miners from El Callao tried to demonstrate against the Chinese transnational Jin Yan when one of the union leaders was arrested by the NG. The workers denounced the use of blunt machetes and tear gas by the police.

(Rafael Uzcátegui. El Libertario # 49, January 2007)



Depolarization and autonomy: Challenges to Venezuela's social movements after D-3

november 2006

Visualizing what will happen to Venezuela's social movements after the elections scheduled for December 3 – every indication points to the re-election of president Chavez – cannot be done without at least a general understanding of their historical path. During the second half of the 80's the economic crises after the «black Friday» was the catalyst of new forms of organizing and demanding that began to develop in this Caribbean country: student and neighborhood movements, women, counterculture, ecological and pro-human rights. Subjective efforts that although coming from the left, did not automatically follow the organizational schemes of the guevarist-lenninists who claimed to be the heirs of the armed insurrection of the 60's. The «Caracazo» (February 1989) as the expression of the growing malaise, marks the beginning of a civil society as alienated from the traditional political parties - networks of State's clients - as it is from the left political parties. The effervescence that ensues weaves a social fabric out of infinite socio-political initiatives, with varied and developing levels of mutual interaction, which played a lead role in the mobilizations for the greatest objective at the time: getting Carlos Andres Perez out of power.

Chavez's original movement raises itself above this dynamic and becomes the face of the people's malcontent, achieving legitimacy at the polls in 1999 by capitalizing on the prevailing wish for change that ran through the country, but also revitalizing the populist, statist and caudillista ethos so much a part of Venezuela's historical make-up. The imposition of a personal mode of domination was preconditioned to the break up of the citizen-led dynamics that brought it to power. Among the many causes

driving this process there is the polarization imposed by the contending elites: those banned from power representing the traditional productive sectors, and the new «leftist» bureaucracy giving legitimacy to the interests of those sectors crucial to the economic globalization of the country.

After 1999 the social fabric is fragmented (neighborhood, student and ecologist movements), neutralized (human rights) and co-opted (indigenous, women, counterculture) by the expectations created by a government rhetorically of the left. In turn this has caused some expression of popular organization with no autonomy within a new network of clients, amidst one of the greatest economic windfalls ever, brought on by the high oil prices.

These popular initiatives, instructed from above, have some common elements that distinguish them from other social movements:

(1) Vertical solidarity supplants intra-class solidarity: mobilizations follow a political agenda imposed by the top; their calls for solidarity when others in the movement suffer repression are almost non-existent.

(2) An identity permeated by personality cult and a lack of history and arguments different from those originating in the seat of power, which prevents any hypothetical «deepening of the revolution».

(3) Their praxis aims to legitimize government's projects, without any other parallel or different process.

(4) A progressing wearing out due to its adoption of politico-electoral cumulative logic.

Default on the expectations generated by Chavez has caused the exponential increase of popular protests during 2006, something that will continue to grow in the coming year. But it is precisely the blackmail of polarization – «to give weapons to the right», «manipulated by imperialism» – which contains the growing discontent against a state that neither transformed itself when it could, nor has a new bureaucracy able to make policies different from Latin American populist welfare.

The challenges facing the social movements, after the hypothetical presidential re-election, are not only of a practical order such as its autonomous configuration or experimenting with diverse practices and spaces of learning and counter hegemony. They are also theoretical. Overcoming imperialist Manichaeism, centered exclusively on George Bush,

would entail squeezing the multiple dynamics of money flow and the power of global capital. It is precisely the social movements, from both poles, which have internalized the discipline of being a cheap energy exporting country, in spite of any consideration for the environment, deepening in the role assigned to Venezuela by economic globalization. Sticking to the events of the last few months – actions against carbon exploitation in Zulia, protests by street vendors in Caracas and traditional fishermen in Guiria – and how they have been opposed and criminalized by the Chavez's rank and file, we foresee a long period of conflict among the oppressed: some protesting for a few structural improvements and other opposing them to climb up to positions within the hierarchy of those embedded in the personal state.

(Rafael Uzcátegui)



october 2006

A Call and an Alert to Public Opinion

As a group of activists of critical tendencies we have found it necessary before the present situation to signal an alert to all popular forces: workers, indigenous peoples, Afro Venezuelans, students, women, neighborhood groups, intellectuals and social groups.

We maintain that the two options publicized by the established order - Chavez as much as Rosales - represent the domination of financial power and empire over Venezuela, and present a scene of super-exploitation, unemployment, and social exclusion in addition to the fortification of big capital.

Eight years into the «revolution» or the so-called Process, we find that there is a social misery that has resulted from the consolidation of the State and the destruction/co-optation of social groups. In recent years, the political regimen has deteriorated into a total submission to transnational capital on the part of the Chavez government, a fact that Rosales and the opposition pretend to not be aware of.

The established game consists of the following: faced with the superficial and limited reforms of the current administration - which are driven by the Stalinist left within the capitalist State - the opposition pretends that these measures are communist, when in reality they form part of the dynamic of global capitalism. What we have seen is State management with punctual payments of external debt, the surrender of the Orinoco' Delta oil and the natural gas of Falcon state, destruction of the environment (Imataca, Perija and Paria), hegemony and the increase of the commercial sector, of financial speculation, and the creation of flexible labor and social exclusion.

The ideological discourse of the State is crushing and hegemonic and has

managed to block all critical forces, which have been silenced through bribery and cronyism, entangled in a thought process that can only lead to totalitarianism. There has been a increased fragmentation of the social movements while the power of the cliques has only grown.

In the same way, there is an exercise in direct militarism when the high branches of the public sector are in the hands of the military forces. The popular imagination has been channeled into the civil-military lie; arbitrariness is the actual situation, and the military sector need not look upon the past with nostalgia, since El Amparo in the 90's is exactly the same as La Paragua today (two military massacres). As a result, Chavismo is simply the reproduction of puntofijismo, as demonstrated by its corruption and impunity.

Based on these considerations, we call upon all indigenous peoples, peasants, students, professors, intellectuals, workers, women, Afro Venezuelans, neighborhood coalitions, social groups and people in general to abstain from voting because there will be no substantial change. The reality is that representative democracy based on populism vs. opposition symbolizes nothing new, but is merely a backward sector anchored in the cold war, just like Chavismo.

This call for abstention is not based on the problem of electoral fraud, which we do not deny; nor does it coincide with the opportunistic call to abstention coming from certain quarters. Required change will never be given through the electoral process, but will rather be produced through the autonomous initiative of the social movements themselves. The grave social, economic and cultural crisis suffered by Venezuela does not find its answer in electoral politics, which banalizes and liquidates all struggle.

We bring this alert forward so that all agents of social change may actively organize around and promote abstentionism through their own struggles, without messiahs or authoritarian bureaucrats, in order to demonstrate to the scaffold of power that it is ineffective and antidemocratic. Only the collapse of the existing system will guarantee transformation. Otherwise, we alert you to increases in repressive practices in the immediate future within the framework of the worsening of the structural crisis of the country.

Faced with the bourgeois, genocidal State of the past 40 years, which is expressed in the candidacy of Manuel Rosales, the alternative cannot be support for the totalitarian State of Hugo Chavez.

(Foro Social Alternativo, FSA)



Macho men and State Capitalism - Is Another World Possible?

March 2006

Latin America is boiling with revolutionary potential these days that could redefine economics, politics and social relations. But sometimes things aren't always as they seem. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is widely seen to be at the center of Latin America's transformation by building a regional trade bloc through the creation of ALBA and Venezuela's membership in Mercosur to oppose U.S. dominance and its constant push for free trade agreements with Latin American governments.

Chavez is drumming up support in a rhetoric that seeks to reminisce of those days of glory when Simon Bolivar intended to unite Latin America. Chavez' Bolivarian revolution suddenly seems the only viable option, not only among the non-elite in Latin America but also gathering support among once disillusioned leftists worldwide.

However, the true democratic debate has been silenced in this simplified two-sided fight between the projects of macho men. While Chavistas and anti-Chavistas tirelessly battle and Venezuelan families are divided, little space seems to be left for alternatives and critiques of the supposed Chavista revolution, without being labeled anti-revolutionary. While the anti-imperial and anti-capitalist discourse of Chavez attracts supporters worldwide, including even such world famous writers as Noam Chomsky and Eduardo Galeano, Chavez is busy making direct business contracts with oil giants such as Petrobras, ChevronTexaco, BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell. As Chavez claims to represent the indigenous population of his country, many questions remain about these mega-corporate ventures, as indigenous voices from over all over the continent speak of the effects of these oil

empires, that is, if anyone wants to listen. Where are the dissident feminist, environmental, and indigenous voices to create a real revolution?

As activists from the American continent prepare to gather in January for a showdown at the World Social Forum, the question that should arise after learning about Chavez mega oil projects is, is another world possible? And the answer should be - not with oil.

Chavez has teamed up with Brazil's now scandalous Lula to create the world's largest oil corporation PetroAmerica, the combination of the two state owned companies PetroVenezuela (Pdvsa) and Petrobras. While Chavez is sending cheap oil to poor Latino immigrants on U.S. soil, he ignores the lives of indigenous people at home and his ventures, if continued, will lead to their eventual extinction.

In Ecuador, Petrobras is infamous for entering the Yasuni national park to exploit for oil, which is the ancestral territory of the Huaorani, a Pleistocene refuge, and a UNESCO Biosphere reserve since 1989. Yasuni has among the most species of trees in the world. In one hectare there are as many trees and shrub species as native trees in all of North America. And in addition, to being home to the Huaorani indigenous peoples, it is home to the Tagaeri and Taromenane who live in voluntary isolation.

The Council of the Huaorani nations of the Ecuadorian Amazon, ONHAE, has decided to break their previous contract with Petrobras. Petrobras only negotiated with former leaders of ONHAE who did not consult their communities. In the previous negotiations, Petrobras promised to finance a small aircraft company, health, and infrastructure projects in the community. But according to local residents, nothing has been done.

In July 2005, the Huaorani women formed their own organization, AMWAE, which similarly to the famous women of the Sarayacu community, opposes oil exploitation. These women tirelessly resist since they know the environmental and social ills of years of oil exploitation in the Amazon region, which includes cancer, hepatitis B, prostitution, alcoholism, and the extinction of species and therefore, indigenous cultures such as the Tetetes. In Venezuela, the indigenous peoples of the Orinoco river valley are similarly threatened by oil and natural gas exploitation.

Revolutionary romantics will often cite the supposed threats to the Bolivarian revolution as the opposition of the empire (United States) while

ignoring the contradictory business contracts between Chavez and multinational corporations which stem from the belly of the beast itself. Stern ideological supporters of Chavez' and Lula's state capitalist ventures such as ALBA, or the Bolivarian alternative to the U.S. free trade agreement, ALCA (FTAA in English), should keep in mind that in September 2000 Chavez signed (with the eleven other South American governments) the Integration of Regional South American Infrastructure (IIRSA), long before he revealed the plans of ALBA. This little-known, yet massive infrastructure project, will, like Plan Puebla Panama in Central America create «development corridors». These «development corridors» will serve the interests of the destructive oil, gas, and mining industries by creating superhighways, hydroelectric dams, and gas and oil pipelines, along with military bases to facilitate exploitation, across the entire South American continent to facilitate successful exploitation.

While part of the U.S. free trade agenda, IIRSA is rarely mentioned in the media and has been planned from above. IIRSA is funded by State and private investments, alongside multilateral and national «development» banks, such as IDB, CAF y FONPLATA, which have willingly loaned the money to governments in order to further indebt the already indebted South American population. IIRSA is based on a purely capitalistic worldview, which premieres the commodification of nature and humans, and distinguishes any possibility for collective rights. Following an IIRSA meeting in June 2003 in Venezuela, Chavez explained the purpose of its projects in his own TV program «Alo Presidente» number 155, as «the promotion of productive commercial models that guarantee sustained growth and sustained growth and sustainability for the whole region.» But Chavez also announced in that same program the creation of PetroAmerica, which like other massive oil projects in South America will likely cause massive environmental destruction and human suffering.

As part of IIRSA, Chavez has also announced the expansion of coal exploitation in the Venezuelan state of Zulia, which is also home to the indigenous people of Bari, Yukpa, and Wayuu who have resisted oil and coal exploitation for years. The Sierra de Perijas, is also a national park, Increased coal production will be topped of with the construction of the mega sea-port Puerto America with funding from the World Bank, to facilitate the exportation of coal and oil to be built on top of three islands which include Los Olivitos, a nature bird preserve, whose inhabitants disapprove with the plans and say no one asked for their opinions of this

project. On March 31 of 2004, thousands of Bari, Yucpa, Wayuu along with university students and adults from Maracaibo marched in resistance of gas exploitation and called for the recognition of indigenous lands. The protesters lamentably never got to meet with President Chavez as he was busy attending to a visit by and ex-footballer Maradona.

Chavez has also welcomed oil giant ChevronTexaco to exploit gas and oil in Venezuela. ChevronTexaco does business in 180 out of 200 countries in the world and while it is the 5ht largest company in the world, it holds 1st place in the extermination of communities, environmental destruction, and human rights violations. During the ceremony which granted ChevronTexaco this right, Chavez cheerfully stated: «Welcome to Paraguaná, misters (in English).» «Somos buenos amigos, buenos socios y buenos aliados de muchas empresas estadounidenses que trabajan con nosotros y cada dia estamos mas alineados en el trabajo» («We are good friends, good partners, and good allies of many U.S. companies who work with us and every day we are more aligned in our work.»)

ChevronTexaco's recent endeavours to extend its empire in Venezuela include a 3,800 million dollar investment in the Hamaca project, an oil field in the Orinoco river basin together with Pdvsa and Phillips Petroleum Company. Initially, the project will create 6000 new jobs but upon the completion of construction of the project, it will only need 700 permanent employers. With massive gains for multinational corporations such as ChevronTexaco, 700 jobs will not help counter the environmental destruction that big oil projects inherently cause.

Furthermore, ChevronTexaco's own website proudly proclaims it has built 11 schools in Venezuela where 4500 students now receive an education of «better quality». Is this perhaps also part of the Boliviarian revolution? As Ali Moshiri, the Latin American representative of ChevronTexaco informed the news agency Reuters on April 18 2005, Chavez' revolution is not a threat to the company: «La politicas esta separada de los negocios en Venezuela. Las oportunidades son tales que estamos trabajando en encontrar y asegurar nuevos negocios.» (In Venezuela politics is separated from business. There are such opportunities that we are working to find and secure new business.)

ChevronTexaco has a history of exploitation of coal and subsequent contamination in Venezuela. In the words of Cesáreo Panapaera, a

community leader of 32 Yucpa communities in the mountain region of Tokuko, Venezuela: «Acaban con la cultura de la siembra, van a acabar con el agua y terminaran acabando con la vida» («They are destroying our farming practices, they are going to destroy our water, and they will end up destroying our lives»). According to Panapaera, the coal exploitation has destroyed rivers, contaminated waters and air and has displaced many farmers and indigenous people from their lands and endangers the lives of his people: «Here are our bows and arrows, and we will use them against the miners if they come to our lands. And if we have to die fighting for our lands, we will die.»

In Ecuador, ChevronTexaco is fighting a class-actions suit filed by 30,000 Ecuadorian farmers and indigenous people who argue that the company's practice of dumping toxic waste from its oil operations has caused irreversible harm to the environment and widespread health problems among local residents. The plaintiffs in the case have endured and continue to suffer the fatal consequences of oil exploitation. Chavez' big oil projects could very well mean extinction and death to the people of the Amazon region. It could also destroy a place that is that Amazon, home to 1/5 of the world's fresh water reserves, one third of the world's biodiversity, and 2/5 of global forests.

While nationalization of resources to some may seem an attractive alternative to the pounding progress of privatizing forces, we have to remember that states have never sided with those most oppressed, just ask the indigenous peoples of the world. Another world is not possible without the knowledge of indigenous cultures that have lived sustainably within the mega biodiversity that is the Amazon rainforest. We need to support these movements while allowing them to decide their own destiny. We must struggle to ensure that they can continue to live their lives as they wish. These are the reasons for why activists have planned to organize an Alternative World Social Forum in Caracas, as a space of open debate to support a more critical and diversified discussion to generate truly sustainable alternatives to capitalism.

(Hanna Dahlstrom)



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WSF Caracas: shroud for Venezuela's social movement's

A member of the group promoting the Alternative Social Forum explains why the World Social Forum (WSF), taking place in Caracas during January 2006, is another attempt by the Chavez government to impede the autonomous development of social struggles in the country.

During the week of January 24 to 29, 2006 the polycentric version of the VI World Social Forum as well as the II Social Forum of the Americas will take place in Caracas. The event has generated great expectations since this city is the epicenter of what since 1999 has been known as the «Bolivarian Revolution», with much impact in Latin America and wide popularity among diverse social and left movements in the world. The fact that Venezuela is the second continental seat of the WSF is a tacit backing of the governmental performance of President Hugo Chavez, as happened at the time with the local government of the Workers Party in Porto Alegre during its slow but true climb to the presidential chair. Is this backing of the government related to the actual strength of the social movements of Venezuela? Or, to say in different words, what contributions the WSF in Caracas will make towards the process of consolidation, expansion and articulation of the country's social movements? To answer this question we will first make a brief review of the nation's contemporary history.

«Punto Fijo» and «Caracazo»

After decades of military and strong man dictatorships, in 1958 a new democratic period is inaugurated in Venezuela. The so called Pact of Punto Fijo is made among the principal dominating actors, who agree to alternate the main political parties of that era, Democratic Action and COPEI, in

power. A few years later a period of armed struggle by the insurgent left starts, a chapter lasting less than a decade with the progressive incorporation of these actors into the «legal» and parliamentary politics, motivated by, among other things, the social floor built by the social-democracy thanks to the large income from oil. The royalties of black gold allow for democratic stability unknown in the continent, paying for a generous social security, widespread education at all levels and subsidizing labor unions and trade associations all over the territory. The oil tanker that daily filled their hulls at the Venezuelan ports financed the ample middle class that developed during the decades of the 60's and 70's, reaching its climax with the so-called nationalization of oil that happened in 1976, when transnational corporations such as Shell stopped operating in the country. From that year until the end of 1981 it was the period known as the fat cows due to the huge amount of money that came into the national treasury. At the beginning of 1983 the devaluation of the currency, the bolivar, is announced, and a period of economic crises begins that initiates the break up of this governmental model started in 1958. During the mid 80's large popular mobilizations start but do not translate into votes for the left political parties which historically maintain a percentage around 5%.

The most notable expression of the death throes of the Pact of the Punto Fijo happens in February 1989, during the so called «Caracazo», when hundreds of businesses were looted in different cities in a week of violent popular explosions, brutally repressed by the army, with a number of deaths and disappearances still unknown, which some say is over a thousand. It is from that February that a civil society, outside the established political parties and with no client relationship to the state, begins to take form. To name but a few, we find the first human rights organizations, ecological associations and networks that promote the Environmental Penal Law and the social initiatives that fueled the mobilizations against the neo-liberal «package» of Carlos Andres Perez –then president of Venezuela – which constitute examples of what autonomous social struggle were possible in that context when political parties and other upholders of the government showed clear signs of fatigue.

1989 represented an important moment in the history of the autonomous social organization of popular demands. The effervescence apparent before and after the popular revolt shows the seams of a social

fabric made up of infinite socio-political initiatives, with different and growing levels of articulation among themselves. They take aim against the president and his policy of «the big turn»: his attempt to apply the neo-liberal prescription dictated by the International Monetary Fund which contrasted with the populist policies imposed by previous governments. In this scenario of growing citizen mobilization something never seen before takes place: the Attorney General of the Republic opens a case against the president for corruption and misappropriation of the so called «secret parties». In May 1993 Perez was suspended from his functions.

Chavez and his movement

A year before the president's fall due to charges of corruption, a political recourse that seemed to be relegated to the past came back to the front pages of the press: the coup d'etat. From the years 1899 to 1958, five conspiracies headed by the military forced the change of the first president, paradoxically including one that in 1945 claimed to be in the name of democracy and the parties system.

Military insubordination in order to take power wasn't the exclusive patrimony of sectors identified with the right. Several armed insurrections stimulated by the Marxist-Leninist left spoke of the «civil-military alliance», in which political vanguards linked with «progressive sectors of the armed forces» to provoke change. This appeal to a pretended progressiveness of the Venezuelan army interpreted its multi-class character under dialectical materialism, attempting to exacerbate the «class contradictions» between soldiers and officers to «win them over to the socialist cause». It is true that the popular heterogeneity of the Venezuelan army is different from the elitist conformation of other armies in the continent, but the Marxist reductionism forgot that its hierarchical and value systems educated them to see themselves as a class different from the civilians. On the other hand, the Venezuelan army was also formed in the anti-communism and the fight against subversion according to the dictates of the Southern Command of the United States, as part of the logic of the Cold War.

After 34 years without military conspiracies – one of the premises of the Pact of Punto Fijo – in 1992 a large group of middle rank army officers attempts a coup d'etat against Carlos Andres Perez. On TV, a character in uniform unknown to all announced the defeat of the uprising «for the time being». That officer was Hugo Chavez, who spent some years arrested

for military mutiny and was set free, via pardon, by the next elected president: Rafael Caldera, who, like Perez, was in power for the second time.

Chavez liberation, which happened during the mid 90's, took place amid large mass mobilization and consciousness rising. For the first time a presidential candidate from the non-traditional sectors, Andres Velasquez, got to improve on the historical 5% of the left, placing himself very close to the elected candidate in percentage points. This was symptomatic of the will for change that like an epidemic grew among Venezuelans faced with the economic crisis and the fatigue of the democratic system. Chavez and his movement piggy back on that dynamic giving it a face to the unhappiness, thanks to the media magnification and its insurrectional aura. We repeat: a development that qualitatively and quantitatively is contemporary to Chavez's movement and of which the MBR-200 (the name of Chavez's first political group) was only a part. The paratrooper from Sabaneta makes a cynical and pragmatic reading of this reality, going from his militant abstention, during which time he was able to get the sympathy of many grass roots social movements, to the presidential candidature, and let's not forget, with the support of the mass media and the financing from sectors of international capital. Chavez and his charismatic dominion convince many sectors that he represents the vanguard of the struggle against the binomial AD-COPEI and is a project for revolutionary transformation. The shortsightedness of the traditional parties and their own mummification accelerated their final crisis, partially masked by the media show of the events of 2002 but that sooner rather than later –as indeed happened – would end up dismantling the empty shells of such parties.

Institutionalizing rebellion

We were saying Chavez rides on a wave of popular unhappiness that in 1989 started weaving a social fabric made up of infinity of embryonic organizations, with different but growing levels of mutual articulation. One of the virtues of chavism is gathering diverse demands and incorporating them in its diffuse ideology giving the sensation that bolivarianism was a legitimate expression of the left's and the community's will. The next step was the establishment of an uncontested direction, paradoxically spreading a democratic proposal of «participation» and the imposition upon its grass root basis of an agenda decided at the top, basically limited to re-

legitimization at the ballot. This way the social movements already spent due to their progressive incorporation in the cumulative politico-electoral logic are mortgaging their own autonomy, and even more important, to the imposition of an authoritarian model of domination, becoming immobilized to raise their own demands. It is in the imposition of organizational models directed by a single hand and in the dismantling of citizen's initiatives that preceded it that one finds the key to understand the current fragmentation of the social movements in Venezuela.

Whoever watches from the outside the avalanche of revolutionary propaganda financed by the Venezuelan state may well be astonished by this statement. Out of the many examples that support it let's name one key fact. During the 90's the management of the state's hydrocarbon company, Pdvsa, attempted to lobby around a policy of opening up the oil trade in order to involve transnational companies in the exploration and exploitation of new wells, reversing the nationalization of 1976. The proposal, in agreement with free market policies, generated widespread and rabid resistance in many sectors, rendering it politically inapplicable. Behind the revolutionary and anti-imperialist rhetoric centered mainly on George Bush Jr., President Chavez has signed off on the largest concessions of energy resources since the decade of the 40's with no internal opposition. For example, the largest natural gas reserve in the country, the Delta Platform, has been given in concession to Chevron, Conoco-Phillips and Statoil for periods of over 30 years. From January 1, 2006 on, mixed enterprises between the multinationals and the state's oil company will be in force, both parts being partners in the exploration and commercial development of the reserves. As of this writing, December 2005, there had been no mobilization by any sector against this measure. Pablo Hernandez Parra, an oil expert and collaborator with the web site www.soberania.org says in one of his articles in the press: «The essence of all that's happening in this new Macondo called Venezuela is just the fact that national and international capital headed by oil companies have donned the red beret and sash, and advancing with triumphant strides impose their privatization program under the guise of socialism for the XXI century. Everything that happens today in this country, from the oil policy to the media circus with land expropriations, is nothing more than a vulgar show between the puppets of capital: government and opposition, in order to consolidate the process of privatization of the natural resources of the nation: oil, gas, mines, land, for the exclusive benefit of big capital.»

The World Social Forum

In the last four years Venezuela has undergone a polarization induced by the top players vying for power: the old «punto fijista» bureaucracy (Fedecámaras, CTV, political parties) against the new Chavez bureaucracy that has supplanted the previous one. This antagonism, false inasmuch as real vs. pretended exercise of power, sustained and amplified by the media, has benefited those who have cast themselves as legitimate voices of the sector of Venezuelan society they claim to represent. Part of the demobilization of the social movements answers to this logic: having taken part in, and assumed blindly the political agenda imposed from above, postponing their own claims. Another chapter belongs to the expectations created by some of the social activists faced with a «progressive and left» government, spokesmen of a discourse that assumes the language of the movements but whose policies go in the opposite direction.

The former U.S. ambassador to Venezuela, John Maisto, told the press: «Chavez has to be evaluated by what he does, not by what he says». This explains why in spite of diplomatic bruising, Venezuela makes her best deals with the most dynamic sectors of global capitalism, including the Big Brother from the North, which consumes over 60% of the energy exports leaving our ports. Here we need to clarify that international geopolitics is radically different from that of the Cold War. As long as countries keep to their roles assigned by economic globalization, they can have the local politics they like best. This is precisely the Venezuelan case not only on oil and energy matters – counting on more than \$60 a barrel, the highest prices ever – but also in the most dynamic sectors of the world's economy: banks, finances and telecommunications. Also, remember that Caracas continues to be a punctual payer of its external debt and obeys without any flack the obligations contracted with the IMF.

This is the context in which the World Social Forum will take place in these shores of the Caribbean: with demobilized local social movements and with no freedom of action, with a government that will finance it and even brags about it in advertisements and press conferences, at the beginning of a year of presidential elections and with the tribune of the WSF as the ideal starting point in the electoral campaign. The lack of operative social networks and infrastructure of citizen's initiative, the event's logistics: room and board, transportation, will be done by the Venezuelan army for the lesser delegations and by

the Hilton hotel chain for those of higher strategic importance for the national executive, as has been the tradition in previous «revolutionary» councils in Caracas. As a movement Chavism – where the main spokespersons of the committee promoting the WSF in Caracas belong – in seven years has only recognized as players those who submit to the leadership of Hugo Chavez, therefore his declarations regarding the realization of a pluralistic forum sound like demagogic speech for the peanut gallery. In this sense, this event will deepen the current dispersal of social elements and will not, in our opinion, change anything.

Because of this and in spite of all the difficulties, of the lack of resources and infrastructure and the asymmetry, a group of us believe it's necessary to have an event parallel to the WSF (in the same city and during the same days) to insure that energy policy discussions, concentration of power, militarism, autonomy and new social movements, the model for the development of the mine industry and the environment, alternative communications and counter-power will take place opening the possibility to spread other versions of what's happening in Venezuela. To this we add the degradation experienced by the WSF: it being controlled by NGO's and sanitized social groups such as ATTAC and Greenpeace, as well as the manipulation by left political parties as platforms for propaganda. Besides, the Latin American situation opens up new agendas for discussion which we feel will not be sufficiently considered at the WSF: the fact that several South American governments are «left» and how their social policies have been incapable of reducing poverty, promote structural changes, preserve the environment and safeguard the rights of minorities, since they limit themselves to capitalism with a human face. We think our event, the Alternative Social Forum (ASF) can be one of the many necessary spaces for gathering and dialog among different grass roots movements, in order to establish our claims and elaborate our agenda of events and mobilizations, without interference from anybody outside its own dynamic. Therefore we invite all activists to visit Venezuela in this fourth week of January to participate whether in the WSF or the ASF, and, most importantly, to see with their own eyes the reality of this country, to contrast versions and data and stop interpreting things listening exclusively to the propaganda manufactured by the Venezuelan state or the opposition political parties.

Facts on the paralysis of the Venezuelan social movements:

- * Mobilizations in solidarity with the direct action done by the indigenous Pemon people (Gran Sabana) against the electrical transmission line to Brazil at the beginnings of 2001: None.
- * The largest demonstration against the war in Iraq: Gathering at Plaza Venezuela, Caracas, 1200 people, May 25, 2003.
- * Are there independent media centers, Indymedia in Venezuela? No
- * Attendees at the demonstration before the Supreme Court of Justice by women's groups protesting the release of the accused for the physical attack of Linda Loayza, October 26 2004: 80 people.
- * Attendees at the national march against carbon exploitation in the state of Zulia, March 31 2005: 1000 people.
- * Attendees at the demonstration called by the Bari, Yukpa and Wayuu peoples on October 11 2005 at Plaza Bolivar against carbon exploitation in the state of Zulia: 150 people.
- * Mobilizations against the energy concessions by the government to multinational companies: None.
- * Mobilizations against the governmental regulation of the largest forest in the country, Imataca, for mine and lumber exploitation: None.
- * Mobilizations against the deplorable state of the hospitals in the country: None.
- * Audiovisual productions from a Chavist position denounce the contradictions between what the government says and what it does: One, «Our oil and other tales» (2004) by the Italians Gabrielle Muzio, Max Pugh and others, censored by the government. The TV stations Telesur, Canal 8 and Vive TV show previous productions from this audiovisual collective, but don't show this last one.
- * Any other direct action called by popular movements? On October 12, 2004 about one hundred activists from Chavist grass roots organizations gathered in front of a statue of Columbus in Plaza Venezuela to tear it down. During the convocation they expressed their desire to «take the head to Chavez» who at the time was at a function in the Teatro Teresa Carreño. Three activists were arrested for the destruction of the statue. On October 21 50 people demonstrated in front of the Court demanding the release of those arrested. A year later, according to writer Luis Brito Garcia, one of them continued in prison.

(Rafael Uzcátegui)



critical texts on the government of Chavez
and their right opponents



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